

# 2017 Annual Report

## for our Land Trust Members



**Rhode Island Land Trust Council promotes land conservation by supporting the missions and operations of land trusts, fostering collaboration and advocating for sound land conservation policy. In 2017, we...**

### **Advocated for state policies to increase support for land trusts, land conservation and defend our land conservation accomplishments**

- ✓ Governor Raimondo's 2018 budget proposes a \$48.5 million Green Economy & Clean Water Bond that includes \$2 million for Local Open Space Grants, \$2 million for farmland conservation, and \$5 million for Local Recreation Grants. We are working to ensure this bond is on November's ballot.
- ✓ The Council worked closely with farmers to oppose changes proposed to the Right to Farm Law that would authorize use of farmland for festivals, concerts and other large-scale commercial entertainment activities without requiring local government planning and zoning approvals. We also opposed legislation to permit development of solar energy facilities on protected farmland.

### **Helped land trust leaders increase their skills, knowledge, implementation of best practices and network with each other**

- ✓ The 2017 Land & Water Conservation Summit on March 11 was fully sold out. The Summit offered 33 workshops, an address by Senator Whitehouse and keynote address by Nobel Peace Prize recipient Dr. Eric Chivian from Harvard Medical School on "*Medical Models for Helping Us Understand Global Environmental Threats.*"
- ✓ The Council organized workshops on best communication practices and nationally recognized land trust "Standards and Practices."
- ✓ The Council helped 6 land trusts prepare baseline documents for the lands they protect and 2 land trusts organize and archive their legal records for the properties they protect.
- ✓ The Council continued to facilitate networking for the board members of land trusts in three areas of the state so that they could discuss opportunities for collaborating.

### **Increased land trusts visibility and promoted enjoyment of conserved lands**

- ✓ Organized the 6th annual Land Trust Days in August and September with a Friday evening kickoff walk hosted by Barrington Land Conservation Trust and attended by over 70 people. Land trusts and partners organized 80 hikes, fairs, festivals and night-time events to share their special places. For the 2nd year, 10 land trusts had walks for a Thanksgiving weekend encore. Over 2,300 people have joined the Land Trusts' MeetUp group - an increase of 50% over 2016.
- ✓ The Council expanded ExploreRI as the go-to resource for finding information about 71 walking trails in Rhode Island. ExploreRI.org trail information had 56,000 visits in 2017.

## Advocating for State Policies and Funding

RI Land Trust Council advocates for state funding and policies to help land trusts conserve the special places in our communities and defend the places we're protecting.

- **Land Conservation Funding** - In fall 2017, RIDEM issued requests for proposals for Local Open Space Grants and Local Recreation Grants. These grants are being awarded in early 2018 and will use funds approved by voters in the 2016 Green Economy Bond. Without a new bond in 2018 the successful Local Open Space and Local Recreation Grant programs will be without funding for the first time in 30 years since these programs were established in 1985. Thus, in Fall 2017 the Council met with RIDEM Director Coit and Governor Raimondo's staff to advocate for an Open Space Bond in the Governor's 2018 budget. In January 2018, the Governor's budget proposed a Green Economy and Clean Water Bond with \$4 million in land conservation funding (\$2 million for Local Open Space Grants, \$2 million for farmland protection, and \$5 million for Local Recreation Grants). With remaining funds from past bonds, \$2 million is sufficient funding for an Open Space Grant round before 2020. The proposed bond is an important commitment by Governor Raimondo in light of the state's very tight budget. In 2018, the Council will be collaborating with Audubon Society of RI, the Nature Conservancy, RI Parks & Recreation Association and other partners to advocate so that the General Assembly approves this bond referendum for voter consideration on the November 2018 ballot.
- **Defending Protected Lands from Intentional Vandalism, Theft and Other Damages** - The Council is pursuing legislation to increase penalties for people who damage protected lands. Current penalties for cutting trees or stealing stone walls from conservation properties are too low and have proven to be ineffective. The legislation, patterned after a similar 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 2017 but stalled in the Senate and is reintroduced in 2018. *Thank you to the legislative sponsors: Senator Sosnowski and Representative Keable.*
- **Protecting Farmland: Threatened by Development for Renewable Energy & Commercial Entertainment Activities**  
There were several bills proposed in 2017 that would require municipalities to permit the **development of solar, wind and other renewable energy facilities on farmland**. Some legislation even proposed to allow these developments on farmland that is protected by the state's farmland protection program. All but one of these bills died in committee. The one bill that was adopted by the General Assembly exempts farmers from the Farm, Forest, Open Space taxation penalty when they develop renewable energy on their property if no more than 20% of the farmland is converted. The legislation also includes an incentive for "dual use" so that this land is also kept in production when a renewable energy facility is constructed on farmland. The Council supports farmers' development of renewable energy facilities as an ancillary use that helps to sustain the economic viability of farms. We are concerned that large-scale commercial solar developments will result in the loss of farmland and increase farmland prices so that they are not affordable for farmers.

