

NORTH COUNTY LAND TRUST



Annual
Review
2019 – 2020

Resilient Together

RESILIENCY

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear supporters, friends and colleagues,

Our focus is laser sharp on our vision. As we prepare for a climate filled with uncertainty, we stand fast in our mission to protect forests, working farmland, drinking water quality and healthy landscapes. These highlands between the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers hold the vibrant landscapes and waterways we strive to protect and connect in the face of a changing climate. The highlights in this review are milestones we are building upon toward our vision.

This year presented opportunities and challenges to all of us as we experienced health, economic and societal changes brought to the forefront by the COVID-19 pandemic. Change is constant. Adaptability and resilience are the skills needed to manage the planned and unplanned changes. Our team pivoted through these changes, displaying their personal and professional resiliency, and delivering on the commitment to our mission in the face of uncertainty. Well done, Team NCLT!

Our purpose matters. Your continued engagement and support of our collective work is valued. Together we are sustaining the landscape that provides fresh air and water, local farm products, climate resiliency and an active, healthy, and economically viable region.

With much appreciation,
Richelle M. Brown
President and Board Chair

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings! We, as humans, global citizens, community members, business owners and outdoor enthusiasts--all of us-- are facing challenges from multiple directions. Through all of that, the one thing that we all have in common is how inextricably linked we are to the earth and her health. Everything we base our society on exists anchored to a place on the planet. North Central Mass is our place.

I see opportunity to rally around this focal point. So many of us are doing great things to address the challenges that may seem distant from land protection-- but if we regard the stewardship of the land that is in our care as a lesser priority, our ability to be resilient in the face of current and future challenges will be greatly diminished. Conserved land provides affordable space for local food production; it maintains and improves our water quality; our forests provide renewable resources and carbon sequestration; outdoor recreation tourism is a pillar of our local economy. I could go on...

North County Land Trust, in concert with our many community partners, is eager to protect the land that is required for our region's resilience on all levels. In this report you'll see examples of this. And with your help, we can continue this important work.

Sincerely,
Anna Wilkins
Executive Director

NORTH COUNTY LAND TRUST IS RESILIENT.

MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

North County Land Trust, Inc. (NCLT) is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 regional land conservation organization founded in 1992. Our Mission is to conserve the farms, forests and landscapes that define the character of our region.

PROTECT: Identify natural resources, working lands and landscapes whose conservation is of the highest priority.

PRESERVE: Conserve land in perpetuity for future generations.

PROMOTE: Engage communities to understand and appreciate their natural environment and the importance of conservation.

Our Focus Area is Diverse

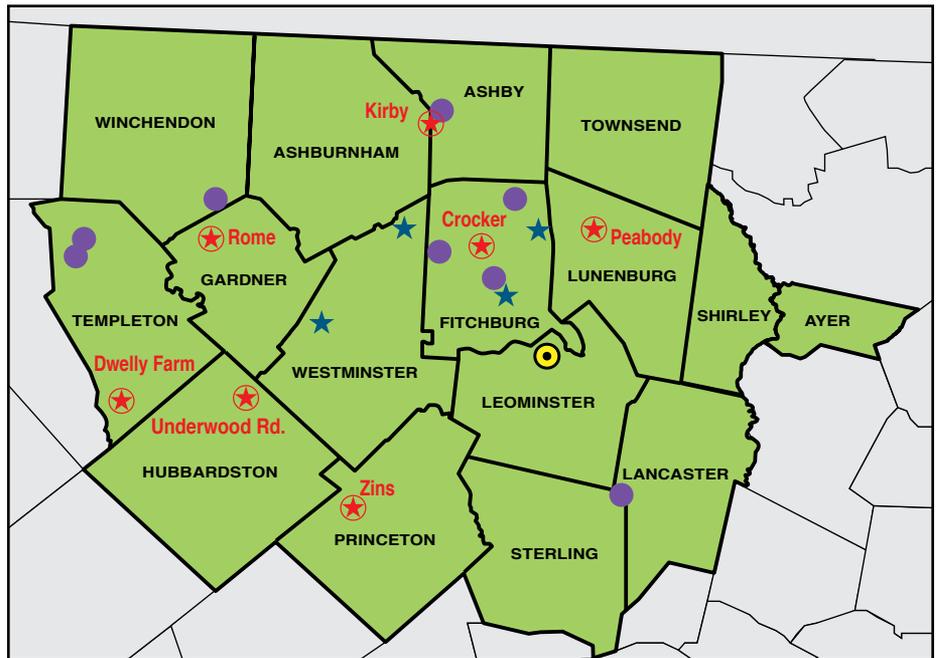
North County Land Trust works in the diverse communities of north central Massachusetts, to conserve land and water resources, farms, urban parks, working forests and scenic landscapes for the benefit of all. We tailor our conservation services to the needs of each community, from small urban centers to rural towns and bedroom communities.

