

—2026—
LAND & WATER
CONSERVATION
SUMMIT

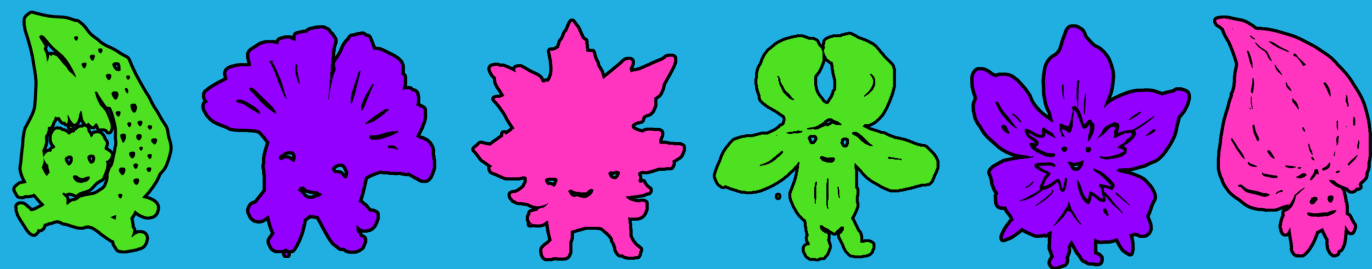


Golden-crowned kinglet — Photo: Devin J. Silversmith @devinjsilversmithpics

March 21, 2026

University of Rhode Island — Memorial Union — Kingston Campus

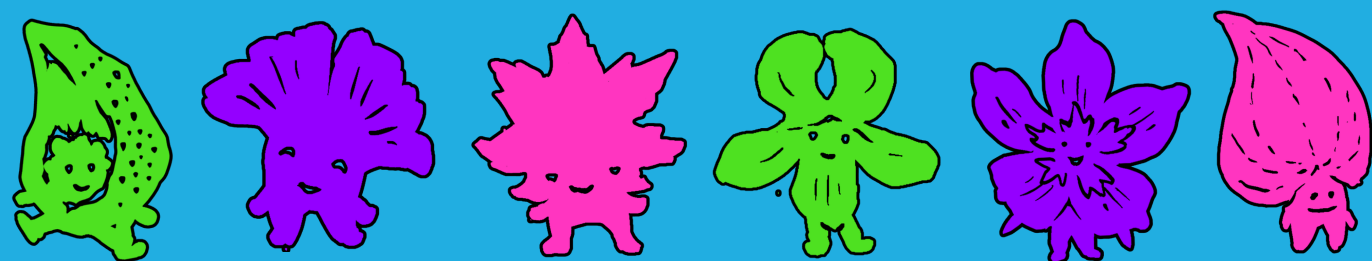




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—2026— LAND & WATER CONSERVATION SUMMIT

AGENDA

- 8:00 am **Registration and Continental Breakfast**
Network and Visit Conservation Commons Exhibitor Hall
- 9:00 am **Welcome and Opening Program—Ballroom**
Welcome—Thomas Rogers, Board Chair, RI Land Trust Council
Land Acknowledgement—Dinalyn Spears, Director of Community Planning & Natural Resources, Narragansett Indian Tribe
Introduction—Kate Sayles, Director, RI Land Trust Council
- 9:30 am **Keynote Presentation: Ethan Tapper, author, *How to Love a Forest***
The Work Ahead: Caring for Our Land and Water and Creating a Just Future
- 10:15 am **Break**
Network and Visit Conservation Commons Exhibitor Hall
- 10:35 am **Session A Workshops**
Your choice from 10 workshops offered
- 11:55 am **Lunch—Ram's Den**
Network and Visit Conservation Commons Exhibitor Hall
Ethan Tapper will be signing copies of his book
- 1:00 pm **Session B Workshops**
Your choice from 10 workshops offered
- 2:00 pm **Break**
Coffee and Afternoon Snacks Offered
Network and Visit Conservation Commons Exhibitor Hall
- 2:20 pm **Session C Workshops**
Your choice from 10 workshops offered
- 3:25 pm **Closing Program—Ballroom**
Updates from Washington—US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (pre-recorded)
Legislative Update: Director Terry Gray, RI Department of Environmental Management
Senator Louis DiPalma and Representative Megan Cotter
Raffles and Prizes
Closing Words—Dinalyn Spears, Director of Community Planning & Natural Resources, Narragansett Indian Tribe
- 4:30 pm **Join us for the afterparty at Whalers Brewery!**
1174 Kingstown Road, Peace Dale

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About the RI Land & Water Conservation Summit

For more than two decades, the Rhode Island Land & Water Conservation Summit has brought together the people who care for the state's land and water. Land trust leaders, watershed organizations, conservation commissions, farmers, planners, state agencies, students, and community members gather each year to share ideas, learn from one another, and strengthen the networks that sustain our collective work across Rhode Island.

Now in its 21st year, the Summit remains Rhode Island's premier gathering for grassroots conservation. **This year's program includes 30 workshops and welcomes 325 participants** from across Rhode Island and neighboring New England states for a full day of collaboration and connection.

The Summit has been hosted at the University of Rhode Island since 2005 and is now organized by the **Rhode Island Land Trust Council**, the statewide coalition of over 50 land trusts working to conserve the lands and waters that sustain our communities.

We are especially excited to return in 2026 after a pause in 2025, when Rhode Island hosted the **Land Trust Alliance's Rally** in Providence. With more than 2,350 attendees, it was the largest Rally in the organization's history and brought national attention to Rhode Island's vibrant conservation community. This year's Summit continues that momentum by bringing the focus back to the people and partnerships shaping conservation across our region.

Participants may notice one change to the program this year. The **Peter Merritt Award for Land Conservation** and the **Blueways Stewardship Award** will no longer be presented during the Summit. The awards will be presented at the annual meetings of the Rhode Island Land Trust Council and the Rhode Island Rivers Council, respectively, as part of each organization's annual celebration of conservation leadership.

Materials from past Summits, including workshop resources and keynote recordings, are archived at landandwaterpartnership.org.