In the wake of the 2017 legislative proposals related to development of renewable energy facilities on farmland, the Office of Renewable Energy convened a series of stakeholder meetings to discuss

the issues and attempt to create consensus about the siting of renewable energy facilities. The Council along with Audubon Society of RI, The Nature Conservancy, Grow Smart and Conservation Law Foundation are participating in these meetings along with representatives from renewable energy development companies, municipalities and state agencies. The goal is to establish principles, policies and guidance for siting renewable energy facilities in Rhode Island. The stakeholder meetings are continuing and will lead to legislation in 2018 which will include guidance for solar and wind development on farmland and forests. Through this process, the stakeholders have already agreed that renewable energy development should not take place on protected lands (including protected farmland).

Another bill introduced in 2017 proposed to **change the "Right to Farm" law** to authorize use of farmland for festivals, concerts and other large-scale commercial entertainment activities without needing local government planning and zoning approvals. The RI Land Trust Council is concerned that changes to this law would result in farmland being taken out of production for use as entertainment venues. Further, we are concerned that this law would result in an increase in farmland prices which will make it even more difficult for farmers to find land for traditional agricultural production. RI Land Trust Council is also concerned that widespread use of farmland for large scale commercial entertainment activities will erode public support for farms, farmers and farmland protection programs. The Council, in partnership with the Conservation Law Foundation, Land For Good, Audubon Society of RI, The Nature Conservancy and American Farmland Trust, opposed this legislation. When the legislation was approved by the House, RI Land Trust Council worked closely with farmers to oppose this legislation in the Senate. The legislation died in the Senate in 2017 but we anticipate that it could be reintroduced in 2018.

- **Protecting Farmland and Keeping it in Production** - RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) is starting a new program to protect farmland and make it available for new farmers at an affordable cost. Under this new "Buy, Protect, Sell" program, RIDEM will use funds from the 2014 open space bond to purchase, protect and then resell farmland. RIDEM held a hearing on the rules proposed for this program in August. The Council collaborated with partners at the Conservation Law Foundation and Land For Good to provide comments on RIDEM's rules for implementing this new program. This program will be using the "option to purchase at agricultural values" (OPAV) for the first time in Rhode Island. OPAVs are a standard provision in farmland protection easements in Massachusetts and Vermont. The Council has been advocating for the use of OPAV in Rhode Island since we held our FarmRI 2.0 forum in 2010. The Council continues to advocate for protecting Rhode Island's remaining farmland and keeping it in production.
- **Saving Municipal and State Liability Protection** - The Council opposed legislation that proposed to eliminate **liability protection** when people are using **municipal and state land for outdoor recreation**. Without this liability protection, towns and the state would face higher insurance bills and would face fiscal pressure to reduce public access to their parks and thereby reducing the number of places where can get outdoors and enjoy nature. There are 19 land trusts in Rhode Island that are affiliated with municipal government that would be directly impacted by this legislation. This legislation would also impede trail development by land trusts that partner with municipalities to develop trails on town properties that abut land trust properties. This legislation died in committee.

- **Pursuing Permanent Protection for Providence Water's Scituate Reservoir and Buffer Lands** - Legislation was introduced in 2017 to create a regional water authority which would acquire Providence Water. The Council partnered with Conservation Law Foundation, Audubon Society of RI and The Nature Conservancy to advocate for the permanent protection of the Scituate Reservoirs and buffer lands owned by Providence Water as a provision of any related legislation. This legislation died in committee in 2017 but the issue and risk of these properties losing their protection is likely to return in 2018.

