

2016 Annual Report



The Rhode Island Land Trust Council promotes land conservation in Rhode Island by supporting the missions and operations of land trusts, fostering collaboration, and advocating for sound policy. In 2016, we...

Increased Support and Permanence for Land Conservation

- Governor Raimondo's Green Economy Bond was approved by voters in 2016. The Council championed this bond from inception through approval by the General Assembly to final voter support. Over one-third of funding in this \$35M bond is directed to the work of land trusts: protecting parks, open space and farmland.
- The General Assembly adopted new legislation which sets standards for Rhode Island courts when they are asked to consider terminating or amending conservation easements. Put forward by the Council, this legislation was modelled after Maine law which is the only other state that has these safeguards to protect public interests in conservation easements.

Promoted Enjoyment of Conserved Lands

- ParkRx was launched by the Council in partnership with: South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds; South Kingstown Land Trust; and The Westerly Land Trust. A new initiative, doctors now prescribe outdoor exercise for their patients' health care along with traditional medicine.
- The Council expanded ExploreRI as the go-to resource for finding 62 trail networks in Rhode Island. ExploreRI.org received 75,000 page views in 2016.
- Land Trust Days was sponsored by the Council, now in its 5th year. 29 local land trusts and partners organized over 56 hikes, fairs, festivals and night-time events to share their special places across the state from August through October, plus a special Thanksgiving weekend encore.

Helped Land Trusts with Best Practices

- The Council helped 6 land trusts to blaze new trails and create trail maps, 13 land trusts prepare conservation easement baseline documents, and 7 land trusts organize their land conservation legal records.

Facilitated Collaboration among Land Conservationists

- Rhode Island's Land & Water Conservation Summit was co-sponsored by the Council in 2016. Fully sold out, the day offered 30 workshops, a visit from Governor Raimondo, and a keynote address by National Wildlife Federation President Collin O'Mara on "*Conservation in this Century; What America can Learn from the Ocean State.*"

State Legislative & Policy Work

The Council is the voice of the land trust community at the Statehouse and in state policy discussions. We advocate for legislation and policy that supports land trusts, land conservation and stewardship and that defends protected properties.

Land Conservation Funding. Rhode Island General Assembly & Voters Approved \$35 million Green Economy Bond, with \$8 million for land conservation & \$5 million for parks: The Council, in partnership with RI Audubon Society, asked Governor Raimondo to include an Open Space Bond in her 2017 budget. The Governor proposed a \$35 million Green Economy Bond that included \$4 million for Local Open Space Grants and \$4 million for RIDEM's land acquisition program. These programs have been the primary catalyst for land conservation in Rhode Island since they began in 1985. The Council, in partnership with Audubon Society of RI, led a broad coalition that advocated to get RI General Assembly approval for a bond referendum on the November ballot and then coordinated a campaign to build voter support for this bond. Many land trusts helped with this work. In November, Rhode Island voters demonstrated their strong support for land conservation and environmental protection with over 67% voting yes to approve the Bond. RIDEM will request proposals for Local Open Space Grants from this Bond fund in spring 2017.

Conservation Easement Amendment Legislation: Approved by the General Assembly: (Senate Bill 2233 & House Bill 7196) This legislation clarifies the standards for court review of proposals to terminate or amend conservation easements and assures that any amendments result in increased conservation benefits. This legislation is a critical safeguard for land conservation accomplishments and ensures their permanent protection. Only one other state, Maine, has adopted legislative standards that put checks and balances in place for proposals to amend or terminate conservation easements. *Thank you to legislative sponsors: Senator DiPalma & Representative Blazejewski.*