PROUD TO BE PART OF THE
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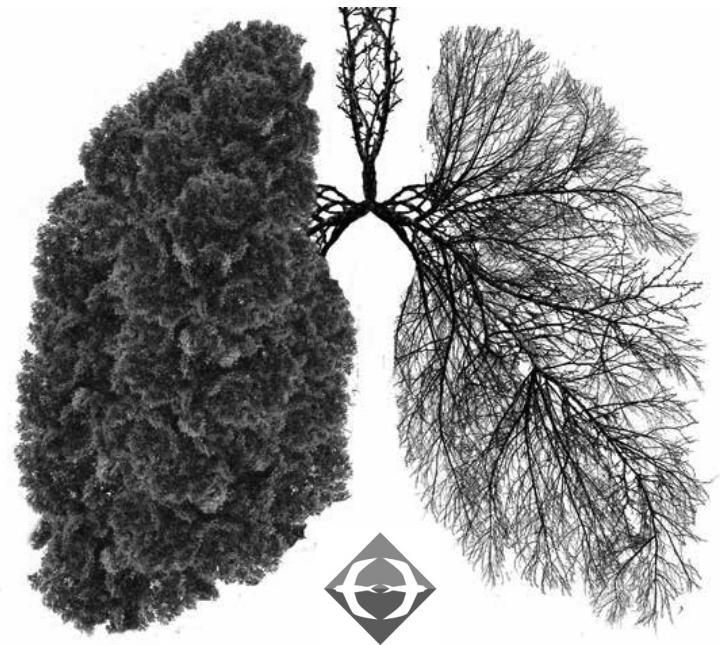


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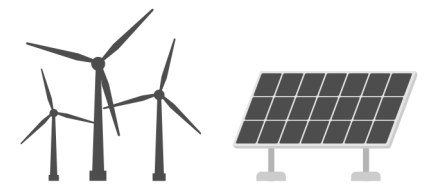
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Keynote

Ethan Tapper

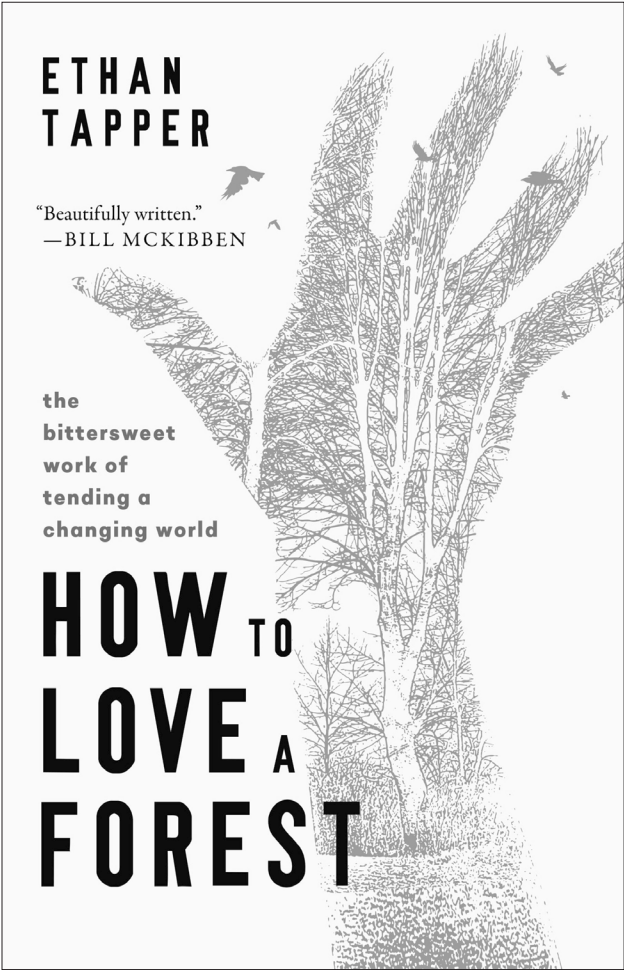
The Work Ahead: Caring for Our Lands and Waters and Creating a Just Future

What does it mean to care for our lands and waters in a time of climate change, inequity, and ecological loss? In his keynote address, Ethan Tapper will explore the complex and necessary acts of conservation and stewardship across Rhode Island’s landscapes and watersheds.

Ethan is a forester, ecologist, digital storyteller, and the bestselling author of *How to Love a Forest: The Bittersweet Work of Tending a Changing World*. For more than a decade, Ethan has been recognized as a thought-leader in the world of ecosystem stewardship, winning numerous regional and national awards for his work. More recently, he has been recognized as a writer – since its publication in 2024, *How to Love a Forest* has been named the winner of the 2025 New England Book Award for nonfiction, and received international acclaim.

Ethan’s message of relationship, responsibility and hope reaches millions of people each year through his writing, social media channels with hundreds of thousands of followers, and the hundreds of walks, talks and keynotes that he delivers across North America each year.

Ethan works, writes, hunts, birds and runs a small consulting forestry business from his home at Bear Island – his 175-acre working forest, homestead, orchard and sugarbush in Vermont – and plays in his punk band, The Bubs.



Ethan will be signing books at lunchtime in the Ram’s Den.

Summit Keynote Speakers

Each year we recruit a Keynote speaker for the Summit who can provide participants with timely information and inspiration for continuing our work together.

- 2004 **Gus Seelig** — *Keys to the 15 Year Success of the VT Housing & Conservation Program*
- 2005 **Peter Forbes** — *The Soul of the Land: Nurturing Our Emotional Connections to Our Communities, Landscapes and Watersheds and Telling Stories that Celebrate These Relationships*
- 2006 **Jeff Milder** — *Using Development to Support Conservation: How to Leverage the Real Estate Market to Help Fund Conservation Projects*
- 2007 **Richard Greenwood** — *Powerful Currents: A Historical Perspective on Rivers and the Making of Rhode Island*
- 2008 **Gina McCarthy** — *No Child Left Inside*
- 2009 **Tom Wessells** — *Reading the Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England*
- 2010 **Tom Horton** — *Saving the Chesapeake Bay’s Land and Water: Lessons Learned after 25 Years*
- 2011 **Steve Sloan** — *Connecting People to Place and Your Conservation Mission*
- 2012 **Mayor Lisa Wong** — *Urban Conservation as a Redevelopment Strategy*
- 2013 **Steve Archibald** — *Not a storyteller? Perhaps it’s time to reconsider!*
- 2014 **Alvaro Sanchez Sanchez** — *Building Strong Green Economies Using Land & Water Conservation Strategies*
- 2015 **Peter Forbes** — *Innovation & Evolution in Conservation*
- 2016 **Collin O’Mara** — *Conservation in This Century: What America Can Learn from the Ocean State*
- 2017 **Eric Chivian, M.D.** — *Medical Models for Helping Us Understand Global Environmental Threats*
- 2018 **Gus Seelig** — *Building Community Through Conservation: Lessons from 30 Years*
- 2019 **David Vallee** — *Conservation, Meet Development: The Role of Land & Watershed Protection in Building Resilient Communities*
- 2020 **Dr. Mamie Parker** — *A Change in Climate: Preparing the Next Generation with Passion, Inspiration, and Excellence!*
- 2021 **Carolyn Finney** — *Building a Stronger Land Movement through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*
- 2022 **Lorén Spears** — *Sustaining and Conserving in Unprecedented Times: Traditional Ecological Knowledge & Environmental Justice*
- 2023 **Dave Vissoe** — *The Joy of Winter Sowing: Native Plant Propagation from Seed and the ReSeeding RI Project*
- 2024 **Tarshire Battle** — *Rooted in Resilience: Centering Community in Land & Water Conservation*
- 2026 **Ethan Tapper** — *The Work Ahead: Caring for Our Land and Water and Creating a Just Future*

