

2018 Annual Report



Our Mission: 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.

Executive Summary

2018 was a very successful year for the Council. We had several major policy successes. Programs continue to help land trusts steward the properties they protect. Land Trust Days and ExploreRI.org website increase the visibility of land trusts, and encourage more Rhode Islanders to enjoy the special places they are protecting.

Some major 2018 accomplishments:

- **Passage of The Green Economy Bond provides funding for land conservation.** Over 78 % of Rhode Island voters approved the \$47.3 million Green Economy bond providing \$4 million for land conservation and \$5 million for park acquisition and development.
- **New legislation helps land trusts defend the properties they are protecting.** There are now significant new penalties for people who cut trees, steal stone walls and otherwise intentionally damage these protected properties in our communities. This new law also authorizes judges to issue fines so that land trusts can restore damaged natural areas.
- **Legislation that proposed to disband Smithfield Land Trust was blocked.** This legislation would have eliminated protection for hundreds of acres owned by this municipal land trust. It threatened to erode public trust in all land trusts and to undermine community confidence that land trust properties are permanently protected.
- **The Council advocated for permanent conservation of land that protects the state's drinking water supplies.**
- **The Council provided consulting assistance to help land trusts** prepare baseline document reports for properties they protect, to organize and digitize their land conservation records, and to plan stewardship for their protected properties.
- **The Council helped land trusts prepare trail maps and added more trail maps to ExploreRI.org** - the "go to" website where Rhode Islanders and visitors can find information on places to get outdoors and hike.

- **The Council held the 'sold out' RI Land & Water Conservation Summit** in March. The inspirational keynote speaker, *Gus Seelig, Executive Director of Vermont's Housing and Conservation Board*, and 32 "how to" workshops provided great learning opportunities and networking for Rhode Island's conservation leaders.
- The Council held **workshops on "Monitoring Protected Lands" and "Land Trust Legal Issues."**

The following provides details of these accomplishments and RI Land Trust Council's work in 2018.

Advocating for State Legislation, Policies & Funding

Overview. The Council gives land trusts a presence at the State House and a voice in state policy discussions. It advocates for legislation and policies that support land trusts and land conservation. 2018 was a very busy and successful year for land conservation policy. Most notably:

- Over 78% of Rhode Island voters supported a Green Economy Bond on election day in November. The Bond provides funding for land conservation and enables RIDEM to continue the Local Open Space Grants Program and protect more farmland.
- The Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that increased penalties for people who cut trees, steal stone walls or otherwise damage protected properties, helping land trusts defend protected lands.
- The Rhode Island General Assembly rejected legislation that sought to disband the Smithfield Land Trust (a municipal land trust).
- Protected properties in Cranston were defended from development of a new power line and related tree clearing.
- RI Department of Environmental Management continues to develop proposed rules for solar development on farmland enrolled in the Farm, Forest and Open Space taxation program that will encourage farmers to keep land in production.
- The Council and land trusts participated in community planning meetings for the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). This plan will guide state and federal policy and funding for outdoor recreation programs.

2018 Green Economy and Clean Water Bond is Adopted. In January 2018, Governor Raimondo's budget proposed a \$48 million Green Economy Bond referendum. The proposed bond includes \$4 million for land conservation (\$2 million for both local open space grants program and farmland conservation). The Council, in collaboration with partners, successfully advocated for the RI General Assembly to retain the funding for land conservation and place this bond referendum on the ballot for consideration by voters on election day.

Beginning in July, the Council and many land trusts were part of a broad coalition that promoted voter support for the bond. The Bond was approved by 78.8% of voters statewide, a majority in every community, and by over 80% of the voters in 11 towns.

It's noteworthy that more voters approved the Green Economy & Clean Water Bond than any other referendum and candidate on the ballot. Further, voter support increased dramatically for the 2018 bond from the 67.6% approval of the 2016 Green Economy Bond and 71.1% approval of the 2014 Environment Bond.