Outreach is a Priority

NCLT works closely with stakeholders in the communities we serve, including landowners, municipal officials and community groups, to identify mutually beneficial land conservation goals. We connect ordinary citizens to the natural environment in their communities, through educational programs, nature hikes and other activities on our public access conservation areas.

Partnerships Leverage Resources for Conservation

NCLT collaborates with government agencies and other conservation organizations to leverage funding and other resources, resulting in the successful completion of projects as diverse as Gateway Park in Fitchburg and the protection of thousands of acres of public water supply land.



- Office
325 Lindell Ave.
- ★ Conservation Area
- ★ Conservation Area w/Trails
- Conservation Restriction

STAFF



Anna Heidorn Wilkins,
Executive Director



Jassy Bratko, Director of
Land Protection



Lisa Adams, Outreach and
Engagement Coordinator



Emily Merlino,
Stewardship Coordinator

LAND CONSERVATION

QUARRY LANE

At its core, this project is about seizing an opportunity to:

- protect environmental justice neighborhoods from further disturbance,
- provide community building and outdoor learning opportunities, and
- promote a return to nature-based play as a critical component to early childhood development and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Acquisition of this parcel, with the support of the community and private fundraising initiatives, will achieve all these goals. We are so pleased to have succeeded in negotiating with the developer/landowner to prevent the intrusive development of this parcel.

The land that became Quarry Lane was subdivided in the 1980's but the houses weren't built until the early 2000's. During that time, the Harugari and Pratt St. neighborhoods were heavily impacted. Neighbors complain about cracked foundations from the blasting of rock for the new house foundations, and their formerly dry basements now flood as water that used to be absorbed by the adjacent woodlands finds new routes down the side of Rollstone Hill. Some neighbors unsuccessfully fought to try to prevent the loss of their "neighborhood woods" and minimize the impact of the development.

The last remaining undeveloped parcel (5 Quarry Lane) was put on the market in 2018 which caught the attention of a neighbor who reached out to NCLT.

NCLT took a closer look and discovered there was a surprising amount of value contained within the lot as undeveloped land. It abuts approximately 100 acres of City conservation and municipal land including the summit of the famous Rollstone Hill and Quarry. The city is currently improving the trails on Rollstone Hill and this parcel could provide neighborhood trail access to that trail network. But most importantly, the impact of the development of this particular parcel promised a significant negative impact for the neighborhood and for one abutter in particular, Busy Bees Preschool.

This remaining long, narrow lot wraps around the playground at Busy Bees preschool and along 4 private lots who already experience seasonal flooding to their properties. The land is currently wooded with mature hardwood trees, mountain laurel, and other native plants, large boulders (that would need to be removed) and the granite ledge, for which Rollstone Quarry was famous for, not far below. Tree

"I love the idea of growing both flowering and food plants in a shared community garden! The preschool children plant their seedlings each spring and enjoy fresh produce as part of their lunches all summer long. Think about how positive it can be for a community to have a common goal and how empowering it can be to learn about and grow your own food. Think how important connections can be among neighbors and the Busy Bees preschool children. There may be seniors who do not have, or live far from, extended family or may be isolated. There may be families with young children who lack the influence and experience of grandparents in their lives."

- Maria Paulino, Busy Bees Preschool Director



clearing, heavy machinery, and significant drainage infrastructure would all be a part of the construction for that one, single-family house.

Busy Bees preschool itself is a microcosm of the Fitchburg community. Their student population is a rainbow of diversity in every way. The school offers dual-language English/Spanish instruction and free meals for all students. Busy Bees also prides itself on its award-winning natural playground recognizing the critical role Nature plays in brain development. The trees and natural surroundings of the adjacent lot could provide the perfect opportunity for enriching the education of the Busy Bees students—a population targeted for early childhood educational support.