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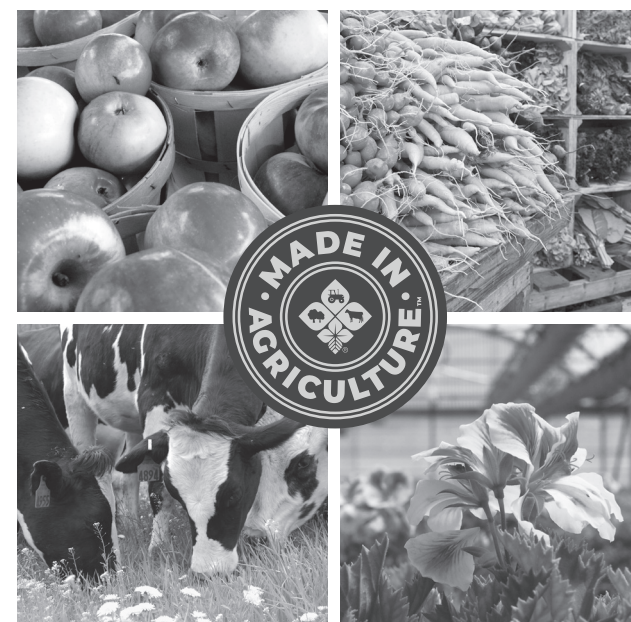
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Seven Leaders Tackling Bottlenecks to Conservation Land Stewardship



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Connect with Community

The New England Program delivers trainings and resources, convenes peer networks, provides financial support and responds to the most pressing needs of land trusts. We help build strong land trusts, ensure permanence, foster equity, and advance land and water protection.

Questions?
Mariah Fogg
New England Program Coordinator
mfogg@lta.org | (202) 349-0587

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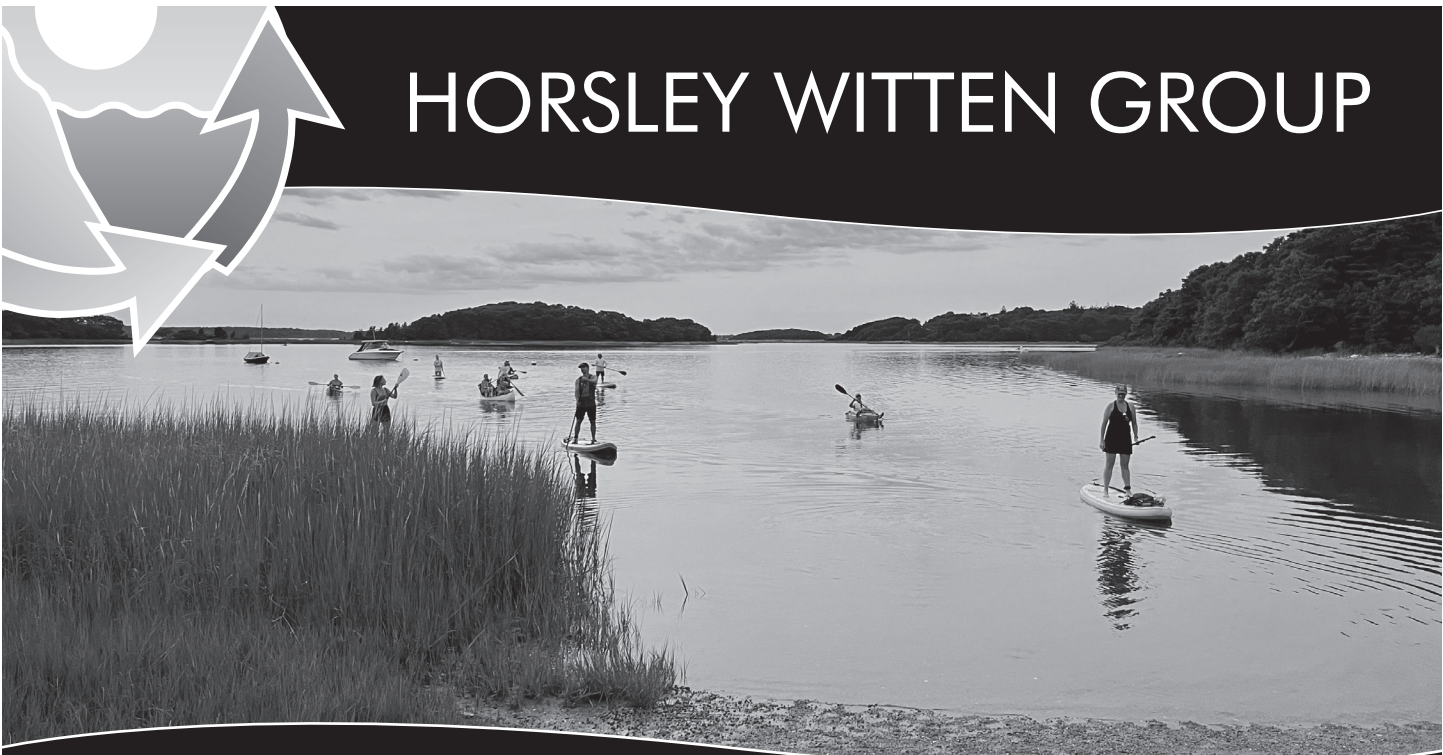
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Session A (10:35 AM)

A1. Beavers: From Control to Collaboration

What if Rhode Island’s most overlooked allies in land and water restoration—and in building climate resilience—were beavers? Beavers often get a bad reputation, yet their potential as partners remains largely untapped across the state.

This session explores projects and research demonstrating how beaver-engineered landscapes provide multi-functional solutions to drought, wildfire, and flooding—and how collaborating with beavers can promote streambed restoration, floodplain reconnection, habitat creation, groundwater recharge, water quality improvement, and more.

We’ll also introduce Rhode Island Beaver Management—the first initiative of its kind in the state—to explore how Rhode Island can build pathways of coexistence and collaboration with beavers, restoring the natural processes that sustain both human and ecological communities across rural and urban landscapes.

As Rhode Island faces mounting pressures from flooding, drought, and degraded waterways, recognizing the ecological role of beavers offers a powerful and cost-effective path to climate adaptation. This session invites land managers, policymakers, and community members to reimagine coexistence and co-creation—shifting from control toward collaboration with nature’s own engineers.

Speakers:

Molly Hastings, Director, RI Beaver Management

Alexandra Ionescu, Associate Director of Regenerative Projects, Biodiversity for a Livable Climate

A2. Beyond Access: Building our Collective Liberation in Outdoor Spaces Intergenerationally

Through this interactive workshop, participants will be able to explore the barriers and understand terminology that highlight the importance of increasing opportunities for youth of color to explore outdoor spaces. This workshop will include reflective activities that outline participants’ initial involvement and interest in the outdoors. We will address the systemic obstacles that exclude youth of color from having early outdoor exploration opportunities.

By brainstorming ways to improve accessibility for youth, participants will gain a greater understanding of the importance of exposure, opportunity, and representation that comes with environmental justice.

