

**NORTH COUNTY**  
**Land Trust**



*Annual Review*  
*Fiscal Year*  
*2017*



North County Land Trust volunteers, staff and board directors at the 2017 Day of Caring. Left to Right: Jenn Reilly, Terra Corps Service Member; Mary Crignan, Volunteer; Anna Wilkins, Executive Director; Brian Cormier, Director; Betty Reid, Director; Richelle Brown, Director; Jassy Bratko, Director of Land Protection; and Tom Bratko, Volunteer.

**Board of Directors**

- Alan Rousseau, Gardner, *President*
- Richelle Brown, Leominster, *Treasurer*
- Lucy Crocker Abisalih, Merrimac, *Clerk*
- Brian Cormier, Leominster
- Clayton Hobart, Devens
- Jackie Leger, Gardner
- Carrie Novak, Templeton
- Donald Ostrowski, Fitchburg
- Elizabeth Reid, Fitchburg

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- John C. Kemp
- Henri L. Sans, Jr., Esq.
- Marion Stoddart
- Karen A. Tucker
- Carolyn C. Winslow

**Staff:**

- Anna Heidorn Wilkins  
*Executive Director*
- Jassy Bratko  
*Director of Land Protection*

**TerraCorps Service Member:**

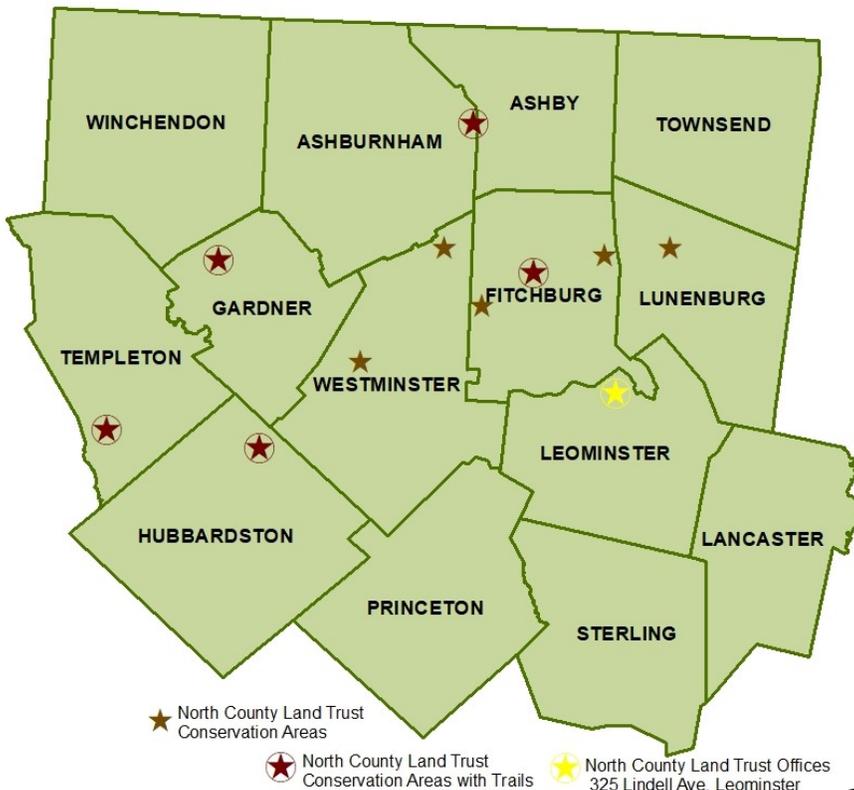
- Jennifer Reilly  
*Youth Education/Community Engagement Coordinator*



**North County Land Trust**

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NORTH COUNTY LAND TRUST, INC. (NCLT) is a nonprofit land conservation organization working with the communities of north central Massachusetts to conserve the farms, forests, and landscapes that define the character of our region.



