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Mission:
The Rhode Island Land Trust Council works to permanently conserve open and natural lands in Rhode Island by supporting land trusts, promoting responsible use and stewardship of conserved lands, and advocating for sound land conservation policy.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

2021 proved to be an exciting year for the Rhode Island Land Trust Council. While still in the midst of the pandemic, the people of Rhode Island continued to recognize the importance of outdoor spaces for respite and recreation. Our meetings continued to be virtual, but our mission became that much more important—our Land Trusts and their open spaces were now having almost triple the visitors! Our programming and services were always important, but are now critical—we are engaging a bigger audience and have expanded our reach.

In January, our longtime leader Rupert Friday announced his retirement, but that did not slow him down. He successfully advocated for land conservation at the State House—and his efforts directly led to the passing of the Municipal Public Trust Bill was signed into law in July 2021. Rupert also led the charge planning and organizing the 2021 Land & Water Conservation Summit in partnership with the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition. The conference was virtual, with the theme, “Building a Stronger Land Movement Through Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Virtual workshops were hosted on various topics and included monitoring, computerized mapping programs, and coastal wetland adaptation. For Rupert’s final project, he launched the exciting RI Walks Challenge, a hunt for 30 whimsical creatures created by artist Greg Rebis at The Steel Yard, and hidden on trails across the state.

None of this work would be possible without the leadership and vision of Rupert Friday and the Rhode Island Land Trust Council is indebted to him for growing the organization to what it is today. Learn more about Rupert’s work and legacy as you dig in to this report. In spring 2021, the Council found our next leader to propel our organization into the future: Kate Sayles. Kate comes to us from the Northern RI Conservation District, where she spent the last decade working in agriculture and forestry, assisting private landowners with natural resources issues, as well as working on large-scale regional conservation projects.

Thank you for your support in 2021 and we look forward to new and exciting initiatives in 2022.

Barbara Rich
PRESIDENT
FAREWELL, RUPERT FRIDAY

After leading the charge as the Council’s Executive Director for nearly two decades, Rupert Friday retired in July, 2021. Rhode Island’s conservation movement has been forever changed by Rupert’s leadership. From the inception of the Council as a program of The Nature Conservancy and through its transition to a highly successful independent organization, Rupert built the Council into a strong coalition– helping individual land trusts to be effective, creating and implementing programs that boost the visibility of land trusts, and ensuring that land conservation has a influential voice at the State House. The Council is enormously grateful for Rupert’s many contributions.

While his accomplishments are too numerous to list, we wanted to share some of the important highlights from Rupert’s leadership of the Council. Over the last 17 years, Rupert:

- Advanced successful campaigns for state environmental bond issues that included securing millions of dollars for the Farmland Preservation Program, and State and Local Open Space grant programs that have been used to conserve thousands of acres.
- Successfully advocated for and assisted in the passage of many bills, including 2021’s Public Trust legislation.
- Co-founded the annual Land and Water Conservation Summit– Rhode Island’s premier conservation conference, now in its 19th year.
- Created the ExploreRI website featuring 131 trails and blueways, visited by thousands of Rhode Islanders every year.
- Developed the RI Walks and the RI Walks Challenge programs, encouraging thousands of Rhode Islanders to get out and enjoy the health and wellness benefits of walking in nature.

Check out “Thank God It’s Friday: R.I. Land Trust Council’s First and Only Executive Director Headed to Retirement” written by Todd McLeish for ecoRI.

Thank you, and fare thee well, Rupert!
Land Trust Leaders and Friends,

I wanted to take a moment to say a quick hello, and to let you know that I am thrilled to be here! I’ve been working hard to get up to speed, and I am very grateful that Rupert, Council staff and our dedicated Board of Directors have all been so helpful through this transition. There’s a lot to learn, but I am feeling confident and grounded in the mission and vision of the Council, and really looking forward to what we have planned in 2022.

I want to get to know you and your land trust better, so let’s schedule a time for a walk or a chat over coffee soon. Please feel free to drop me a line with any of your thoughts, concerns or land trust needs.

Ksayles@rilandtrusts.org
401-212-0832.