Legislation Increasing Penalties for Damaging Protected Lands: (Senate Bill 2718 & House Bill 7606) The Council is seeking legislation to increase penalties for people who substantially damage protected lands by cutting trees and stealing stone walls. Current penalties are too low and have proven to be ineffective. The legislation, patterned after a very successful law in Connecticut, increases fines and enables land trusts and municipalities to recoup costs for restoring protected lands that have been damaged. This legislation was approved by the House in 2016 but stalled in the Senate and is reintroduced in 2017. *Thank you to legislative sponsors: Senator Sosnowski & Representative Keable.*

Outdoor Recreation Council: The Council's Director, Rupert Friday was one of the 30-member Outdoor Recreation Council (ORC) appointed by Governor Raimondo on January 4, 2016. On December 14 the ORC issued a report with recommendations for improving the state's outdoor recreation resources and increasing outdoor recreation activities for its citizens and visitors. The ORC report recognizes that lands protected by land trusts are an important part of the state's network of outdoor recreation resources. The ORC report also documents the value of the ExploreRI website and potential of the ParkRx initiative to get more people outdoors.

RIDEM Agriculture Conservation Program Rules: RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) is starting a new program to protect farmland and make it available at affordable prices for new farmers who are having difficulty finding land to farm. Under this new program, RIDEM will use

funds from the 2014 open space bond to purchase, protect and then resell farmland. The Council collaborated with partners at the Conservation Law Foundation, American Farmland Trust, Land For Good and Southside Community Land Trust to review and provide comments on RIDEM's rules for implementing this new program.

Land Trust Capacity Building, Assistance & Networking

The Council's programs and technical assistance help land trusts to network with each other, implement best practices, improve their stewardship and grow.

Land & Conservation Water Summit: The 13th Summit - held on Saturday, March 19, 2016 - offered 30 workshops for 320 participants including leaders from 45 land trusts and organizations that support land conservation. The keynote speaker was National Wildlife Federation President Collin O'Mara who talked about "*Conservation in this Century; What America Can Learn from the Ocean State.*" A second plenary session, "*Preserving Place; the Narragansett Salt Pond Preserve,*" was facilitated by Rhode Island Public Radio environmental reporter Ambar Espinoza. She conducted a live on-stage interview of filmmaker and storyteller Marc Levitt and Tomaquag Museum Executive Director Loren Spears. For a second year, Governor Raimondo spoke at the Summit.

Stewardship Assistance Team "SWAT" Team: In 2016, this Council initiative helped 5 land trusts and the town of Cumberland prepare trail maps and blaze their trails. The SWAT Team is coordinated by Roy Najecki. Work this year included helping Foster Land Trust, West Bay Land Trust, Tiverton Land Trust, Tiverton Open Space Commission and Cumberland Land Trust to create a trail maps and blaze trails. Roy also coordinated work in Cumberland that brought together Cumberland Land Trust, the Cumberland Conservation Commission and the Cumberland Planning Department to blaze and map trails at the town's Monastery property and Diamond Hill Park.

Baseline Documentation "Circuit Rider": This Council initiative helped 13 land trusts prepare 21 Baseline Document Reports (BDRs) for their protected lands in 2016. The Council contracts with Carol Lynn Trocki to do this work. Carol's leadership added **an exciting new approach** this year: a class at the University of Rhode Island (URI) that teaches students to prepare BDRs. The URI class enabled us to get more BDRs done and to connect university students with land trusts. The Spring 2016 class had 20 upper-level undergraduate students and graduate students. Students were each paired with a land trust and prepared a BDR under Carol's supervision. The results were outstanding: 18 BDRs were prepared for 10 land trusts (Barrington, Foster, Glocester, Hopkinton, North Kingstown, Narrow River, Richmond, Smithfield, Tiverton Open Space Commission, and Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation). A couple of the students are continuing to work with land trusts after the class. In addition to the BDRs prepared by the class, Carol worked directly with Bristol Land Trust and West Bay Land Trust to prepare BDRs. Work also began work on BDRs for Glocester Land Trust and Warren Land Trust that will be completed in 2017.