## Dear Friends & Supporters,

These are exciting times at the North County Land Trust. This year marks our 25th Anniversary serving the communities of North Worcester County in Massachusetts. Since 1992, the NCLT has achieved tremendous success in conserving land for the current residents and visitors to our area, and for the future generations to come. We have done this through close working relationships with landowners, community organizations, municipal government, and state & federal agencies.

Our team (staff, Board of Directors, Board of Advisors, volunteers) has been our greatest asset. Our heart-felt thanks go out to Lucy Crocker Abisalih for going above and beyond, serving as our interim Executive Director. This year, the board and I were very pleased to welcome Anna Wilkins as our new Executive Director, and Jassy Bratko has moved from the NCLT Board to the staff as Director of Land Protection. Jennifer Reilly joined us in September for her year of service as our Youth Education and Community Engagement Coordinator. We also are delighted to welcome Brian Cormier and Elizabeth Reid to the Board of Directors. In addition, I'd also like to thank and acknowledge two folks that have moved on to opportunities outside of the NCLT: Vanessa Perini, Director of Development, for her service over the past 2 years, and Kristin Bullett, TerraCorps Community Engagement Coordinator, for her service over the past year. We were saddened to learn of the passing of John Todd Crocker, a member of our Board of Advisors and long-time contributor to the NCLT. We are very thankful for Todd's appreciation of the outdoors and for his commitment to the NCLT.

As you review this year's Annual Report, you will see many examples of the NCLT's work. This work has consisted of stewardship projects on our existing properties, outreach to community organizations, and new land conservation opportunities. In order to continue to get these great results, I ask for your help. As you can see from our FY2017 Financial Report, we have a relatively small operating budget and are very dependent on your contributions. Therefore, every donation to the NCLT has a big impact on our budget. Our goal for FY2018 is to raise \$32,000 in general contributions and an additional \$21,000 business donations. These goals are very achievable with your support. Help us to fulfill our mission!

In closing, I'd like to thank our entire NCLT Team and all of our supporters in the community for their generous donation of time, money, and expertise. Together, we can continue this legacy of the NCLT for the next 25 years.

Alan Rousseau, President

Oct, 2017



*Our sincere gratitude to Vanessa Perini who reshaped our office as Director of Development - giving so much of her time and wisdom. We wish her all the best as she pursues her passions!*



*Kristin Bullett, our 2016-2017 TerraCorps service member, here with some of the Wednesday Walks regulars. Thank you for all your time, energy and smiles!*



Photo by: Warren Tuiskula

# ON THE LAND

This past year, Jassy Bratko, our Director of Land Protection, has been working hard alongside dedicated volunteers to spruce up the trails. Here are some highlights.

## Crocker Conservation Area, Fitchburg, 127 Acres

Only half a mile from Fitchburg's Upper Common, Crocker Conservation Area received a lot of love from staff and volunteers this year. We have installed beautiful new trail name signs, blazed all the trails with different color and shape markings, and published a new map. This forested preserve has almost four miles of trails on varied terrain and beautiful views of Overlook Reservoir. Now it's easier than ever to venture off the beaten track and explore all the other trails.



Jassy Bratko shows off the newly installed trail signs at Crocker Conservation Area

## Dwelly Farm Conservation Area, Templeton, 68 Acres

Dwelly Farm Conservation Area, has a new management plan! The old hayfields of this former dairy farm will be managed as a wildflower meadow to encourage habitat for our native pollinators and a wide range of other wildlife. Infrastructure improvements are planned to increase access to the property including a bridge, a culvert, new trails through the woodlands, and a parking area with a trail head kiosk on Barre Road. Many thanks to Eagle Scout, Cole Carignan, for building the kiosk.



Baby Woodcock hides in the meadow at Dwelly Farm

## Zins Conservation Area, Princeton, 6 Acres

Our Zins Conservation Area, is a beautiful woodland donated by the Hudson family in 2014. A fabulous team of volunteers from Unitil cleared the existing trail in November 2016. Coordinating with an adjacent land owner, we returned this summer with more volunteers to create access to the stunning Bickford Pond Reservoir and the trails that loop around it. Thanks to these wonderful volunteers this property can now host our popular owl prowls, bird walks, and other events.