If this lot were to be developed, all of the trees surrounding the preschool would be removed and the opportunity for access to the abutting City land would be lost, not only to the students but to the rest of the area neighborhoods as well. The elderly, low-income and long-time residents would yet again, be faced with the consequences of the construction of an ill-sighted house lot.

This is why North County Land Trust is energized to help.

Land Conserved: 18.5 acres (22 additional acres facilitated)
Quarry Lane Conservation Area Added | Burdin Conservation Restriction Added



▲ Our friends at Busy Bees Preschool in Fitchburg helped us to rally support for the new Quarry Lane Conservation Area next door.

Maria Paulino helps her Busy Bees Preschool students plant fruits and vegetables which is an experience she recognizes not all young children have. ▼



ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN:

Starting in early 2019, after recognizing the great strides the organization was making, the NCLT board embarked on creating a plan that would provide the strategic scaffolding to ensure that its work is relevant and impact effective and understood. Over the next half year, they met regularly to draft a strategic plan. The process unified and defined our identity, work and focus for the next 3 years.

We envision a future that connects our communities through conservation – where physical, ecological, recreational and economic interconnections are embraced – enriching the unique character of each community.

NCLT wants to continue to serve as a leader and a catalyst for conservation, by acting directly to protect the nature of north central Massachusetts and by stimulating individual and institutional action through conservation, collaboration and education.

NCLT Strategic Plan Summary

In this dynamic political and economic environment, we must parse through the noise and stay focused on the goal of conserving land critical to supporting a resilient environment to combat climate change and support species survival.

A brief summary of our strategic framework can be found on our website. We welcome all input that prompts creative thinking and soundly advances the pace of conservation in our region and throughout New England. Join our effort!

LAND CONSERVATION

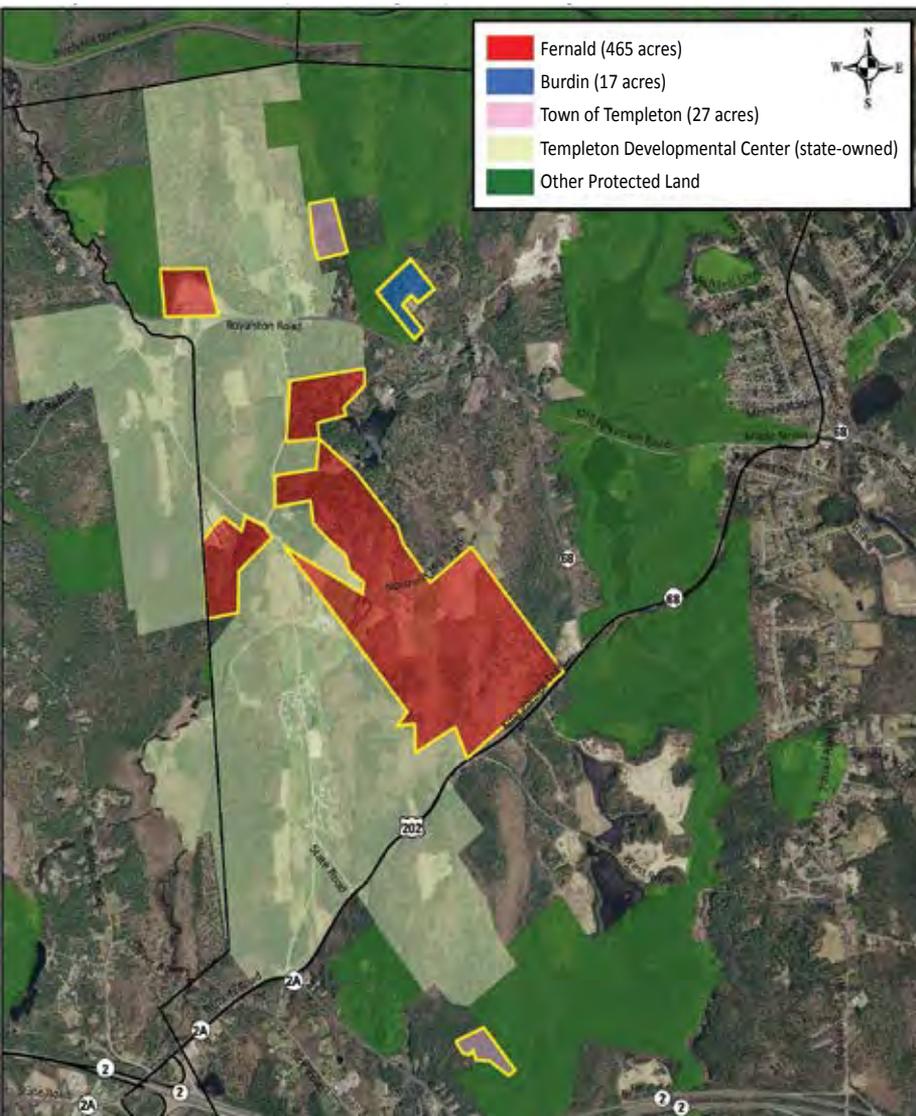
BURDIN CONSERVATION RESTRICTION (part of the Norcross Hill Conservation Project) SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED!