P.S. Follow us on social media for updates on our work!
Fiscal year 2021 (July 1, 2020- June 30, 2021) began with a carryover of $281,122. Total revenue in 2021 was $159,308.07. Individual giving was strong with additional revenue coming from Land Trust dues, foundation grants, Land and Water Conservation Summit revenue, cost shares, and Cares Act Paycheck Protection Program.

The total expenses for 2021 were $213,308.49, including the 12% administrative fee for TSNE MissionWorks sponsor services. A Transition Plan was a significant but necessary expense to the Council but some Executive Director transition costs were made possible by a generous Organization Development Transition grant from van Beuren Charitable Foundation.

A Development Plan was completed, and implementation is underway to fund ambitious growth outlined through Strategic Planning. An expanded budget for fiscal year 2022 includes a Philanthropy Associate to help fund the growing programs of the Rhode Island Land Trust Council.

Debra Mitchell
TREASURER
HELLOS & GOODBYES

WELCOME TO OUR NEW PHILANTHROPY ASSOCIATE, SHANNON DOWLING

On March 15, 2021 we officially welcomed Philanthropy Associate Shannon Dowling to the RI Land Trust Council Team! Born and raised in Rhode Island, Shannon is a graduate of Western New England University. Over the last several years, she managed the membership program at the Preservation Society of Newport County. Shannon jumped right into her role, assisting the Council in the implementation of a feasibility study for the 2020 development plan, creating a comprehensive membership dues system, and putting together a multi-year fundraising plan so the Council can further build capacity and expand programs to support land trusts. We’re excited to have her on board!

AND GOODBYE TO TERRACORPS MEMBER, ERIC WUESTHOFF

Eric Wuesthoff served as the Terracorps Service Member with the Council from August 2020 until July 2021. During his time with the Council, Eric worked as Land Stewardship Coordinator and helped to launch our GIS mapping program in coordination with URI and ESRI. Through the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, Eric was still able to assist 21 individual land trusts state-wide — nearly half of all the land trusts in the state! Over his year-long service term, Eric's accomplishments were impressive: he completed over 500 parcel maps, led 17 virtual and in-person training sessions on using GIS tools to monitor properties, and trained a total of 88 individuals. Eric ended his Service with Terracorps in July to pursue his Doctorate in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at Rice University in Houston, Texas.
2021 LAND AND WATER SUMMIT

The 2021 Land Conservation Conference was held virtually as a two-day event on March 19th & 20th. Due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tough decision was made to cancel an in-person Summit in RI in favor of collaborating over state lines with our friends and partners to the north- the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MassLand). The theme of the conference was **Building a Stronger Land Movement through Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**. The conference featured the inspiring speaker Carolyn Finney, scholar-in-residence at Middlebury College and author of Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors.

The conference was attended by 490 participants, including 200 from the Rhode Island land trust community, and featured workshops focused on helping land conservation leaders improve their knowledge and skills, while focusing on committing to equity and justice in their work. We look forward to an in-person conference in July of 2022.

LAND TRUST DAYS

Land Trust Days 2021 was another success! After 2020’s pared-down roster of events due to COVID-19, it was great to bring back our usual, vibrant Land Trust Days experience. At the start of the pandemic, we saw a huge increase in the use of land trust trails as Rhode Islanders struggled to find safe & fun activities. In 2021, even as the state began to open back up, demand for trail access did not dwindle: the vast majority of our Land Trust Days events filled up to maximum capacity almost as soon as they were published to our social media calendars!

Over 600 Rhode Islanders attended our 33 Land Trust Days events, which were hosted in partnership with 21 land trusts. Guided trail walks proved to be the most popular events!

ONLINE WORKSHOPS

In the spring, the Council hosted a series of Earth Month webinars for land trusts on three key stewardship topics: monitoring property boundaries with Carol Trocki, using GIS tools for monitoring & mapping with Eric Wuesthoff (the Council’s TerraCorps Service member at the time), and identifying coastal properties for marsh migration with URI’s Mike Bradley. These webinars were attended by over 45+ land trust leaders representing 21 of Rhode Island’s land trusts.
EXPLORERI WEBSITE

Established in 2008, the ExploreRI Website remains the free and interactive website for information about Rhode Island’s trails and blueways. The site makes it easy to get outdoors and explore Rhode Island’s natural treasures. The Rhode Island Blueways Alliance and the RI Land Trust Council have partnered since its inception to maintain and update the ExploreRI website. In December 2021, the Blueways Alliance voted as an organization to dissolve, and complete control of the Blueways portion of the ExploreRI website was passed to the Council. While the Blueways Alliance has dissolved, the Council will continue to work with its original members to maintain and streamline both websites.