## Underwood Road Conservation Area, Hubbardston, 65 Acres

Underwood Road Conservation Area in Hubbardston is a lovely wooded property on a quiet residential street. Generously donated by a local Hubbardston family, it has an easy 1.5 mile loop trail that is a favorite location for one of our popular owl prowls! Plans are underway to expand the trail system and incorporate an all person accessible trail in 2018.

## Peabody Conservation Area, Lunenburg, 21 Acres

We're excited to be in the planning process for building a looped trail system at the Reg and Helen Peabody Conservation Area in Lunenburg. This property, recently donated by the Millington family, is a serene, well-maintained pine and hemlock forest containing a portion of the clear-running Mulpus Brook. We can't wait to introduce you next year.



Hudson Family with Bickford Pond as the backdrop

## TIMBER HARVEST SCHEDULED

### Rome Conservation Area, Gardner, 175 Acres

The forest at Rome is primarily comprised of hemlock and balsam fir trees. A timber harvest is planned for the winter of 2017/18 that will promote a diversity of trees and wildlife. Once the harvest is complete the recreational opportunities will be increased with the improvement of current trails, addition of new ones, installation of culverts and bridges, an improved trailhead area and connections to the 2,500 acres of land and trails owned by the City of Gardner.



## United Way DAY OF CARING 2017

Our **Kirby Conservation Area** in Ashburnham, donated by Helen Kirby, is our latest conservation area to be opened to the public. As a project for the United Way Day of Caring an amazing group of fifty volunteers, mostly from **Worker's Credit Union** and the **North Central Association of Realtors**, worked to help create or clear five trails. This marked and mapped trail system allows visitors to explore the beautiful and remote woodland. Trails meander through low bush blueberry, stands of mountain laurel, past a hidden pond and across small streams. You'll find a new trail map up on a kiosk built and installed by volunteer, George Styros. More trails are planned to be opened in the spring of 2018.

**THANK YOU TO THE UNITED WAY DAY OF CARING VOLUNTEERS!**





**G**rowing up in Gardner, one of my favorite pastimes was exploring the woods and trails in the City Forest. These experiences shaped who I am today, and now I'm absolutely thrilled to be working with the North County Land Trust (NCLT) to help protect, steward and promote such conservation lands in my home area of North Central Massachusetts.

Change comes slowly here, as it often does just outside major urban hubs. But it is inevitable, and while some changes can be uncomfortable—the demolition of a beloved historic building, the development of a woodland you roamed as a child—we strive for and applaud change and development that increase our quality of life. In this context, the question arises:



## WHY IS LAND CONSERVATION SO IMPORTANT?

**Loss of Connection:** It is well documented that within our society there is a loss of connection with nature. We are all so busy that, when we prioritize our days, the walk in the woods falls to the bottom of the list. But we are missing out on so many benefits. Studies have shown that, for children, unstructured playtime in nature is extremely important for fostering healthy cognitive and emotional development, and decreasing stress and anxiety.



*Terry S., Lori C and Aspire! at Devens Staff evaluate trails at Crocker for accessibility issues.*

Other studies have found that, for adults, exposure to nature can improve attention, memory and creative thinking, and that people who spend time in nature are more likely to heal faster from illness and have better overall fitness.

NCLT is committed to

breaking down barriers that prevent people from connecting with nature. We have already started the planning process to increase accessibility at all our conservation areas for persons with mobility issues or visual impairments. We are working with schools and our local Boys and Girls Clubs to supplement their programming with environmental and outdoor activities. And we are excited to expand our public program offerings, which we hope we can keep free of charge so all may have the opportunity to create or reclaim their own relationship with nature.

**Unplanned Development:**

A recent study from Harvard Forest estimates that Massachusetts is losing 65 acres a day to development, and that funding for land conservation has fallen 50 percent since 2008. How can we ensure that our communities can respond thoughtfully to mounting development pressures? While we will continue to provide support to local land trusts, city and town officials, and volunteers, it is my goal to have NCLT, with the participation and sup-



*Deciding what to do with family land can be a long but rewarding process*

port of all our community partners, develop a **Regional Strategic Conservation Plan** that looks at land conservation across political boundaries. This plan will help us identify and seize opportunities that might be beyond any one municipality's jurisdiction and capacity.