Speakers:

Destiny Manston, Special Projects Coordinator, Youth in Action

Aisha Isabel, Program Director, Youth in Action

Nyrell Wright, Board Member and Program Alumni, Youth in Action

A3. Conservation Made Possible: NRCS Funding for RI Land Trusts

This presentation will introduce land trusts to the wide range of funding opportunities available through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. We will explore easement programs that help protect working lands, forest, and critical habitats, as well as financial assistance programs that support long-term stewardship and land management. Attendees will learn how NRCS can partner with land trusts to fund conservation easements, enhance ecological resilience, and provide resources to care for the lands they own and manage. This session will highlight practical and accessible tools and funding paths to make lasting conservation possible.

Speakers:

Marina Capraro, Easement Program Manager, USDA-NRCS

Annie Ragan, Financial Assistant Program Manager, USDA-NRCS

Brunilda Velez-Diaz, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, USDA-NRCS

A4. Climate Change, a Just Transition, and the Role of Labor

This panel will explore what a “just transition” truly means for Rhode Island workers and communities, connecting the dots between climate action, equity, and labor. Panelists will discuss how organized labor is shaping the state’s energy and climate transition—from the Act on Climate and 100% Renewable Energy Standard to local initiatives like Providence’s Climate Justice Plan. The conversation will reflect on how policy and funding landscapes have shifted over time, including the evolving role of federal and state tax credits, and how unions and allies can continue to adapt and advocate for equitable outcomes.

Emerging opportunities such as geothermal and district thermal networks will be highlighted as examples of the next generation of climate infrastructure that can deliver good, union jobs. Panelists will also reference

findings from Climate Jobs Just Transition and Clean Energy Jobs reports and ongoing state planning efforts. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of why labor is essential to achieving the state’s climate goals and how worker justice can be embedded across conservation, resilience, and decarbonization efforts.

Speakers:

Harrison Antone, Labor Liaison, Climate Jobs Rhode Island

Erica Hammond, Legislative Director, Rhode Island AFL-CIO

Quilcia Moronta, Community Organizer, Climate Jobs Rhode Island

Serena Russell, Policy Coordinator, Climate Jobs Rhode Island

A5. Restoring Our Soils, Preserving Our Lands

Development, farming practices, and climate change are rapidly degrading the country’s soils in both urban and rural settings. In order to protect our health, and the productivity of our lands, we need to restore the health of our soils. We will feature a discussion from one of the nation’s compost thought leaders, RI’s own Jayne Merner, on the importance of soil health and the benefits in terms of health, community resilience, stormwater management, and more. She’ll bring her years of experience composting, using that compost on her farm and throughout the community. We’ll then hear from Rich Pederson Steward of City Farm in Providence which has some of the best soil you’ll see right in an urban setting, on the importance of urban farming to the community. And finally you’ll hear from Isaac Bearg of the RI Food Policy Council about how individuals and communities can encourage the diversion of waste from our rapidly filling landfill in favor of practices that generate the compost we need to restore our lands.

Speakers:

Isaac Bearg, Program Director - Food, Climate and Environment, RI Food Policy Council

Jayne Merner, Owner, Earth Care Farm

Rich Pederson, City Farm Steward, Southside Community Land Trust

A6. State of the State — Farmland and Its Future in RI

Rhode Island’s farmland is under intense pressure from development and rising land prices, even as interest in farming and access to local food continues to grow. In this workshop, we will review the latest data on the status of farmland and discuss where current trends are leading. We will examine practical models for land access, including conservation-based tools, long-term leases, and other strategies communities are using to keep land in agriculture. We will close with a conversation about what Rhode Island can do next to protect farmland and support the next generation of farmers through policy, partnerships, and other actions.

Speaker:

Laurel Witri, Farm Transition Specialist, Land & Sea Together, CMCRI

A7. Stewardship Takes to the Skies: Drones as a Tool for Land Conservation

Tired of climbing through impenetrable thickets of multiflora rose, greenbrier, and blackberry? Need to find a way to document that hard-to-reach encroachment? Or maybe you’re looking for a way to take your social media account to the next level? A drone may be the answer for you! In this session, Stewardship Manager Sean Grandy of Aquidneck Island Land Trust and Stewardship Director Adam Yorks of Sakonnet Preservation Association will discuss their use of drones in monitoring, mapping, communications, etc. as well as potential future applications for stewardship work. Participants will learn the process of remote pilot certification through the FAA, learn about different drone models to choose from, and get tips for flying. After the presentation, we will take the session outside for a live drone demo. In addition to discussion on drones, participants will learn a little more about other easy-to-access tools related to remote monitoring.

Speakers:

Sean Grandy, Stewardship Manager, Aquidneck Island Land Trust

Adam Yorks, Stewardship Director, Sakonnet Preservation Association

A8. The State of Rhode Island’s Forests 2026

This moderated panel will feature representatives from the Department of Environmental Management’s Division of Agriculture & Forest Environment, as well as the University of Rhode Island’s Department of Natural Resources Science. Panelists will give an overview of the current state of Rhode Island’s forests and urban tree canopy, highlighting progress made on the 2020 Forest Action Plan. The panel will touch upon current efforts to sustainably manage Rhode Island’s forests – both on state and privately-owned lands, as well as trees in urban areas

Speakers:

Robert “Lou” Allard, Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator, RIDEM

Christopher Riely, Forestry Specialist and Research Associate, University of Rhode Island

Alana Russell, Forest Health Program Coordinator, RIDEM

Tara Hoda, Natural and Working Lands Policy Fellow, RIDEM

Nancy Stairs, Cooperative Forestry Program Supervisor, RIDEM Division of Forest Environment

A9. The Work Behind the Work: Getting Your Organization’s Strategic Game in Order

Many conservation organizations struggle not with what they want to achieve, but with how to organize themselves to achieve it. Strategic plans often articulate bold visions, yet without clear structures and systems, implementation falters.

This interactive workshop introduces a practical framework that helps conservation nonprofits strengthen performance across four key dimensions:

Strategic Planning—Setting direction with focus and purpose;

Organizational Design—Aligning people, roles, and governance to deliver on strategy;

Strategic Implementation—Converting goals into coordinated, measurable action;

Systemization—Building internal processes and rhythms that sustain progress over time.

Drawing on experience supporting land trusts, including the South Kingstown Land Trust, watershed organizations, and other environmental nonprofits across Rhode Island and beyond, Alidade Consultants will share lessons learned and simple tools for aligning mission, people, and systems. Participants will complete a self-assessment of their own organization’s “strate-

gic readiness” and leave with a practical roadmap for strengthening alignment, accountability, and execution.

Speaker:

Mark Kravatz, President, Alidade Consultants

A10. Why Monitoring Matters

For more than thirty-five years volunteers in the URI Watershed Watch (URIWW) program have been monitoring lakes and ponds (as well as rivers, streams, estuaries and salt ponds) throughout the state and adjacent areas. Scientist-led, state-certified and using established methods, the volunteer generated data have produced significant and robust long-term data sets that encourage local actions. This presentation will review the overall Watershed Watch program, highlight water quality trends, and emphasize how volunteers continue to be an integral component of management and restoration projects. How those data have fostered local actions will also be a central focus. A panel of site sponsors and local coordinators from throughout RI will discuss how they use the water quality data generated through their volunteers and URIWW to achieve their watershed restoration and protection goals.