Throughout 2021, the Council added information for an additional 6 trails, so there are now 131 trail systems on ExploreRI. The Council is working to get every land trust trail and other walking trail in Rhode Island mapped and posted on ExploreRI so that they are easy for people to find and enjoy. In March of 2020, the number of visits to our trail list skyrocketed as Rhode Islanders sought safe ways to get outdoors and have fun during the pandemic. In a survey on walking during COVID, many respondents indicated that they would continue to walk more even once the pandemic tapered off, and our website traffic suggests this is true! While website visits dropped from their stratospheric heights in 2020, they are still up 150% from the 12 months leading up to the pandemic.

RIWALKS

At the start of 2020, the Council launched RIWalks, an online platform where individuals can set a goal for spending time outdoors, keep track of the walks they take & rate trails. While COVID-19 slowed the progress with promoting RIWalks to health care providers, the Council has made great strides exploring additional ways to promote walks for health, including establishing new relationships with partners doing similar work.

In October 2021, the RI Land Trust Council, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of RI, RI Department of Environmental Management, local Health Equity Zones, and a passionate community member began convening monthly meetings to discuss issues around equitable access to our state’s natural places, with a focus on access to nature as a social determinant of health. We know that for many people in our communities, nature trails are inaccessible – whether because of transportation; adequate, multilingual information about trails, or safety in nature. In 2022, the group plans to organize “Community Conversations” across the state—partnering with frontline, BIPOC communities so that they have the largest role in shaping future trail access programs.
RI WALKS CHALLENGE

Unveiled in June 2021, the RIWalks Challenge has been steadily growing! The Council partnered with land trusts to install 30+ steel sculptures of anthropomorphized woodland plants on different trails around the state, with the purpose of encouraging Rhode Islanders to take walks and find them all! Each creature has a QR code that walkers can scan and track their progress through the Challenge on RIWalks.com. Since June, Folks of all ages – from young children to retirees – have been out & about on land trust trails searching for these mystical creatures. RIWalks Challenge creatures have been visited (which is tracked through QR code scans) over 4,000 times! RIWalks hashtags have been tagged on Instagram and Facebook over 300 times as program participants snap & post selfies of themselves with the creatures.

NETWORKING & INFORMATION SHARING

The Council continues to foster networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic eNews newsletter. The eNews was distributed to 771 land trust board members, staff, volunteers, and others interested in land trusts and land conservation in Rhode Island. In 2021, the Council sent 18 eNews updates during 2021. Of those, 10 were standard eNews editions with grant opportunities, legislative updates, workshops and resources and 8 were special mailings including events like the Land and Water Summit, important announcements like Giving Tuesday, and legislative updates. The Council’s Executive Director regularly sends additional emails to land trust presidents, chairs, and directors to share time-sensitive information as well.

To learn more, or to join our eNews, please subscribe!
The Council continues to contract with Carol Lynn Trocki to help land trusts prepare baseline document reports (BDRs) and develop stewardship plans for their properties. In 2019 we started working on a new program with Peter August, Greg Bonynge & Aimee Mandeville developing a tool to help land trusts monitor their conservation properties using ArcGIS from Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI). ESRI generously donated a group license to the Council for the use of the software.

In August 2020, TerraCorps Service Member Eric Wuesthoff joined the Council staff as Land Stewardship Coordinator. Eric worked to train land trust leaders on the technology, digitize and upload boundaries of land trust properties onto their own ArcGIS database and make trail maps.

This program enables land trust leaders to use smartphone to find property boundaries in the field. Made possible through generous funding from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative (CSC), the Council worked with TerraCorps in late 2021 to select Malcolm Drenttel to continue Eric’s work as Stewardship Coordinator, and received another generous donation of licenses from ESRI in the fall.