Another critical piece in the land conservation puzzle is the building of relationships with individual land owners. It is important that land owners know all their options and feel comfortable when making long-term decisions. *How do I want my land stewarded? What kind of legacy do I want to leave for my family and community?* It is especially rewarding when conservation is the best decision for a landowner and we can be a part of that solution. This is a process that can take years, so it's never too early to start the discussion.

**Climate Solutions:** Our climate is changing whether we agree about the reasons or not. What is fantastic about conservation is that it's all about solutions. Forests are significant carbon sinks, regulate micro-climates and help to conserve moisture. When a natural disaster or extreme weather hits, the less altered the landscape has been, the faster it will be able to recover to serve its function, be it water retention and filtration, soil stabilization, or providing critical breeding habitat for wildlife.

### Where Do We Go From Here?

We need support on all levels, because while there are many outstanding land conservation efforts already underway in our region, there is so much more to do. As a Regional Land Trust, NCLT is here to assist with land conservation efforts within and between our area towns, cities, and organizations, connect people with nature, and provide local solutions for global environmental issues, all of which maintains or even improves quality of life. Join us as we work to preserve open space, and to ensure that we have a resilient landscape capable of supporting our farms, wildlife, and the needs of all our community members. I'm looking forward to meeting you and hearing about your ideas, concerns, and strategies as we strive to develop our dynamic communities sustainably.

Happy Trails!

Anna H. Wilkins, *Executive Director*

# A WORLD OF THANKS



*Eagle Scout Kameron Kamel and Gardner Troop 9, completed a trail building project at Dwelly Farm Conservation Area in Templeton*

## **We couldn't do it without our volunteers!**

NCLT is privileged to have dedicated volunteers who have done so much for us this year.

**Trail Work:** Tom Flanagan, Mike Perry, Mary Crignan, John Savone, Annie Saball, Karen Koutrakos, Edmund Taylor, Ron Deschamps, Tom Bratko, Michelle M Hansen, United Way Day of Caring volunteers, Unitil, Rick Gardner, Princeton Open Space Committee members, Gardner Boy Scouts Troop 9, and Leigh Hudson

**Walk Leaders:** Al Gadway, Clay Hobart, and Ralph Baker

**Trail Kiosks:** Cole Carignan, George Tyros

**Photography:** Warren Tuiskula, Kyle Marshall, and Julie Roch

**Signs:** Thanks to Angelo Bisol of *Crafts by Bisol* custom cedar signs at deeply discounted prices.

**Office/technical Assistance:** Henri Sans Jr. Esq., Rose Denis, Nancy Seguin, and Victoria LeBlanc.

Many thanks to every member of the NCLT Board of Directors who has shared their time, local knowledge, and special expertise to help manage the conservation areas.

# LOCALLY FOCUSED FROM THE BEGINNING, 25 YEARS LATER, THE CROCKER LEGACY CONTINUES

**H**anging on a door at the bottom of the stairs in my childhood home in Lunenburg was a poster. On it was a photograph by Eliot Porter. It wasn't a dramatic, full color landscape that took my breath away. It depicted a serene grove of birch trees with slight fall coloring – pure and simple. Across the bottom it read: "In wildness is the preservation of the world"\*. The poster is memorable because of its understatement. It depicted a scene that could be found outdoors only a few hundred feet from those stairs – a reminder of the sublime beauty of even the most humble natural spaces.

That image and message represent well what NCLT's founders cherished - the wonder of nature's seemingly simple gifts and the joy and privilege of witnessing them.