Speakers:

Cindy Gianfrancesco, Chair, Scituate Conservation Commission

Elizabeth Herron, Program Director, URI Watershed Watch

George Davis, Director, The Committee for the Great Salt Pond

Alicia Schaffner, Executive Director, Salt Ponds Coalition

Session B (1:00 PM)

B1. A Culture of Philanthropy: What Does it Look Like (And how can you cultivate it?)

What is a “culture of philanthropy?” What does it look like? Why should you create it, anyways? This workshop will present the basics of what a culture of philanthropy looks like, and will provide you with some tools to begin this cultural evolution at your organization. Raising money is central to any nonprofit organization’s success, but the right culture can make it more efficient, effective, and even fun! Participants will learn the basics, participate in an exercise, and leave the workshop with clarity on what they should focus on in the next three to 24 months to measurably change their culture and achieve more impact.

Speaker:

Kevin Essington, CEO, City Greener Strategies

B2. Intersection at the Intersection: The Promenade/Kinsley Greenway

Join the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council for a presentation on the new Kinsley & Promenade Greenway. We will discuss the partnership needed to create this unique section of the Woonasquatucket River Greenway, its design elements, how we use it as a training ground, and how we will maintain its functions. We will also cover its long term vision as an integral part of the Valley neighborhood of Providence.

Speakers:

Jarrod Holgate, Stormwater Supervisor, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

Alicia Lehrer, Executive Director, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

Mark Pereira, Civil Engineer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

B3. Combating Litter and Marine Debris in our Rivers & Bay

Litter, marine debris and microplastics are growing pollution problems in the bay, our rivers and throughout the state. In this presentation, Save The Bay and the Blackstone River Watershed Council will discuss what we know about the problem and potential solutions, including the recent installation of a “water goat” on the Blackstone to capture debris and potential solutions

that can be pursued at the state or local levels. The presentation will also include an update on efforts to pass a ‘bottle bill’ in Rhode Island.

Speakers:

John Marsland, President, Blackstone River Watershed Council

Stephanie Santos, Chair, Lincoln Conservation Commission

Jed Thorp, Director of Advocacy, Save The Bay

B4. Deer Management for Conservation Landowners – Why & How

Whitetail deer are a common sight throughout Rhode Island, and their abundant population creates challenges for conservation landowners & land managers. Presenters will discuss some of these challenges, and the tools that are available in Rhode Island to manage whitetail deer abundance. Additionally, presenters will share real-world examples of organized hunting programs that landowners (primarily land trusts) have successfully implemented in Rhode Island.

Speakers:

Dylan Ferreira, Principal Wildlife Biologist, RI DEM Fish & Wildlife

Michael Woods, New England Chapter Chair, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

B5. Food Recovery for Rhode Island: Community Action for a Stronger Food System

Join us for a panel featuring graduates of the University of Rhode Island’s Food Recovery for RI program - a community initiative to minimize food waste and uplift community-led solutions. Panelists will share how they’ve made meaningful change after completing the course, from organizing zero-waste events to implementing sustainable practices at local food pantries. From classrooms to kitchens, see how every Rhode Islander can take simple steps that make a big difference for our environment.

Speakers:

Dara Benno, Volunteer, Food Recovery for RI

Karen Griffith, Volunteer, Food Recovery for RI

Bruce Thompson, Volunteer, Food Recovery for RI

Vanessa Venturini, State Program Leader, Food Recovery for RI, URI Cooperative Extension

B6. How Housing Works with Local Communities and the Environment

HousingWorks@ RWU is a research and policy organization that provides information and data about housing issues and challenges in RI. Through our research and reports, we show the important connections between housing, climate resiliency and protection of local environmental and historic resources. At this session, we would like to provide updates on our zoning atlas and new story-mapping features. We also will invite colleagues from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) program in MA to discuss how local housing, environmental and historic preservation activists can work together towards common goals.

Speakers:

Brenda Clement, Executive Director, HousingWorks RI @ RWU

Jenn Doherty, Preservation Planner, Barrett Planning Group

James Hardy, Research Analyst, HousingWorks RI @ RWU

Garth Hoxsie-Quinn, Supervising GIS Specialist, Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning

B7. Meet & Greet with Land Access Specialists

Join us for an introduction to farmland access and farm transition in Rhode Island. Meet lenders, service providers, and conservation organizations working in this space, and leave with a clearer sense of the resources available and the people that can help. This workshop is perfect for farmers, landowners, land trusts with farmland, and those who'd just like to learn more!

Speakers:

Molly Allard, District Manager, Northern RI Conservation District

Amanda Chang, Farm Loan Officer Trainee, Farm Service Agency

Stacy Entel, Program Manager, Agricultural Mediation, Center for Mediation and Collaboration RI

Bradley Fesmire, Community Engagement & Program Director, Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership

Ananda Fraser, Produce Safety Program Coordinator, RI Dept. of Environmental Management

Francesca Gallo, Program Coordinator, Legal Food Hub

Christopher Laughton, Director of Knowledge Exchange, Farm Credit East

Deanna Levanti, Southeastern New England Field Agent, Land for Good

Maggie Longo, Food Systems / Restaurant / Hospitality Business Consultant, RI Small Business Development Center

Diane Lynch, Board President, RI Food Policy Council and Commissioner, Agricultural Land Preservation Commission

Laurel Witri, Farm Transition Specialist, Land & Sea Together, Center for Mediation and Collaboration RI

B8. Salt Marsh Restoration: A Collaborative and Holistic Approach Utilizing Tidal Hydrology Restoration, Marsh Migration Facilitation, and Sediment Placement Techniques

Coastal salt marshes are high value habitats that provide many ecosystem services such as improved water quality, storm protection, and fish and wildlife habitat. Many of New England's salt marshes have been negatively impacted by accelerated sea level rise and past anthropogenic activities which caused degradation of these marshes including vegetation conversion from high marsh species to stunted, low marsh species, *Spartina alterniflora* (cordgrass); dieback of vegetation; expansion of impounded water on the marsh platform; subsidence of the peat and expansion of *Phragmites australis*.

As land managers we are tasked with stewarding these landscapes to work with what we have today as a starting point looking to the future holistically. Our goal in this session is to touch on three primary techniques of salt marsh restoration; tidal hydrology restoration, marsh migration facilitation and sediment placement, that have been utilized successfully in Rhode Island to restore these important habitats and the ecosystem services they provide. In coordination with land trusts, municipalities, and state and federal partners, we have designed, implemented, and monitored these salt marsh restoration techniques and will share the results of these projects and the importance of long-term adaptive management and stewardship to achieve the restoration goals.