"Circuit Rider" Organizing Land Conservation Records: This initiative, a partnership with the National Land Trust Alliance (Alliance), helps 7 land trusts organize their land conservation records. We are contracting with a consultant, Holly Lippert, who is helping land trusts organize their land conservation records; identify core gaps in their records; develop a plan for filling those gaps; and digitize their

records. Land trusts that worked with this initiative in 2016 were Barrington, Charlestown, Hopkinton, Narrow River, Richmond, Smithfield, and Tiverton. More are planned in 2017.

Facilitating Regional Networking and Collaboration: The Council coordinated meetings of land trust leaders (involving 12 land trusts and a watershed organization) in three regions of the state and facilitated discussions about opportunities for the land trusts to collaborate. The initial meetings were held in November and early December. Follow-up meetings to plan specific projects were scheduled for early 2017.

Standards & Practices Update Forum: The Council partnered with the Land Trust Alliance to hold a conference call on September 12 so that Rhode Island's land trust leaders could discuss and provide feedback about the proposed revisions for the national *Land Trust Standards and Practices*.

Funding for Farm Conservation: The Council partnered with NRCS on December 8 to hold a workshop about the requirements of the revised federal farmland protection program and how land trusts can work with federal funding to acquire conservation easements on farmland and wetlands.

Land Trust E-news: The Council continues to promote networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news and e-mails to land trust presidents, chairs and executive directors.

Marketing, Community Outreach & Engagement

The Council increases the visibility of land trusts and the special places they are protecting. Our goal is to build community support for, and engagement with, land trusts and sustain support for land conservation.

ExploreRI.org Website: The Council is striving to get all land trust trails and other walking trails in Rhode Island mapped and posted on this website so that they are easy for people to find and enjoy. We now have over 62 maps of trail networks posted. This year we added maps for Cumberland's trails at the Monastery and Diamond Hill Park and National Wildlife Refuge trails.

Explore has been a great success. More people visit the trails and protected properties once trail maps are posted on the ExploreRI website. In 2016, there were over 40,000 visits to the trails list page. At least 22,000 different people visited one of the pages with information about a specific trail system and over 1/3 of the visitors get information for more than one trail. There were over 75,000 total page views which was a 40% increase over 2015. Nearly 1/2 of the visitors to ExploreRI are people from nearby states who are coming to Rhode Island to hike or kayak. This strong use of ExploreRI.org documents the importance of the website and the strong public interest in getting outdoors and taking walks. ExploreRI also documents interest in trails throughout the state including inland areas.

Land Trust Days: This very successful and popular program was held for the 5th year from August 3 through October 2 with a kickoff celebration on July 22. This year, 29 land conservation organizations and partners participated in Land Trust Days and hosted 46 activities over the 8 weeks. Overall attendance - people attending Land Trust Days activities - increased from 2015. This year, we organized an "encore" for Land Trust Days over Thanksgiving Weekend. Eleven organizations hosted a walk that weekend and most were well attended

Once again, the Council sponsored Rhode Island Public Radio promotions during Land Trust Days to increase the visibility of land trusts and Land Trust Days. We also received prominent coverage in several local newspapers. The Council's social media promotion of Land Trust Days has been very effective and increased each year. The website had 2133 visits which averaged just under 4 minutes each. Facebook page "likes" increased 36.6 % over 2015. The number of people who have joined the MeetUp group for Land Trust Days increased from 89% over 2015 and is now over 1500 people.

ParkRx (Park Prescriptions): The Council launched a pilot initiative with the health care community: ParkRx. Our goal is to get health care providers to 'write prescriptions' for their patients to get outdoors and take walks on land trust trails as part of their health care treatment. Research documents that spending time outdoors in nature and taking walks are both good for physical and mental health. This program uses land trust preserves and trails as a community resource to help people improve their health. At the same time, the program connects more people to land trusts and the special places they are protecting in Rhode Island communities.