*Note: RI Land Trust Council's advocacy work is made possible by land trust dues, donations from individuals, a generous grant from the Conservation Stewardship Endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation and other foundation grants.*

### **Land Trust Capacity Building, Assistance & Networking**

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

- **Land & Conservation Water Summit** - The 14<sup>th</sup> Summit - held on Saturday, March 11, 2017 - offered 33 workshops. The Summit was attended by 300 participants including leaders from 31 land conservation organizations. The Summit is the Council's signature event and best networking and learning event each year for land trust leaders. Workshops provide "how to" information on many aspects of land conservation, stewardship and non-profit organization management.

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse kicked off the 2017 Summit by discussing "**Efforts to Address Climate Change**" and introducing the keynote speaker: Dr. Eric Chivian, from Harvard Medical School and Director of The Program on Preserving the Natural World. Dr. Chivian's **keynote** was "**Medical Models for Helping Us Understand Global Environmental Threats.**" A second plenary session held during lunch was a "Conversation with John Gwynne and Marc Levitt." John is a life-long Rhode Islander who was head of design at Roger Williams Park and Zoo before working with the Wildlife Conservation Society at the Bronx Zoo in New York. John shared stories about his work to inspire people to protect nature and wildlife in the United States, Central Africa and Brazil.

- **Workshops** - The Council organizes workshops for land trust leaders as needs and opportunities arise. In 2017, in addition to the workshops organized for the Land & Water Conservation Summit, the Council organized two workshops:
  - **Land Trust Standards and Practices** - October 12, led by Becca Washburn from the Land Trust Alliance. The workshop was attended by 24 people from 14 land trusts who learned about the best practices on stewardship of conservation easements and fee owned land.
  - **Water Words that Work** - December 5, organized in partnership with Narragansett Bay Research Reserve Program. This is a nationally acclaimed workshop about how to communicate better about land conservation and environmental issues.
- **Stewardship Assistance Team "SWAT" Team** - In 2017, this Council initiative helped Cumberland Land Trust prepare trail maps and blaze some new trails. The SWAT Team is coordinated by Roy Najecki who, for the first time, also prepared trail maps for RIDEM properties so that they can be posted on ExploreRI.com. Many RIDEM properties have outdated or no trail maps. Roy prepared trail maps for George Washington Management Area and Pulaski State Park. The Council is researching

options for "geo-referencing" trail maps so that smart phones can show hikers where they are on trails (as Google Maps does for highway travel). *If your land trust needs assistance preparing a trail map or blazing a trail, contact RI Land Trust Council about this program.*

- **Baseline Documentation “Circuit Rider”** - This Council initiative helped 6 land trusts prepare Baseline Document Reports (BDRs) for their protected lands in 2017. The Council contracts with Carol Lynn Trocki to do this work. Carol worked with Bristol Land Trust, West Bay Land Trust, Warren Land Trust, Warwick Land Trust, Scituate Land Trust, Gloucester Land Trust and Exeter Land Trust to discuss or prepare BDRs. We are also partnering with Carol to repeat the class at the University of Rhode Island (URI) that teaches students to prepare BDRs. The URI class in 2016 enabled the Council to help land trusts get more BDRs prepared. The class also gave students real world field experience and connected students with land trusts. The class is scheduled for Fall 2018. Students are each paired with a land trust and prepare a BDR under Carol’s supervision. The results from the first class were outstanding and couple of the students from that class are continuing to work with land trusts. *Notes: the RI Land Trust Council's BDR Circuit Rider assistance for land trusts is made possible by a generous grant from the Rhode Island Foundation. The URI class is made possible by a generous grant from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation. If your land trust needs assistance preparing a baseline document for properties that you are protecting, contact RI Land Trust Council about this program.*
- **“Circuit Rider” Organizing Land Conservation Records** - This initiative, a partnership with the national Land Trust Alliance (Alliance), helped 2 land trusts organize their land conservation records in 2017 (Barrington Land Conservation Trust and The Westerly Land Trust). We contract with a consultant, Holly Lippert, to help land trusts organize their land conservation records; identify core gaps in their records; and digitize their records. *If your land trust wants assistance with record keeping, contact RI Land Trust Council about this program.*
- **Facilitating Regional Networking and Collaboration** - Continuing a project started in 2016, the Council convened a second meeting of land trust leaders in three regions of the state in early 2017. These consultant-facilitated discussions enabled land trust leaders to explore opportunities for their organizations to collaborate. East Bay land trusts (Sakonnet Preservation Association and Tiverton, Bristol, Barrington, and Warren Land Trusts) meetings were continued through 2017. Discussions fostered networking and information sharing. The East Bay land trusts are planning to continue organizing and facilitating their own meetings 3-4 times a year. Land Conservancy of North Kingstown, Narrow River, Charlestown, and South Kingstown Land Trusts are also planning to continue meeting periodically. *This project was made possible by grants from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation.*
- **Land Trust E-news** - The Council continues to foster networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news and additional e-mails to land trust presidents, chairs and executive directors about grant opportunities and time sensitive information. *Please be sure RI Land Trust Council has email addresses for your land trust's board members so that we can keep our enews distribution list up to date.*