Speakers:

Wenley Ferguson, Director of Habitat Restoration, Save The Bay

Ben Gaspar, Restoration Ecologist, Save The Bay

B9. WQdashboard: Making Water Quality Data Accessible to the Public

Analyzing and sharing water quality data is a challenging task for small watershed groups that lack staff or programming capacity. To assist with this problem, the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program has developed an open-source website template, WQdashboard, that allows nonprofits, government agencies, and other groups to present current and historic water quality data to the public. The website presents water quality data in three basic formats: an interactive map, an annual report card, and a series of graphs.

WQdashboard is designed with maximum flexibility and customization in mind. For example, it accepts multiple different input formats, including the format used by Watershed Watch. Furthermore, although the website can be set up or updated by users with limited to no coding experience, advanced users who are proficient in R Shiny can fully customize the website to suit their needs.

In this session we will present a brief overview of WQdashboard and share how the Salt Ponds Coalition and Blackstone River Collaborative are currently using the package to share data. The second portion of the session will involve a hands-on workshop to walk new users through the process of creating their own website with WQdashboard.

Speakers:

Heather Parry, Water Quality Program Coordinator, Blackstone River Coalition

Alicia Schaffner, Executive Director, Salt Ponds Coalition

Mariel Sorlien, Geospatial and Design Manager, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program

B10. Environmental Justice: Indigenous Rights

Lorén Spears, Narragansett, and Executive Director of Tomaquag Museum, will share the historical and contemporary impacts on the environment and how they affect Indigenous rights, including access, health disparities, housing inequities, reparative strategies, and food sovereignty initiatives. She will also express the agency and vibrant cultural continuation of the Native community.

Speaker:

Lorén Spears, Narragansett, Executive Director, Tomaquag Museum

Session C (2:20 PM)

C1. Caring for Fishers is Caring for Waters: Health, Equity, and Resilience in Rhode Island's Seas

Commercial fishers sit at the front lines of climate change, economic volatility, and regulatory shifts—yet they are rarely centered in land-and-water conservation planning. This panel brings together fishers, public-health practitioners, and conservation leaders to explore how human health, equity, and stewardship intersect in Rhode Island's working waters. Drawing from ongoing community-based research with RI fishers (sleep, stress, tobacco use, cardiometabolic risk, and work productivity), we ask: How does caring for people improve the care of places? Panelists will discuss climate-linked disruptions to fishing effort; barriers to preventive care and insurance; culturally responsive cessation and sleep-health supports; and ways conservation, watershed, and forestry partners can align with working-waterfront needs (including mobile services, port-based navigators, and co-designed interventions). We will highlight funding pathways (federal/state), coalition models with municipalities and NGOs, and pragmatic “no-regrets” steps that advance both ecosystem resilience and community well-being. Participants will leave with concrete strategies, model language for grants/policies, and contacts for collaboration—moving beyond siloed projects toward a just, durable stewardship agenda that treats fishers as essential partners in caring for our lands and waters.

Moderator:

Thaís Moreira, PhD, RN, Assistant Professor – URI College of Nursing

Speakers:

Fred Mattera, retired fisherman, President of The Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) and Executive Director of the Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island

Jody King, lifelong quahogger, the “King of the Bay”

C2. Develop a Strategy for a Community-Based Conservation Organization

Save the Lakes has developed a strategy for creating an organization of lake associations to collectively care for our lands and waters. The strategy creates outcomes in the themes of – Climate Change (stormwater, dam management, and resiliency to flooding), Inequality (water access, free information and support, State Legislature

and State Agencies integration) and Ecologic Loss (eutrophication due to Aquatic Invasive Species, boating regulations for recreation, saving native flora and fauna from invasive species). With lake management funding in RI as almost non-existent, Save the Lakes “bridges the gap” between a single lake association and the RI Agencies that are designed to protect State Land and Waters.

Save the Lakes has based the strategy on four pillars of stakeholders (Lake Associations, Fishing Groups, Conservation Groups and Cities/Towns) to implement outcomes vital to saving land and waters.

Save the Lakes seeks to support the health of our lakes both now and future generations. A central focus for the Lake Associations is expansion: increasing the number of lake associations to more positively impact action in support of lakes. The underlying premises are:

Lake Associations are the primary stewards of lakes, ponds and reservoirs.

Organized groups are essential to achieving informed action.

Working together = greater impact: for our lakes as a whole and for influencing the legislature to support lakes’ needs.

Partnerships are important.

Numbers matter: a stronger voice increases the potential for action.

Unified action strengthens lake stewardship.

Speakers:

Judy Colaluca, President, Save the Lakes

Tom Pendergast, Secretary, Save the Lakes

C3. Farm Succession and Agricultural Leasing for Land Trusts

This presentation will highlight how land trusts can examine their holdings to meet the needs of RI farmers seeking land, and how to support farmers who are already working land trust acreage to plan for their futures. We will cover how to assess land for farming, secure land tenure through strong lease agreements, the basics of transferring tenure, and long-term farm viability. Leasing and farm succession resources will be shared for land trusts as well as private landowners including a new guide for writing effective stewardship clauses.

Speaker:

Deanna Levanti, Southeast New England Field Agent, Land for Good

C4. Growing Climate Resilience with Miniforests: The Miyawaki Method of Afforestation

Across the Northeast, communities face growing ecological disruption: rising temperatures, shrinking habitats, degraded soils, and increasing stormwater runoff. Yet a vibrant movement is emerging—people are planting miniforests using the Miyawaki Method—or adaptations of it—to restore life to cities, schoolyards, parks, and vacant lots.

The Miyawaki Method, pioneered by Dr. Akira Miyawaki, creates dense, diverse, multilayered miniforests of native trees and shrubs in spaces as small as 1,000 square feet. Through careful soil preparation and expedited ecological succession, these miniforests establish quickly and begin functioning as self-sustaining ecosystems within a few years.

Miniforests provide a wide range of ecological benefits: they serve as nodes in networks of species movement, cultivate biodiversity, improve air quality, capture stormwater runoff, store carbon, and reduce urban heat island effects. Equally important, they empower communities to become stewards of living systems in their neighborhoods, cultivating a deeper connection to local ecology and supporting education around insect–host plant relationships, the water cycle, and other ecological processes.

This presentation will introduce the Miyawaki Method, share how Biodiversity for a Livable Climate is putting it into practice, and highlight emerging scientific insights from the miniforests we’ve planted.

Since 2021, we have brought this approach to the Northeast, planting the region’s first miniforest at Danehy Park in Cambridge, MA, and organizing the inaugural 2025 Northeast Miniforest Summit. To date, we have helped create eight miniforests across Massachusetts, demonstrating how community-driven restoration can transform urban spaces into resilient, thriving ecosystems.

Speaker:

Alexandra Ionescu, Associate Director of Regenerative Projects, Biodiversity For a Livable Climate

C5. Improving Coastal Resilience and Public Shoreline Access

We will present information on strategies and tools to improve coastal resilience through land conservation and habitat restoration, and highlight a case study project that was a partnership between the RI Department of Environmental Management / Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the RI Coastal Resources Management Council, and the Town of Westerly, RI.