Legislation to Help Land Trusts Defend Protected Lands is Adopted. The Council had legislation introduced that increases penalties for people who intentionally damage protected lands (cutting trees, stealing stone walls, etc.). The approval of this legislation by the General Assembly and the Governor was the culmination of a multi-year effort to replicate a law in Connecticut. This law authorizes judges to award fines for stewardship costs so that land trusts can restore properties that are damaged. Connecticut is the only other state with a similar law which has helped land trusts prevent encroachment on protected lands.

Smithfield Land Trust Defended. The Council led a campaign to stop legislation that proposed to disband the Smithfield Land Trust. This legislation would have been very damaging to land conservation in Smithfield and across the state. Smithfield Land Trust is one of 19 municipal land trusts - organizations established by legislation or town charter - it protects 20 properties and over 1000 acres that would have been at risk. The legislation would have set a damaging precedence for the 18 other municipal land trusts and the properties they are protecting, and would have undermined public confidence in land trusts and their missions.

Advocated for Permanent Conservation of Land That Protects Drinking Water Supplies. Several legislative proposals to change ownership and management of Providence Water and other water supply systems were considered in 2018. These proposals raised concerns about the future of the land around the Scituate Reservoir and other lands' that water suppliers own to protect drinking water supplies from pollution. The Council continues to advocate for permanent protection of this land.

Defending Protected Land from a New Power Line. The Council advocated against a proposal submitted to the State Properties Committee for development of a new powerline through protected lands in Cranston. This work was in support of the West Bay Land Trust's effort to maintain their protection. The Council also wanted to avoid setting a precedent for new powerlines in protected lands.

Outcome: the new powerline will be put underground along the road corridor and will not impact protected land.

The Council's State Policy Work Influenced a National Discussion. Rhode Island's experience in revising our state's conservation easement legislation was instrumental in the national decision made to not modify the national model conservation easement enabling legislation.

Solar Development Impacts on Land Conservation. 2018 continued to see unprecedented pressure in Rhode Island to develop solar and wind energy production facilities on farmland, forests, and protected lands. The Council, and other environmental organizations, are participating in an ongoing state committee that is exploring strategies for guiding renewable energy development to preferred development sites such as landfills, gravel pits, parking lots, rooftops etc. and discouraging development on the state's remaining farmland and unfragmented blocks of forest land. In addition, the Council and our partners at Conservation Law Foundation, Land For Good, and American Farmland Trust continue to advocate for policies that promote dual use: both renewable energy facilities and agricultural production.

Farmland Conservation. The Council continued to work with our partners (Conservation Law Foundation, Land For Good and American Farmland Trust) to review and submit comments on RI Department of Environmental Management's (RIDEM) second draft of proposed rules for their new "Buy, Protect, Sell" program to help new farmers gain access to farmland. RIDEM seeks to protect farmland and make it available at affordable cost for new farmers who are having difficulty finding land to farm. The Council also continues to partner with South Side Community Land Trust and others who are coordinating efforts to connect farmers - especially new farmers - with land to farm.

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, Stewardship Assistance & Networking

Several Council programs help land trusts implement best practices, improve their stewardship, grow, and network with each other.

15th RI Land & Water Conservation Summit held on Saturday, March 10. The Summit had capacity attendance with over 300 including representatives from 40 land trusts and organizations that support land trusts and land conservation. The Summit offered 32 workshops, and a keynote address, "*Building Community Through Conservation: Lessons Learned from 30 years*," by Gus Seelig, Executive Director of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. The 2018 Summit was organized in partnership with the Audubon Society of RI and RI Association of Environmental Educators to foster collaboration among Rhode Island's land trusts, watershed organizations, conservation commissions and other community based conservation organizations.

Workshops. The Council hosted two workshops in 2018. A field workshop on "*Monitoring Protected Lands*" was held April 28, 2018 in Smithfield. "*Land Trust Legal Issues*" workshop was held at the Attorney General's office in Providence November 1 in partnership with the Attorney General's office.