## Marketing, Community Outreach & Engagement

The Council's programs increase 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 increase community support for land conservation.

- **ExploreRI.org Website** - The Council is working 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 71 trail maps posted. This year, with help from the SWAT Team, we added maps for more Cumberland land trust trails and for the first two State Park and Wildlife Management Areas (George Washington Management Area and Pulaski State Park).

ExploreRI has been a great success with very limited marketing. More people visit land trust trails and protected properties once trail maps are posted on the ExploreRI website. In 2017, there were over 56,000 visits to the website's trails pages with nearly 16,000 different people seeking information about a specific trail. Over 75% of the website's visitors look at information for more than one trail. Nearly ½ 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 that are away from the coast.

- **Land Trust Days** - This very successful and popular program was held for the 6<sup>th</sup> year from August 12 through October 1. The kickoff celebration on Friday, August 11th was hosted by Barrington Land Conservation Trust at the Doug Rayner Wildlife Refuge and attended by over 70 people. Land conservation organizations and partners hosted 80 activities over Land Trust Days 7 weeks. Overall attendance at Land Trust Days activities was good. For a second year, the Council organized an “encore” for Land Trust Days over Thanksgiving Weekend. Ten 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. We also received prominent coverage in several local newspapers. The Council's social media promotion of Land Trust Days has been very effective and is increasing each year. The Facebook page now has over 1,600 “likes”. The number of people who have joined the MeetUp group for Land Trust Days increased 50% from 2016 and is now over 2,300 people.

- **ParkRx (Park Prescriptions)** - The Council continues to develop our 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 good for physical and mental health. This program encourages people to enjoy land trust preserves and trails as a community resource that can help them improve their health. Our other goal for this program is to connect more people to land trusts and the places they are protecting in our communities.

The Council continues to research best practices and network 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. 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 land trusts are both leading a walk on the first Saturday of every month.

The Council is seeking funding to further develop the Pilot ParkRx program and expand it statewide. We received small grants from South County Health Bodies, Healthy Minds and Hazard Family Foundation to begin developing a website that includes games and other systems that help to motivate people who get prescriptions to take walks. The website will provide feedback to the medical providers about walks that their patients are taking. The Council is also developing a walk leader training so that we can recruit more walk leaders and collaborate with land trusts to offer walks more frequently and in more locations.

- **Protecting farmland and keeping it in production.**

RI Land Trust Council is part of a network of state and regional organizations - including several land trusts - that is working to sustain agriculture in Rhode Island. Challenges to sustaining agriculture include: loss of 80% of Rhode Island's farmland since 1940; the cost of farmland is the most expensive in the nation and not affordable for farmers unless it is protected from development; our aging farmers - more than 1/3 of Rhode Island's farmers are over 65 years old and will soon retire yet few have plans for the succession of their farms; and connecting the many young farmers in Rhode Island with land to farm.

