

Tailoring Resources to All-Volunteer Land Trusts

Did you know that 57% of land trusts are all-volunteer? Many of these groups are saving land, some are getting accredited or preparing to do so and most are making a big impact in their communities. In 2012, the Land Trust Alliance hired Conservation Impact to conduct a four-month research project to determine how to best serve this important part of the conservation community.

All-volunteer land trusts are the face and the voice for land conservation in their communities, sometimes protecting the only open space in their town where children can play. While the amount of acres that these groups conserve may not seem significant on a national scale, these lands are extremely important at the local level.

The Alliance has designed a program that will bring increasing levels of tailored training, tools and support to all-volunteer land trusts over the next several years. Listening and responding to their feedback, the Alliance is committed to providing improved services to these organizations, including:

- A dedicated page on the Alliance public website that provides information and describes services available and then drives

land trusts to a tailored page on The Learning Center for deeper learning and information;

- An online learning module that provides succinct approaches to the basics of running, growing, maturing and governing a land trust;
- A contracted expert to respond to online and phone inquiries and provide a limited amount of phone consultations and coaching;
- A dedicated expert who provides technical assistance, guidance and training directly to all-volunteer land trusts at their home offices; and
- A pool of small grants that will help all-volunteer land trusts pursue their organizational development goals.

These services represent only one part of a more comprehensive suite of activities and products the Alliance will pursue in the coming years to help all-volunteer land trusts get what they need to become more effective organizations.

You can read the full report with recommendations from Conservation Impact on the Alliance's website at www.lta.org/land-trusts/all-volunteer-land-trust-report.

Land Trusts Forge on after Fires

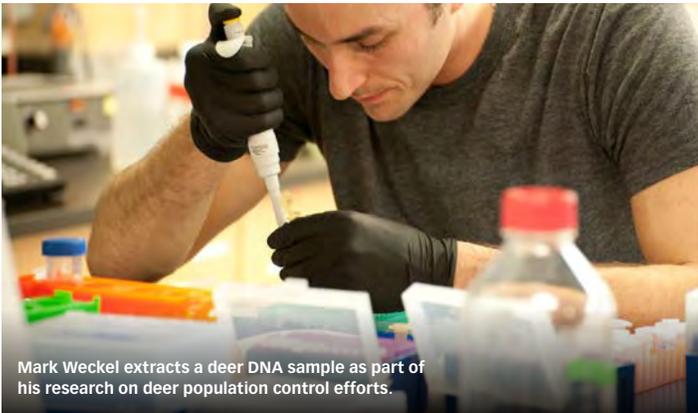
A fire on December 5 destroyed the house (*shown at left*) that was headquarters to the North Coast Land Conservancy in Seaside, Oregon, and a fire on December 18 severely damaged the offices of the Wolf River Conservancy in Memphis, Tennessee.

Luckily, no one was injured in either fire and both conservancies are slowly recovering. "A special thank you must go to our good partners at Ducks Unlimited, who offered us temporary quarters," writes Keith Cole, executive director of Wolf River Conservancy, who also credits the quick action of the conservancy's IT service provider, Breakthrough Technologies, with saving important data.

On their websites, both conservancies thank the many people who helped them make it through the disasters. Katie Voelke, North Coast Land Conservancy's executive director, wrote to supporters, "Never have we been so grateful for what we realize is the most important part of our land trust: YOU."



NORTH COAST LAND CONSERVANCY



Mark Weckel extracts a deer DNA sample as part of his research on deer population control efforts.

MIANUS RIVER GORGE PRESERVE

Managing Deer in Suburban New York

As in many Northeastern natural areas, the burgeoning white-tailed deer population is ravaging tree saplings and wildflowers at Mianus River Gorge Preserve in the suburban county of Westchester, New York.

The land trust compared 2004 conditions to 1966 vegetation surveys and found that seedling density had declined by 85% and saplings of 12 tree species could not be found.

In this populated area just north of New York City, rifle hunting was not possible. Instead, the land trust began partnering in 2004 with local bow hunters to harvest deer, hoping to decrease their population. Director of Research and Land Management Mark Weckel has monitored the effectiveness of bow hunting to restore baseline vegetation conditions, and sets control areas with deer exclusion fences.

His conclusion? Bow hunters are unlikely to reduce deer within a local area to historic levels, but they can make some improvements. Foresters identify historic deer populations at 15 per square mile. Bow hunters have reduced deer on the preserve from 60 per square mile to 40 over seven years but are unlikely to make any further reductions, he explains.

Weckel says even these modest decreases have made a difference on the preserve, particularly in undisturbed areas where native plant seeds are waiting to make a comeback. "Seedling diversity is up, and we're seeing higher flowering rates for wildflowers," he says. "However, advanced regeneration, including a dense, diverse understory, remains elusive."

For more information on Mianus River Gorge Preserve's deer program, see www.mianus.org/what-we-do/land-stewardship. •



River otters make their home on the newest addition to Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge.

STEVE GIFFORD

Partnership Adds Land to Indiana Refuge

For more than a decade, a property connecting two sections of the Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge was the refuge's top priority for acquisition. Once partially mined, the 1,043-acre tract in southwestern Indiana had been rehabilitated into prairie, ponds, wetlands and forest, and contains river otter, bobcat and rare and endangered species, such as the copperbelly water snake and the cerulean warbler.