Stewardship Assistance Trail Team "SWAT" Team. This volunteer committee coordinated by Roy Najecki is helping land trusts design, create, blaze and map trails on protected properties. In 2018, the SWAT Team helped Cumberland Land Trust develop new trails and map additional trails for Black Hall, Mercy Woods, Burlingame/White Cedar Swamp.

Providing Technical Assistance to Help Land Trusts with Stewardship.

The Council contracts with Carol Lynn Trocki to help land trusts prepare baseline document reports (BDRs) and develop stewardship plans for properties they protect. In partnership with the Land Trust Alliance, the Council also contracts with Holly Lippert to help land trusts organize and digitize their land conservation records.

Carol helped Scituate Land Trust, Warwick Land Trust and Gloucester LT with BDRs and coached a variety of land trusts. Holly helped Westerly Land Trust.

In fall 2018, Carol taught a course at the University of Rhode Island (URI) in which 16 students prepared BDRS for 15 properties protected by 9 land trusts. We plan to repeat this successful class in spring 2020 if we have adequate funding and student enrollment.

The Council's stewardship assistance projects are funded by a generous grant from The Rhode Island Foundation, and the URI class by a grant from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment at the Foundation.

If your land trust needs assistance with baseline document reports, stewardship plans, organizing and digitizing your land conservation records, please contact the Council.

Networking & Information Sharing. The Council continues to foster networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news newsletter. The e-news is distributed to over 700 land trust board members and others interested in land trusts and land conservation. The Council's Executive Director sends additional emails to land trust presidents, chairs and executive directors about time sensitive information such as grant opportunities and important meetings.

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. If you do not receive the enews and want to sign up, please send us your name, email address and organization affiliation.

Community Outreach & Engagement

Increasing Visibility & Connecting People with Land Trusts

The Council has several initiatives to increase the visibility of land trusts and the special places they are protecting. Our goals are: to increase the number of Rhode Islanders and visitors who enjoy and value the places land trusts are protecting, who support land trusts as members, volunteers and donors; and to strengthen community support so that political leaders and voters continue to support bonds for land conservation and stewardship.

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. There are over 88 trail maps posted. The Council is contacting municipalities so that we can add trail maps and trail information for municipal trails.

The Council is redesigning ExploreRI so that it is more user friendly and more functional with smart phones. (The website was designed before smart phones were in use, when most people used the website from a personal computer.) The other improvement we are adding is "geo-referencing" trail maps for some trail systems so that people can use the Avenza app on their smart phone to see their location on the trail maps as they walk (similar to how google maps show a car's location on the street map). We "geo-referenced" maps for the Cumberland Monastery for Land Trust Days kick-off event in August.

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 2018, there were over over 50,000 visits to the website's trails pages with nearly 12,000 different people seeking information about a specific trail. Over 79% of the website's visitors look at information for more than one trail. Nearly ½ of the visitors to ExploreRI are from nearby states coming to Rhode Island to hike or kayak. ExploreRI.org has become the "go to" website for coastal and inland trail information in Rhode Island

Land Trust Days. The 7th year of this very popular program was held August 10 through September 30. The kickoff celebration on Friday, August 11th, hosted by Cumberland Land Conservation Trust at the Monastery was covered by The Providence Journal with a front page article. 29 land trusts and partners hosted 41 activities over Land Trust Days 7 weeks. Overall attendance was good and averaged 30 people for trail walks. For a second year, the Council organized an “encore” for Land Trust Days over Thanksgiving Weekend. Eight land trusts hosted a walk that weekend. (Because of extreme cold temperatures over that Weekend, several walks were canceled and others were only lightly attended.)

Once again, Rhode Island Public Radio promotions during Land Trust Days increased the visibility of land trusts and these events. The Land Trust Days website had over 4050 unique users who had over 10,400 page views. The Facebook page now has over 1,800 “likes”. The number of people who have joined the MeetUp group for Land Trust Days increased 20% from 2017, now over 2,800 people.

We were pleased that in 2018 Gathering Waters Conservancy - the Wisconsin state land trust coalition held Land Trust Days.