Working together with partners, we are:

- creating a list of farmers who are looking for land to farm and landowners who are looking for a farmer;
- helping farmers with succession planning for their farm when they retire;
- promoting land conservation to conserve our remaining farmland and keep it in production; and
- advocating to support these initiatives (Details on the Council's advocacy to sustain agriculture are discussed earlier in this report).

The Council, in partnership with Land For Good, has an outreach project working with land trusts to encourage landowners to lease their land for farming. This year we partnered with Charlestown Land Trust to replicate a successful workshop that we piloted in 2016 with Aquidneck Land Trust, South Kingstown Land Trust and Narrow River Land Trust. The workshop encourages 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. Many new vegetable farmers only need a couple of acres where they can grow crops to have a viable farm. The Council believes that some landowners who own large properties (5-20 acres) might consider leasing some of their land to these new farmers. Charlestown Land Trust worked with their town planning office to identify and reach out to these landowners and invite them to our workshop. During the workshop, a young farmer discusses what farmers are looking for when they lease land. We also have 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 with, and begin conversations 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.

The Council also partnered with Land For Good to conduct succession planning workshops for farmers. We held a succession planning workshop for farmers on February 13 at Sandywoods Farm in Tiverton. Land For Good also held a Succession Planning School in Rhode Island over three days in late 2017 and early 2018.

The Council is also participating in two beginner farmer projects: one led by Southside Community Land Trust and a second regional project led by Land For Good. Both of these projects are working to make more land available to farmers and to connect farmers with land.

Another Council initiative in 2017 to help land trusts protect and steward farmland was an effort to improve coordination between land trusts, the land conservation community in Rhode Island, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Council met with NRCS staff to discuss their monitoring requirements for federal farmland conservation easements. We shared the Rhode Island monitoring protocol developed by RI Land Trust Council and Conservation Stewardship Collaborative and refined this protocol for farmland easements. In November, the Council's Executive Director along with staff from Aquidneck Land Trust, South Kingstown Land Trust, RIDEM and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) participated in a regional meeting (convened by American Farmland Trust and Land For Good) to discuss agriculture conservation. We learned that other New England states are having greater success using the federal farmland protection program and we learned about steps they have been taking to create that success. Rhode Island's NRCS office is now convening meetings to plan how land trusts, RIDEM and NRCS can better coordinate activities and programs to protect farmland.

## 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.

### 2017 Rhode Island Land Trust Council Members

- Aquidneck Land Trust
- Audubon Society of Rhode Island
- Barrington Land Conservation Trust
- Block Island Conservancy
- Block Island Land Trust
- Borders Farm Preservation
- 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
- Exeter Rural Land Preservation Trust
- Foster Land Trust
- Gloucester Land Trust
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Land Conservancy of North Kingstown
- Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust
- Narragansett Land Conservancy Trust
- Narrow River Land Trust
- Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy
- North Smithfield Land Trust
- Prudence Conservancy
- Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust
- Sakonnet Preservation Association
- Scituate Land Trust
- Smithfield Land Trust
- South Kingstown Land Trust
- Southside Community Land Trust
- The Nature Conservancy
- Tiverton Land Trust
- Warren Land Conservation Trust
- Warwick Land Trust
- Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation
- West Bay Land Trust
- West Greenwich Land Trust
- The Westerly Land Trust

### Grants & Major Gifts

- The Rhode Island Foundation
- Conservation Stewardship Collaborative  
Endowment @ the RI Foundation
- South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds  
✓ (Health Equity Zone)
- van Beuren Charitable Foundation
- Prince Charitable Trusts
- Sharpe Family Foundation
- Hazard Family Foundation
- Woodcock Charitable Trust
- Anonymous contribution
- RI Department of Environmental Management  
(Trail Grant)
- Board Members - RI Land Trust Council
- Worldways Social Marketing (in kind)
- Bafflin Foundation
- Southside Community Land Trust  
(Land Access Working Group)
- Anthony Maione and Dori Gerhardt
- Arthur H. Carr Fund  
and Mrs. Dudley A. Williams
- John Gwynne, Jr. and Mikel Folcarelli
- In Memory of Debra NajECKI
- Kate and Arthur Chute
- Jane K. Langmuir
- Patricia L. Sylvester

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

*Christopher Riely*, President

*Rupert Friday*, Executive Director