In 2019, the Council purchased 3 trail counters- equipment that enables land trusts to count the number of people walking on their trails. The Council loans these trail counters to land trusts so they can obtain data about the use of their trails each month. In 2021, trail counters were stationed on 5 different land trust trails in Smithfield, Cumberland, South Kingstown, Glocester, and Scituate. This year alone, the devices counted over 23,000 trail users on the five trails. We are so grateful to RI Land Trust Council volunteer Bruce Payton for managing our trail counter program by moving the devices between trails, making repairs, and collecting the data.

The Council’s volunteers continue to assist land trusts in creating and mapping their trails, including the Beaudoin & Sullivan Conservation Areas in Coventry. TerraCorps Service Member Eric Wuesthoff utilized ArcGIS to map additional 45 trails for land trusts in 2021.
In the fall of 2020, with the assistance of Carol Lynn Trocki, the Council’s Excellence Committee conducted a survey of Rhode Island’s land trusts to gain new information on individual land conservation accomplishments and stewardship practices. The role of the RI Land Trust Council’s Land Trust Excellence Committee is to bring tools, training and services to land trusts in Rhode Island. The main focus of this group is to support RI Land Trusts in their conservation and stewardship work, with an eye towards ensuring that conservation properties are permanently protected.

The “2020 Rhode Island Land Trust Conservation & Stewardship Accomplishments, Activities, and Practices - Survey Highlights,” was released in October 2021, and documented the number of properties and acres of land that Rhode Island Land Trusts are conserving, and helped the Council better understand land trusts’ need for stewardship assistance, such as number of conservation properties that need Baseline Documentation Reports, land trust that want help designing and implementing monitoring programs, etc. The response was impressive, with 39 land trusts participating.

Key Findings:

- Of the land trusts responding, 21% were Private 501c3 - Staffed, 38% were Private 501c(3) – All Volunteer, and 41% were Municipal (also All-Volunteer run).
- Collectively, RI’s land trusts are protecting over 1,900 properties covering over 55,000 acres, or 87 square miles.
- Given that there are approximately 91,000 acres of protected land in Rhode Island (including those protected by State and Federal government), the contribution land trusts is significant. Sixty-one percent of the State’s protected lands are held exclusively, or in partnership with, a land trust.

The 2020 Survey results provided the Council with information on the areas where land trusts could benefit from additional programs and services. In fall of 2021, The Land Trust Excellence Committee partnered the Land Trust Alliance to explore Risk Management as an area of continued education that all land trusts in RI could benefit from. Generously funded through the RI Foundation Land Trust Excellence Grant, a new program called “Ensuring Conservation Permanence in Rhode Island” will be rolled out in the spring of 2022.

**ENSURING CONSERVATION PERMANENCE:**

**RISK MANAGEMENT**

The 2020 Survey results provided the Council with information on the areas where land trusts could benefit from additional programs and services. In fall of 2021, The Land Trust Excellence Committee partnered the Land Trust Alliance to explore Risk Management as an area of continued education that all land trusts in RI could benefit from. Generously funded through the RI Foundation Land Trust Excellence Grant, a new program called “Ensuring Conservation Permanence in Rhode Island” will be rolled out in the spring of 2022.
Though 2021 was challenging at the State House due to restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council, led by Rupert Friday, continued to advocate for land conservation and land trusts, and made headway with the Council’s top legislative priorities.

**MUNICIPAL PUBLIC TRUST DEDICATION WAS ADOPTED IN BOTH THE HOUSE AND SENATE!**

The Municipal Public Trust enabling legislation authorizes municipalities to declare the conservation properties that they own as “being held in the public trust.” By adopting Public Trust, cities and towns can reassure residents that their parks and conservation areas are permanently protected for future generations and will never be sold or developed. Rhode Island is only the 2nd state to adopt this authorization for municipalities. Thank you to Pennsylvania Land Trust Association, WeConservePA, for their assistance with this legislation.

Thank you to Senator Euer and Representative Edwards for sponsoring this legislation and championing it through the legislative process!

**RI CONSERVATION EASEMENT “LIBERAL INTERPRETATION” LEGISLATION PASSED THE SENATE BUT STALLED IN THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE.**

This bill amends RI’s Conservation Easement Enabling Legislation to clarify that these sorts of restrictions on properties are in the public interest, and ensure that if there is ever a dispute about the intent of the easement, the courts will defend the conservation values recorded in the easement.