Speaker:

Caitlin Chaffee, Chief, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RIDEM)

Rachel Holbert, Project Specialist, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RIDEM)

C6. Locally-Led Conservation: The Role of the Conservation Districts

In Rhode Island and across the country, conservation districts play a key role in the conservation and care of working lands by linking local concerns to national funding and policy. In this presentation you’ll learn about the origin of Rhode Island’s three conservation districts, the work they do across Rhode Island, and how you can become involved in your district as a board member, volunteer, Local Working Group participant, or organizational partner. The districts are unique in Rhode Island’s conservation landscape in that they were established by legislature, and yet have the power to independently respond to conservation needs at the local level. The presentation will highlight recent successful conservation district projects that illustrate the ability to the districts to respond to local needs and concerns. The districts have many tools available to assist land managers, including land trusts, by connecting them with resources, publicizing their great programming, and accessing state and federal resources. Furthermore, through the Local Working Group process, connecting with your Conservation District can provide local residents with an influence on how the federal government distributes conservation funding. You will leave this workshop with contact information for your local District, a more thorough understanding of its role, and knowledge about how it can help you to conserve the land that you love.

Speaker:

Molly Allard, District Manager, Northern Rhode Island Conservation District

C7. Natural Climate Strategies Across Rhode Island

Representatives from The Nature Conservancy will share how Rhode Island is planning for and adapting to a changing climate, including the role of conservation. We will discuss how we can use nature in coastal ecosystems to face rising sea levels and storms, the importance of protecting forests and farms in climate, as well as how RI cities and towns are planning for changing conditions. The event will start with an overview of natural climate solutions relevant to Rhode Island’s landscape, highlighting forests, urban trees and wetlands as important carbon sinks.

Panelists will then share short presentations of current initiatives, including:

Bringing nature back to the coast by supporting living shoreline projects and beneficial reuse of dredge material transforming hardened or degraded shorelines into living habitats that buffer storms, improve water quality, and connect people to the bay. Our team is also in the field monitoring fish and shellfish populations to help assess ecological changes and inform adaptive management.

The Municipal Resilience Program that brings together local leaders to assess strengths and vulnerabilities in the face of climate change – leading to community-centered projects that mitigate flooding, provide protection against heat, and protect people and natural resources.

A partnership with RIDEM to integrate natural and working lands into statewide climate policy, planning, and programming. This includes a current initiative to integrate climate and carbon considerations into forest management plans for DEM-owned and managed lands.

Speakers:

Tara Hoda, Natural and Working Lands Policy Fellow, RIDEM

Heather Kinney, Coastal Restoration Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy

Angela Tuoni, Director of Climate & Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy

C8. Seeing Inland Flooding More Clearly: New Modeling and Community Science Tools for Rhode Island

Rhode Island communities are facing increasing risks from inland and riverine flooding driven by changing precipitation patterns and climate change. Building on the state’s long-standing leadership in coastal resilience tools—including STORMTOOLS for coastal storms and sea level rise and the MyCoast platform for documenting coastal flooding—University of Rhode Island and RI Sea Grant are expanding these efforts inland. This session will explore two complementary initiatives to improve understanding, documentation, and planning for inland flooding across the state. First, we present a new inland STORMTOOLS modeling effort to generate climate-informed flood maps for key watersheds, including the Wood–Pawcatuck, Blackstone, Pawtuxet, and Moshasuck–Woonasquatucket River Basins. By downscaling climate model projections and incorporating expected changes in precipitation intensity, the project estimates how future conditions may alter FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps and increase flood elevations and extents. The resulting watershed models and online mapping tools will support regulatory agencies, municipalities, and watershed groups in risk assessment, planning, and management. Second, we highlight a statewide community science initiative to document stormwater, riverine, and inland flooding through MyCoast. Expanding MyCoast beyond its coastal origins will help fill critical data gaps and empower residents to contribute to a more complete picture of flooding impacts. The session will conclude with an interactive discussion, inviting participants to explore practical applications of these tools in local planning, communication, and resilience efforts.

Speakers:
Eliza Berry, Coastal Resilience Specialist, RI Sea Grant / URI
Dr. M. Reza Hashemi, Associate Professor, University of Rhode Island
Casey Tremper, Coastal Resilience Specialist, Rhode Island Sea Grant

C9. Trespass and Encroachment on Preserves and Conservation Easements

Trespass and encroachments on preserves and conservation easements can be complex and costly to navigate and resolve. Join us to discuss trends in trespass on conserved lands and risk mitigation strategies informed

by lived experience. Topics will include pre-acquisition due diligence, the unique challenges of third-party trespass on a conservation easement, Land Trust Standards and Practices, Terraforma and tips for monitoring, enforcement and dispute resolution.

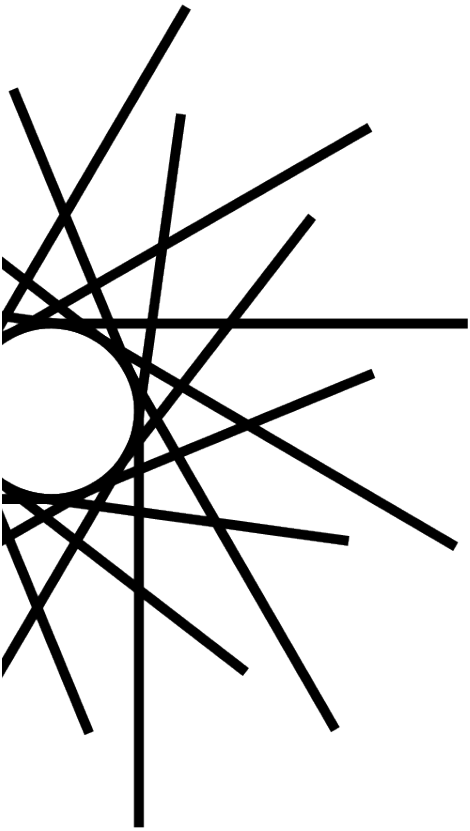
Speakers:
Martha Day, Stewardship Compliance Coordinator, South Kingstown Land Trust
Julia Landstreet, Executive Director, South Kingstown Land Trust
Ailla Wasstrom-Evans, Conservation Defense Fund and Education Manager, Land Trust Alliance

C10. Engaging in Conservation Topics on Social Media

How do we engage people in conservation topics on social media?
Since 2024, Ethan Tapper has built a following of more than 300,000 across Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram (all under the handle @HowToLoveAForest), with videos about trees, forest ecology, wildlife, and ecosystem stewardship. In this workshop, Ethan will discuss some of the nuances of creating engaging social media content, and building social media platforms. Feel free to bring some examples of social media content for Ethan’s feedback!

Speaker:
Ethan Tapper, author, *How to Love a Forest*





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Through tools such as the *2025 Housing Fact Book* and *Rhode Island Zoning Atlas*, HWRI aims to increase awareness around the importance of housing affordability in the Ocean State:



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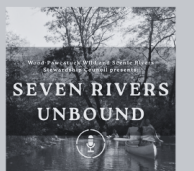
This is a super helpful resource for planning out your Wild and Scenic River paddles!