The Crockers, who were papermakers in Fitchburg, at one time owned hundreds of acres on Prospect Hill. They explored that land with their horses and dogs, picnicking and often quietly retreating to read or write. Almost all of that original family land has been conserved; some was parceled in the 1970s to provide land for the Crocker Elementary School. In 1992. The final piece, 150 acres surrounding the Overlook Reservoir in Fitchburg brought the North County Land Trust to life. Big Crocker and his sisters had a vision - a nonprofit land trust led by and for the immediate community.



*New trail names at Crocker honor our founders*

Once the North County Land Trust was incorporated, the Crockers gave a portion of the 150 acres to Fitchburg to protect Overlook Reservoir and donated the remaining property to the North County Land Trust to establish the Crocker Conservation Area, so that it would be conserved for all to enjoy.

Since that time, with many years of determined leadership by Janet Morrision, the North County Land Trust has worked tirelessly on conservation efforts in our region, including the preservation of hundreds of acres of watershed land for the City of Fitchburg and the coordination of regional landscape scale acquisitions in partnership with state, federal and peer organizations. Our AmeriCorps service members have helped start initiatives like Central Mass Grown, and organized programming which has reached countless youth, families, and individuals.

NCLT now owns or stewards over 600 acres in 8 of our 14 focus communities.

In 2017, the North County Land Trust continues to be true to its purpose. Anna Wilkins and her team are adeptly tuning in to the conservation needs of our local communities.

Thoreau's compelling words and Porter's humble photograph perfectly represent the vision, dedication, and focus of the industrious staff and generous supporters of NCLT. Our ambition to be a resource for the community, and a leader and partner in thoughtful conservation has never been stronger. -Lucy Crocker Abisalih



*Big Crocker and his family picnicking in the Fitchburg woods, 1977*

\* Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*

# BUILDING CONNECTIONS: A YEAR OF SERVICE

For the last year, I have served at NCLT'S MassLIFT AmeriCorps Community Engagement Coordinator, and have thoroughly enjoyed my role. Overall, the focus of my service year was on sharing the joy of nature and environmentalism with folks in our communities in north central Massachusetts.

I spent many days on our beautiful trails sharing my love for nature with others. I visited local schools and after school programs with nature lessons and activities, supplementing their programs with environmental science. Over 100 middle school students from Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner and Lunenburg were served by these programs and had an opportunity to engage with nature in their backyards. We explored ponds, brooks, gardens, owl pellets and more! These students were so excited to get outside and experience the sights, sounds and smells of nature.

Local adults also experienced our trails this year, in weekly walks at Crocker Conservation Area in Fitchburg and at special events like Earth Day and National Trails Day. Over the year, we built a strong base of about 15 locals who frequently came to walks and volunteer days, and saw a lot of new faces on our trails!

This year, NCLT made a lot of headway in spreading our mission, but there is still much to be done! Many of these projects will be continued by our next AmeriCorps member, who will also focus on engaging our community and students. It is challenging and rewarding work, and I am very grateful for all I have learned and experienced.

*-Kristin Bullett, MassLift Service Member, 2016-2017*



*Kristin leads a National Trails Day hike, Rome Conservation Area, Gardner*



*Students at the Lunenburg Boys and Girls Club study pond critters*



*Kristin Bullett facilitates an environmental science lesson at Longsjo Middle School, Fitchburg*

# FISCAL YEAR 2017 FINANCIALS

Revenue		Totals
Individual Support		\$41,795.00
Non-cash Individual Support		\$902.00
Grants		
Farmland Inventory	\$9,580.00	
Quabbin to Cardigan	\$19,500	
Mass Woodlands	\$1,990.00	
		\$31,070.00
Endowment		\$22,000.00
Timber Harvest– Rome		\$14,676.00
Environmental Programs		\$600.00
Misc		\$95.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>		<b>\$111,138.00</b>

Expenses		
Staff Payroll & Payroll taxes		\$42,906
AmeriCorps		\$7,763.00
Environmental Programs		\$2,608.00
Property Stewardship		\$10,566.00
Communication		\$4,001.00
Travel		\$837.00
Overhead		\$12,265.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$80,946.00</b>

Income		
Gross Income		\$30,192.00
Transfer to Temporarily Restricted		\$ (19,500.00)
<b>Net Income</b>		<b>\$10,692.00</b>



Our goal for FY2018 is to raise \$32,000 in general contributions and an additional \$21,000 business donations. These goals are very achievable with your support. Help us to fulfill our mission!