Thank you to Senator DiPalma and Representative Craven for sponsoring this legislation. The bill looks favorable to pass in 2022.
SOME OF OUR OTHER VICTORIES THIS YEAR INCLUDED:

The Forest Conservation Act was signed into law. The Act codifies the importance of forests to the state's environment and economy, establishes the Forest Conservation Commission and Forest Land Conservation Fund that enables the state to purchase development rights from forest property owners who want to conserve their forest land.

Thank you to Senator Ciccone & Representative Speakman for sponsoring this legislation.

An act to prohibit the intentional release of balloons was adopted! Balloons are a serious stewardship problem for land trusts and detrimental to wildlife and marine life. This legislation prohibits the release of ten or more balloons.

Thank you to Senator Sosnowski & Representative Donovan for sponsoring this legislation.

The Ocean State Climate Adaptation and Resilience Fund (OSCAR) was adopted! This legislation establishes a fund to provide grants to cities, towns, and state agencies for projects that:

- Protect or enhance natural systems and habitats to improve the resilience of these systems to rising sea levels;
- Adapt infrastructure on public lands to address the impacts of climate change; and
- Help preserve and enhance public access to the RI shoreline

Thank you to Senator Pearson and Representative Vella-Wilkinson for sponsoring this legislation, and to Save the Bay for championing it over the finish line. While this bill was signed into law to establish the OSCAR fund, no funding was allocated to implement projects.
The RI Land Trust Council adopted a new Strategic Plan in 2020 that established goals and initiatives to increase support provided to land trusts. This support is imperative as many Rhode Island land trusts are volunteer-run and open space is finite. To fund the planned growth and needed programs and projects, the Council adopted an ambitious Development Plan with a fundraising campaign.

Before launching the fundraising campaign, the Council conducted a feasibility study in Summer 2021, which sought the advice from our board, supporters, land trust staff and volunteers, and key environmental and community leaders to refine and determine a course of action for the campaign.

Individual interviews were conducted with 25 participants and provided valuable insights for both the fundraising campaign and future program planning. Most constituents believe the Council is in a unique position as one of the only organizations that advocate for conservation issues at the statehouse. Also, the Council provides various support services to local land trusts entrusted to protect and steward the land. Participants overwhelmingly noted that the Council is not well known enough outside of the land trust community. Valuable programming and services will boost visibility of the Council in the land trust community and with the general public, and will provide the Council with a stronger voice at the statehouse.
The Rhode Island Land Trust Council is grateful for the generous support from member organizations, donors, foundations and corporations. It is with support from these entities that we can continue to permanently conserve open and natural lands in Rhode Island by supporting land trusts, promoting responsible use and stewardship of conserved lands, and advocating for sound land conservation policy.

**OUR 2021 DUES PAYING MEMBERS:**

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OUR GENEROUS DONORS

$25,000+
CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP COLLABORATIVE
RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION

$10,000-$24,999
CHRISTINE RYAN AND WALTER BROWN
PRINCE CHARITABLE TRUSTS
VAN BEUREN CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

$5,000-$9,999
ARTHUR GOLDSTONE
HAZARD FAMILY FOUNDATION
SHARPE FAMILY FOUNDATION
JENNIFER AND CHRIS SUELENTROP
WOODCOCK CHARITABLE TRUST

$2,500-$4,999
ANONYMOUS (1)
NED LEVINE & ISABELLA PORTER
ROY NAJECKI
SAND DOLLAR FOUNDATION
AMY & JEREMY WINTERSTEEN

$1,000-$2,499
PETER PARE
BARBARA RICH
THOMAS ROGERS

$500-$999
ARTHUR H. CARR FUND
RUPERT FRIDAY & SUSAN ORBAN

$500-$999
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 SHAWEN WILLIAMS
 CONNIE WORTHINGTON

$250-$499
JUDITH & MURRAY DANFORTH
JOHN GWYNE & MIKEL FOLCARELLI
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$1-$250
ANONYMOUS (1)
ABBY BROOKS
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HERE WE COME 2022