ParkRx (Park Prescriptions). The Council continues to develop our project to encourage people to get outdoors and take walks for their health. We've learned a lot from our networking with other "ParkRx" style programs. 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 began as 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 and Westerly Land Trusts. Our initial goal was to get health care providers to ‘write prescriptions’ for their patients to get outdoors and walk as part of their health care treatment. Those land trusts were both leading a walk on the first Saturday of every month. South Kingstown Land Trust continues to offer a walk on the 1st Saturday.

We have held focus groups and are developing a website that includes games and other systems that help to motivate people to take walks. The website will provide feedback to the medical providers about walks that their patients are taking. The Council is also continuing to research best practices and to develop a leader training program. Our goal is to recruit more walk leaders and collaborate with land trusts to offer walks more frequently and in more locations. The Council is also adding municipal trails to ExploreRI. We are updating ExploreRI and will add the degree of difficulty, so people with varied mobility can enjoy the outdoors.

The Council's ParkRx project has been made possible by generous grants from van Beuren Charitable Foundation; South County Health Bodies, Healthy Minds (a Health Equity Zone); and the Hazard Family Foundation.

How We Accomplished This Board, Staff, 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.

2018-19 Board of Directors

John Berg	Bruce Payton (began March 2018)
Laura Bozzi (began March 2018)	Barbara Rich (Vice-President)
Alex Chuman	Christopher Riely (Co-Secretary)
Margaret DeVos	Carol Lynn Trocki
Edward [Ned] Levine (began March 2018)	Nancy Weinstein (Co-Secretary)
Connie Lima (Until November 2018)	Connie Worthington
Debra Mitchell (President)	Shawen Williams (Until March 2018)
Roy Najecki	

Staff

Rupert Friday - Executive Director
Laura Luttrell - Program Coordinator (June-December)

2018 Dues Paying Land Trusts - Our 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
- Coventry Land Trust
- Cumberland Land Trust
- Exeter Rural Land Preservation Trust
- Foster Land Trust
- Gloucester Land Trust
- Historic New England
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Land Conservancy of North Kingstown
- Lincoln Municipal Land Trust
- Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust
- Mt. Tom Land Trust
- Narragansett Land Conservancy Trust
- Narrow River Land Trust
- Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy
- North Smithfield Land Trust
- Prudence Conservancy
- RI Farm Bureau Land Trust
- 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 & Donations

- Larry Anderson
- Anonymous contributions (4)
- John Berg
- Laura Bozzi
- Abigail Brooks
- Jane A. Buxton, PhD
- Arthur H. Carr Fund and
Mrs. Dudley A. Williams
- Alex Chuman
- Edward Clement
- Conservation Stewardship Collaborative
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- Lee Fieder
- Elaine Fontaine
- Rupert Friday
- Zachary Gold
- John Gwynne, Jr. and Mikel Folcarelli
- Hazard Family Foundation
- Mary Hutchinson/Mapping and
Planning Services
- Edward Levine and Isabella Porter
- Constance Lima
- Anthony Maione and Dori Gerhardt
- John and Diana Marshall
- Kevin McDonough
- Dennis Migneault
- Debra Mitchell
- Roy P. Najecki
- Bruce Payton
- Pitney Bowes Foundation
- Prince Charitable Trusts
- RI Department of Environmental Mgmt.
(Trail Grant)
- The Rhode Island Foundation
- Barbara J. Rich
- Christopher Riely
- Paul A. Roselli
- Sharpe Family Foundation
- Lewis D. Sorrentino Fund and
Mary Jane Sorrentino
- South County Healthy Bodies, Healthy
Minds (Health Equity Zone)
- Southside Community Land Trust
(Land Access Working Group)
- Chris and Jen Suellentrop
- Linda A. Steere and
Edward R. DiLuglio Fund
- Mike and Heather Steers
- Carol Lynn Trocki
- van Beuren Charitable Foundation
- Nancy Weinstein
- Shawen Williams
- Ken and Dottie Woodcock
- Connie Worthington and Terry Tullis

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

Debbie Mitchell, President

Rupert Friday, Executive Director