

What We Accomplished in 2011



New Strategic Plan Completed and Being Implemented

The RI Land Trust Council (Council) completed a year-long strategic planning process that **re-affirms the Council's mission and signature programs** and adds several exciting initiatives. Most significantly, the Plan highlights **a need to increase the visibility of land trusts and protected lands**. To this end, the **Council is launching: "Land Trust Days"** as one new initiative to connect more Rhode Island residents with the special places land trusts are protecting and engage more people in land trusts' work.

State Legislation & Policy

2011 was RI Land Trust Council's 8th consecutive year of success at the Rhode Island Statehouse. We pursue legislation to support land trusts and land conservation and to safeguard our State's protected lands.

Legislation initiated in 2011 by the Council, approved by the RI General Assembly and signed by the Governor:

- Clarifies that **conservation easements are not terminated by merger** (if the land trust that holds an easement also owns the property) **or if there is a foreclosure on a property protected by a conservation easement** (RI General Laws 34-39-3).
- **Establishes a system of checks and balances to protect conservation easements from damaging amendments.** Proposed **amendments to conservation easements that "materially detract" from the conservation values** that the easement is written to safeguard **must be now be reviewed by the court** (RI General Laws 34-39-5).
Until now, there was no review or oversight of conservation easement amendments. The IRS has questioned the permanence of conservation easements and challenging the validity of charitable contributions for donated easements if they can be easily amended. This legislation **addresses that IRS concern.**

Rhode Island is one of the few states with these protections for conservation easements.

Thank you to our legislation's sponsors - Senator Sosnowski, and Representatives Blazejewski, Walsh, and Lally. Attorney General Kilmartin's staff also collaborated with the Council on this legislation.

Opposed Threatening Legislation

RI Land Trust Council **opposed two 2011 legislative proposals** that would be detrimental to land trusts and land conservation. Both bills were stopped in 2011:

- One bill proposed to require municipalities to permit developers to use protected open space created by conservation/cluster developments for infrastructure such as stormwater management ponds and septic systems. The legislation would have also **restricted the town's ability to protect wetlands and steep slopes** during the subdivision process and **limited local government planning and zoning authority** to control lot size.
- Another bill proposed to **remove liability protection for municipalities and the state for public outdoor recreation use of their properties.** This legislation would increase liability costs for towns and the state and put a damper on municipal and state support for land conservation. Faced with high liability costs, many public properties would be closed for outdoor recreation uses and, thereby, reduce public support for land conservation.

Additional Highlights of Council Initiatives

- **Land Conservation Funding** – During the fall of 2011 the Council made the case to DEM Director Janet Coit and Governor Chafee that a **2012 open space bond referendum** is needed. We encouraged them to include a bond in the Governor's 2012 budget for farmland protection, local open space grants and recreation development grants. These programs are important to the state's economy and quality of life. State bond funds invested in land conservation **appreciate in value and are a catalyst** that attracts many more \$ from other funding sources.

➤ **Agriculture Conservation**

The RI Land Trust Council continues our initiative to improve farm conservation policies and practices. These efforts build on the forum we held in February 2010: FarmRI 2.0 – Crafting the next generation of farm conservation strategies. We are working to implement recommendations from that forum. In 2011 the Council:

- ✓ Published a **report on the forum: FarmRI 2.0:** Crafting the next generation of farm conservation strategies. (**Get the report at:** www.rilandtrusts.org/agriculture.htm)
- ✓ Produced and **distributed flyers at farmers' markets** to increase public awareness and knowledge about farm conservation issues.
- ✓ **Wrote a handbook for RI land trusts, municipalities and institutions on leasing farmland** they own to farmers. This will help keep protected farmland in production.
- ✓ Held a **workshop** on October 27 for land trusts and municipalities **on leasing farmland.**
- ✓ **Completed a survey of land trusts to document which own farmland and how they are managing that farmland.** The Council is assisting 2 land trusts with planning and leasing to improve the agricultural use of their protected farmland.
- ✓ Continued representing the land trust community on the Agriculture Partnership which developed a 5-year *Rhode Island Agriculture Strategic Plan* and is working on implementation. Continued participating in a New England project led by Land for Good to improve farm conservation.