# THANK YOU TO OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

Tom and Lucy Abisalih

Alpha Rho

Applewild School

Dr. Robert and Christina Babineau

Ralph and Judy Baker

Roni Beal

Keith Bockus

John R. Bogdasarian, M.D.

Charlotte Bramley

Tom and Jassy Bratko

Richard & Helen Brockelman

Richelle Brown

Kristin Bullett

Mary Jo Bullett.

Larry Casassa

Chairtown Lumber

Community Foundation of

North Central Massachusetts

Ed Cook and Stacey Boisvert

Brian Cormier

Brian and Lisa Cote

Alfred Crocker and

Stephanie Cassano

The Douglas and Isabelle

Crocker Foundation

Martha Crocker and Tom Leonard

Bruce and Patty Durkee

Jack Dwelly

Don Erb

Allan Foster

Tom and Sarah Fullen – Printworks

Carrie Harris

The Henshaw Family

Clayton Hobart and

Amanda Graham

Matthew Hogan -

Industrial Packaging Supply

Leigh Catherine Hudson

Dorcas H. Hurd

Alec Jones

Kameron Kamel

Helen P. Kirby

John Kemp

Ned LaFortune -

Wachusett Brewing Company

John Lastella

Jesse and Nicole LeBlanc

Jackie Leger

Jackie Leger Real Estate

Michael C. Leonard -

North Quabbin Forestry

Deborah MacDonald

Donata Martin

Elaine Mroz

Maureen Nguyen

North Medford Running Club

Dan and Carrie Novak

Donald Ostrowski and Wren Colle

The Perini Family

Chris Picone

Pillar Profit Solutions

Art and Lynne Pinsoneault

Elizabeth Reid

Thomas and Mary Robinson

Rollstone Bank & Trust Foundation

Allen and Barbara Rome

Arlene Rome

Alan Rousseau

John and Caren Savone

Meriwether Schmid

Samantha Squailia - Rustic Craft

Marion Stoddart

Geoffrey and Bonnie Tillotson

The Trustees

The United Way of

North Central Massachusetts

Dick and Sheryl Vaillette

Mark and Patti Washburn

Chris and Peggy Williamson

Carolyn Winslow

Norman & Christine Wironen

## Wish list for 2018:

### Volunteer Positions:

- ◆ Photographer/photo file manager
- ◆ Web designer
- ◆ Database Guru assistance
- ◆ Spanish speaking naturalist to lead bi-lingual hikes
- ◆ Walk leader– share your nature-based hobby or interest
- ◆ Deed researcher/History buff

### Land and Trail equipment:

- ◆ Chain saw backpack, all terrain wagon, mattocks, shovels, loppers, folding saws, metal rakes, power drill, chain saw protective equip.

- ◆ Donation or discount on surveying services
- ◆ Skilled Carpenters (to build kiosks or bridges)

### Other equipment:

- ◆ Office Supplies
- ◆ Small cabinet with a drawer
- ◆ New printer
- ◆ New Laptop

Our wish list is not limited to only items on this list! If you'd like to find out more about ways to get involved, we want to hear from you. If you or someone you know is willing to donate their time, talent, goods, services or sponsor a purchase, please contact Jassy Bratko or Anna Wilkins.

[jbratko@northcountylandtrust.org](mailto:jbratko@northcountylandtrust.org)  
[awilkins@northcountylandtrust.org](mailto:awilkins@northcountylandtrust.org)



Laurie Nehring teaches about owls at an NCLT Owl Prowl, Underwood Road Conservation Area, Hubbardston.

JOIN US FOR FREE  
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PROWLS WITH  
LAURIE NEHRING,  
BIRDING EVENTS  
WITH CLAY HOBART,  
NIGHT HIKES, AND  
MORE!



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