Explore the Wood-Pawcatuck's Wild and Scenic Rivers through Seven Rivers Unbound! Learn how people live, work and play in the Pawcatuck Watershed and its federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers.

This podcast is sponsored by the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council.

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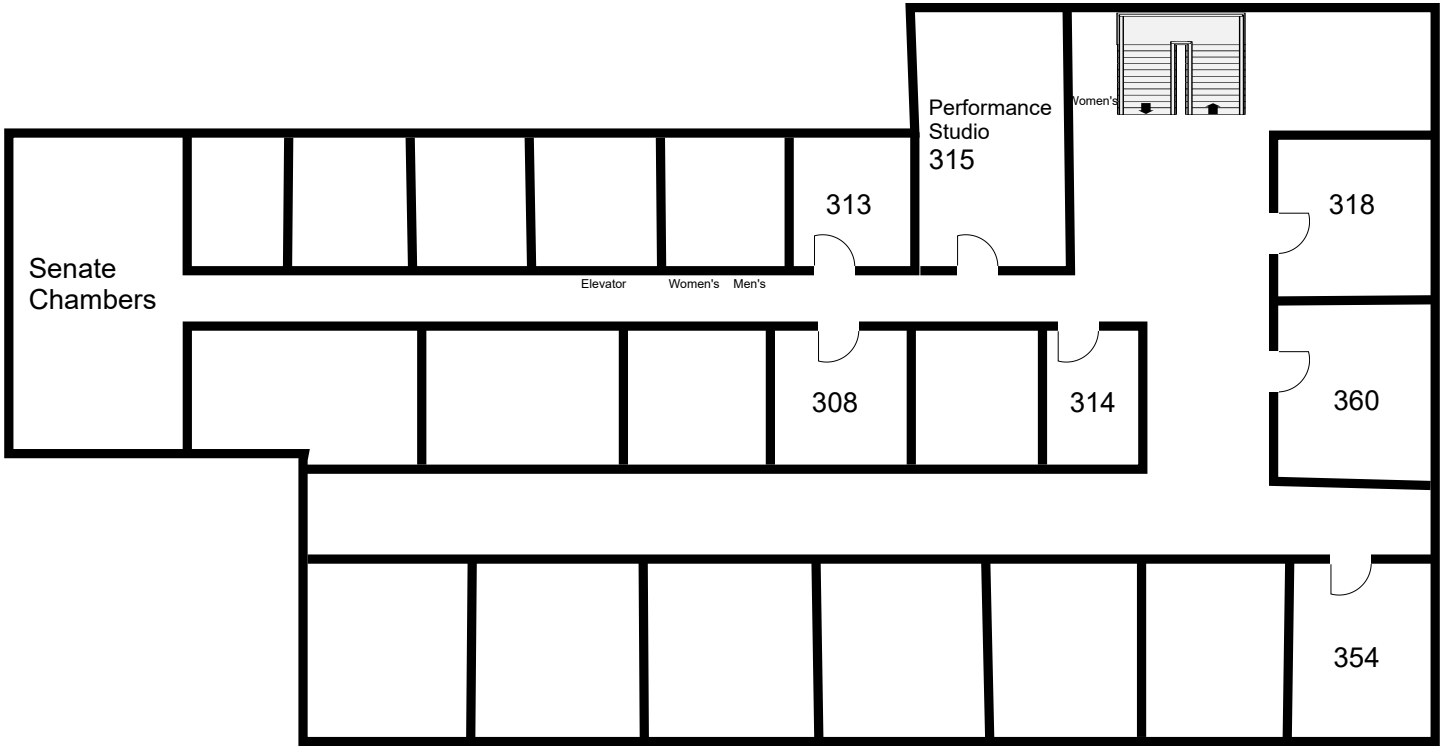
Pawcatuck Watershed Map

Wild and Scenic Rivers and Tributaries highlighted in blue

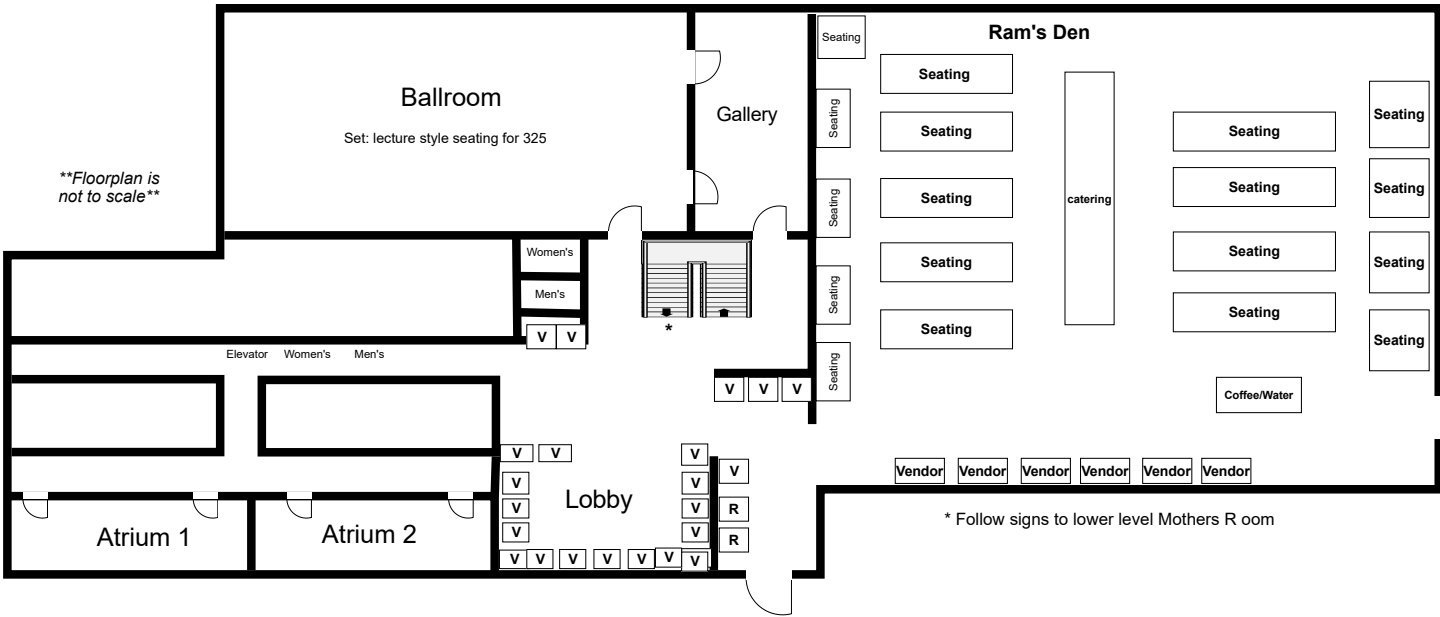


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R = registration table

V = vendor table in Conservation Commons

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