The Council has been researching best practices and networking with leaders of similar programs around the nation. The pilot program is a partnership with South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds (a "Health Equity Zone" project to improve community health, reduce childhood obesity and mental health problems), South Kingstown Land Trust and Westerly Land Trust. Both land trusts have extensive trail networks. In August, we designed a prescription pad. These were printed and distributed in September to Coastal Medical, Narragansett Bay Pediatrics, Thundermist Health System's Wakefield clinic, and Wood River Health Center. The prescriptions direct patients to the ExploreRI website to find trails where they can get outdoors and take a walk. In an effort to reduce the barriers that patients face when they get a prescription - i.e. make it easier for patients to start getting out and taking a walk - the South Kingstown Land Trust and Westerly Land Trust are both regularly leading a walk at one of their trails on the first Saturday of every month.

The Council was part of a workshop on ParkRx at the National Land Trust Conference in October. The Council is seeking funding so that we can take the next steps to develop a website for this program and roll ParkRx out statewide.

Sustaining Agriculture - Innovative Outreach Workshops for Landowners: The Council partnered with three land trusts and Land For Good to conduct innovative workshops in 2016 that encouraged property owners to lease their land to farmers. One of the biggest constraints that new farmers in Rhode Island face is finding land to farm. And many new vegetable farmers only need to farm a couple of acres to have a viable farm operation. The Council thinks that some people who own large properties (5-20 acres) might consider leasing some of their land to these new farmers. We partnered with Aquidneck Land Trust, South Kingstown Land Trust and Narrow River Land Trust to identify and reach out to landowners about this issue and invite them to a workshop. The workshop discussed what farmers are looking for when they lease land. The workshop also had landowners who already lease their land to farmers discuss what it is like leasing to a farmer. The Council believes that these workshops enable land trusts to connect and begin a conversation with property owners who might someday protect their land. Having this land in active agriculture also helps the state's farmers and supports local food production.

How We Accomplished this: Grants & Funding Support

The work of Rhode Island Land Trust Council is made possible through **hundreds of hours of volunteer time from the Council's Board members and land trust leaders**. We receive generous contributions from our member land trusts, foundations, organizations and individuals. Thank you!

2016 Rhode Island Land Trust Council Members

Aquidneck Land Trust	North Smithfield Land Trust
Audubon Society of Rhode Island	Northwest RI Supporters of Open Space
Barrington Land Conservation Trust	Prudence Conservancy
Block Island Conservancy	RI Farm Bureau Land Trust
Block Island Land Trust	Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust
Bristol Land Conservation Trust	Sakonnet Preservation Association
Burrillville Land Trust	Scituate Land Trust
Charlestown Land Trust	Smithfield Land Trust
Cumberland Land Trust	South Kingstown Land Trust
East Greenwich Land Trust	Southside Community Land Trust
East Providence Land Conservation Trust	The Nature Conservancy
Foster Land Trust	Tiverton Land Trust
Glocester Land Trust	Warren Land Conservation Trust
Hopkinton Land Trust	Warwick Land Trust
Land Conservancy of North Kingstown	The Watch Hill Conservancy
Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust	Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation
Mount Tom Land Trust	West Bay Land Trust
Narrow River Land Trust	West Greenwich Land Trust
Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy	The Westerly Land Trust

Grants & Major Gifts

The Rhode Island Foundation
Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment @ the RI Foundation
van Beuren Charitable Foundation
Prince Charitable Trusts
Sharpe Family Foundation
Hazard Family Foundation
RI Department of Environmental Management Trail Grant
RI Department of Environmental Management LASA Grant
Worldways Social Marketing
Anonymous contribution
Land For Good - Agriculture Land Access Project
John Gwynne, Jr.
Judith and Murray Danforth
Perennial Planters Garden Club
Carol Strasburger
Board Members (current & former) of Rhode Island Land Trust Council

Thank YOU for supporting the Rhode Island Land Trust Council's Work!

Christopher Riely, President

Rupert Friday, Executive Director