Just when a government purchase seemed close, it ended in a stalemate over language in the proposed warranty deed. With "for sale" signs already on the property, Sycamore Land Trust stepped in to purchase the land with a loan. "We literally could not have done it without Sycamore Land Trust," says Refuge Manager Bill McCoy. "We were going to lose it."

The land trust's flexibility and a determined coalition of public and private partners and funders saved the land from development. Landowner Peabody Energy sold the property at a bargain price, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased a conservation easement from Sycamore Land Trust allowing the agency to manage it as part of the refuge. The purchase links 5,000 contiguous acres under refuge management.

"A lot of people worked for years to make this happen," says Sycamore Land Trust Executive Director Christian Freitag. "Conservation groups, private industry, government agencies—all working together. We all knew how important this parcel was." •

Public Lands Give the West an Economic Edge

National parks, national forests and other public lands have economic benefits, according to a study by Headwaters Economics, an independent nonpartisan research group. Its report, “West Is Best: Protected Lands Promote Jobs and Higher Incomes,” released in November 2012, links popular public lands to a faster pace of economic growth in 11 western states.

Among the study’s findings:

- Western non-metropolitan counties with more than 30% of the county’s land base in federal protected status such as national parks, monuments, wilderness and other similar designations increased jobs by 345% over the past 40 years. By comparison, similar counties with no protected federal public lands increased employment by 83%.
- Per capita income in western non-metropolitan counties with 100,000 acres of protected public lands was on average \$4,360 higher than per capita income in similar counties with no protected public lands.

The quality of life benefits of nearby public lands are an important component of attracting an educated and talented workforce, and the businesses that employ them, the report summarizes. For more about this study, go to <http://headwaterseconomics.org/land/west-is-best-value-of-public-lands>.



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Helping a Community Heal

Grieving with the rest of the country, the Newtown Forest Association (NFA) in Newtown, Connecticut, was honored to have hosted a temporary memorial located on its Glen property in Sandy Hook Center (shown at left).

Now turning to the idea of a more permanent tribute, the NFA has established the Sandy Hook School Memorial Tree Fund (the Fund) to support

the creation of a living memorial with plantings in memory of the Sandy Hook Elementary School victims. “Support for the initiative has been overwhelming,” says Guy Peterson, NFA treasurer and membership chair.



SARAH HEWINGWAY

To date, nearly \$300,000 has been pledged or received from across the nation. NFA extends special thanks to the Tree Lady for the Fund’s largest contribution via the Newtown Tree Project, which has supplied tree saplings to elementary school children for more than 25 years and endowed the NFA to continue this for decades to come.

“We can think of no greater living tribute to the victims and the people of Newtown than to help create a quiet, peaceful place in our wonderful town for meditation among native trees and flowering shrubs,” says Peterson.

The Newtown Forest Association, an old land trust that has been preserving Newtown’s resources since 1924, cooperates with but operates independently from the Town of Newtown and receives no funding from the town. For more information, go to www.newtownforestassociation.org.

Turning to Nature to Buffer Storms

When Hurricane Sandy passed over Long Island, the storm surge on the eastern end engulfed one of Peconic Land Trust's beach preserves, wiping out nearly all the dunes. Had there been beach homes on the preserve, they would not have fared well. "It's a wakeup call for us all with respect to the power of nature and the importance of considering where we live and where we place structures," says Executive Director John v.H. Halsey.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, land trusts are still cleaning up downed trees and regrouping from weeks of electrical outages and lost office time. Land trusts and other environmental groups in New York state called for restored funding to the state's Environmental Protection Fund, which helps conserve and restore beaches,

wetlands, forests and other green infrastructure, and supports other environmental programs.

After Hurricane Irene in 2011, New Jersey state, counties and towns have dedicated funds to buy homes and land within frequently flooded areas. The Land Conservancy of New Jersey has systematically purchased residential properties within the floodplains and headwaters of major state rivers to restore the watershed and prevent flooding disasters. The land trust received a \$1,500 Dodge Foundation emergency grant after Hurricane Sandy to restore a deer enclosure fence that prevents erosion and overgrazing on 100 acres at the headwaters of the South Branch of the Raritan River.

Read more about how protected lands act as storm buffers in "Unsung Heroes," *Saving Land*, Summer 2012, p. 12. •



A community garden on Triangle Land Conservancy's Irvin Farm and Nature Preserve offers growing space to 25 Burmese families.

A Family Garden Far from Home

Bitter melon, luffa and other traditional Southeast Asian produce grow side by side with strawberries and mustard greens on 2.5 acres of the Triangle Land Conservancy's Irvin Farm and Nature Preserve in Orange County, North Carolina. The garden is planted and tended by 25 families from Burma (also called Myanmar), many of whom are political refugees.

The preserve was bequeathed to the land trust in 2007, around the time when an estimated 400 Burmese refugee families began to resettle in the Chapel Hill area. Several grants enabled the land trust to create community gardens on the preserve and form a partnership with Orange County Partnership for Young Children, which operates the Transplanting Traditions Community Farm to help refugees grow their own food for better health and to sell through a small community supported agriculture program.

The community garden is one of a number of community engagement and education programs the conservancy has developed on the preserve through partnerships with other agencies and public and private funders. "The Transplanting Traditions Community Farm highlights the power and innovation of local conservation," says Triangle Land Conservancy Executive Director Chad Jemison. "Not only does conservation protect natural resources and treasures, it can become a catalyst in meeting a community's social needs as well." 🌱