Networking, Capacity Building & Resources

- **8th Land & Conservation Water Summit** – held March 26, 2011 offered 27 workshops. Keynote Speaker: Steve Sloan – Connecting People to Place & Your Conservation Mission.
- **Initiated the Land Trust Excellence Partnership with Land Trust Alliance (Alliance).** RI Land Trust Council and the Alliance signed a partnership agreement to help land trusts across the state implement Standards and Practices – the nationally recognized best practices for land conservation. In 2011, we started this initiative by surveying land trusts about their practices and their priorities for assistance. 24 land trusts completed the survey. In 2012, this project will provide consulting support to the first group of selected land trusts to help them implement priority Standards and Practices.
- **RI Land Trust Council Website was upgraded in 2011:** www.RILandTrusts.org The site provides information about the Council and our accomplishments, and provides links to our agriculture videos and report. The website helps people find a local land trust by providing links to land trusts around the state. We continue to add resource information to help land trusts and people who are interested in protecting their land. The Council and the **Rhode Island Land & Water Partnership** continue to maintain our companion website: www.landandwaterpartnership.org This website has an **on line stewardship library** and information from many past workshops.
- **Conservation Stewardship Collaborative (CSC)** - The Council represents the land trust community as one of 7 members of this coalition. The CSC is working to improve stewardship of Rhode Island's protected lands and is supported by an endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation established by the Sharpe Family.
 - **CSC initiatives benefit land trusts and their stewardship work.** Specifically, CSC gave grants in 2011 and 2012 to support the Council's state policy work. CSC also funded pilot projects for improving baseline documentation of protected lands and management of invasive species. See the CSC website for details of projects funded: www.ricsc.org
 - **CSC pilot project funded consultants' work with 4 land trusts to prepare baseline documents** for properties they own using a protocol developed by Scott Ruhren at Audubon Society of RI for the CSC. Richmond Rural Land Conservation Trust, Foster Land Trust, Prudence Conservancy, and Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation were selected for this pilot project. Based on what we learned from the pilot project, Scott revised the protocol. In 2012, CSC is undertaking a 2nd pilot project testing the revised baseline documentation protocol and then developing a management plan protocol.
- **Land Trust E-news** - the Council continues to promote networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news and action alerts. Additional emails are sent to land trusts' presidents, chairs and executive directors with time sensitive information.
- The Council continues to **represent the state's land trust community in statewide** coalitions and partnerships so that land trusts' interests are included in decisions and initiatives.

How We Accomplished this: Grants & Funding Support

The RI Land Trust Council's work is made possible by the contribution of **100s of hours of volunteer time and expertise by the Council's Board members and land trust leaders** from across the state. The Council's work is funded by generous contributions from land trusts (our members), foundations and other organizations and individuals.

We appreciate this support that makes our work possible!

Land Trusts Supporting RI Land Trust Council in 2011

- Aquidneck Land Trust
- Audubon Society of RI
- Barrington Land Conservation Trust
- Block Island Conservancy
- Block Island Land Trust
- Bristol Land Conservation Trust
- Burrillville Land Trust
- Charlestown Land Trust
- Conanicut Land Trust
- Cumberland Land Trust
- East Greenwich Land Trust
- East Providence Land Conservation Trust
- Foster Land Trust
- Gloucester Land Trust
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Land Conservancy of North Kingstown
- Lincoln Land Trust
- Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust
- Mill Cove Conservancy
- N. Smithfield Land Trust
- Narragansett Land Conservancy Trust
- Narrow River Land Trust
- The Nature Conservancy of RI
- Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy
- Pawtucket Land Trust
- Prudence Conservancy
- RI Farm Bureau Land Trust
- Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust
- Sakonnet Preservation Association
- Smithfield Land Trust
- South Kingstown Land Trust
- Southside Community Land Trust
- The Westerly Land Trust
- Tiverton Land Trust
- The Watch Hill Conservancy
- Warren Land Conservation Trust
- Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation

Grants & Major Donations

Thank you to these foundations, organizations and individuals for their generous contributions to the RI Land Trust Council in support of land conservation and land trusts' work across the state:

The Rhode Island Foundation

Conservation Stewardship Endowment @ The Rhode Island Foundation

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

Prince Charitable Trusts

Prospect Hill Foundation

Sharpe Family Foundation/Julie & Henry Sharpe III

Hazard Family Foundation

Woodcock Charitable Fund

Audubon Society of Rhode Island (in kind)

Bafflin Foundation

Land For Good

Contributions by Board Members of RI Land Trust Council (Current & Former):

Jane Baumann John Berg Abby Brooks Jane Buxton Ted Clement

George Mason Kevin McDonough Roy Najecki Joe Pailthorpe Paul Roselli

Trish Sylvester Linda Los Tibbetts Helen Tjader Carol Lynn Trocki

Thank YOU for supporting the RI Land Trust Council's Activities!