We are excited to announce that the Burdin Conservation Restriction (CR) was successfully completed June 12, 2020! The property is owned by Jo-Anne and Danny Burdin and will permanently protect 17 acres of forested land that includes important wildlife habitat. North County Land Trust (NCLT) was proud to partner with Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust to acquire the CR in which North County is the Primary Grantee and Mount Grace is the Secondary Grantee.

Danny has lived on the property, which abuts the Otter River State Forest, for his entire life. Jo-Anne is a life-long conservationist, serving for many years on the Templeton Conservation Commission and the Millers River Watershed Council. Their



▲ Jo-Anne and Danny Burdin



CR was an essential component of the Norcross Hill Conservation Project (NHCP) and their willingness to conserve their land was vital to its success.

The 1.5-million-dollar NHCP project has now protected 509 acres of land in the northern reaches of the Town of Templeton, a region that is a gateway from the densely populated metro Boston area to the expansive, unfragmented forests of northern New England and Canada. This enabled the creation of the new Norcross Hill Wildlife Management Area which is a stunningly beautiful mix of agricultural fields and meadows, forests, streams, wetlands, cart roads and trails.

Jo-Anne and Danny have heard Whip-poor-wills around their land and, on at least one occasion, a bear has been seen strolling around! They both enjoy watching the spring-time activity on the vernal pool which is located on their property. The NHCP acreage, which was previously mostly privately owned, will now be open to the public for hunting and passive recreation and Jo-Anne and Danny have given permission for public access on their CR.



SUNSET VIEW FARM

Congratulations to Mount Grace Conservation Land Trust and Chuck and Livvy Tarlton for conserving their farm, Sunset View Farm, in Winchendon. The 70-acre parcel is bordered by Route 140 on one side and by the North Central rail trail on the other. Mt. Grace reached out to North County Land Trust to co-hold a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the farm. You can visit Sunset View Farm from the bike path using a new ½ mile trail. We're proud to be a part of the group that worked to permanently conserve this 70-acre property as a whole farm forever.



COMMUNITY

CONSERVATION IS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

This past year, NCLT began holding a series of events to bring the conservation community together. We aimed to create opportunities for each of our partners to get to know each other better, build new relationships, strengthen existing ones, and provide networks to share valuable experiential knowledge with one another. Our goal is increasing the pace of conservation in our region as well as strengthen the stewardship network that cares for our lands and trails.



The first “Conservation Conversation” gathering brought together Open Space Committee members, land conservation professionals and supporters to learn valuable information and network with fellow conservation partners. ▼

CREATING CONNECTIONS FOR LAND CONSERVATION

Thanks to grants received, we were able to: bring valuable information to landowners in the region as they consider key decisions about the future of their land in multiple landowner workshops, participate in the planning and execution of a regional open space conference, and facilitate a mapping workshop with our conservation partners in each of the towns in our region. We are grateful for the many opportunities given to NCLT. Overall engagement of individuals exceeded expectations within and beyond our territory. Continued engagement over the series of events proved the value in the programs that were offered.





▲ For the younger generation of hikers, Little Land Explorers was created to engage kids in nature with various activities like scavenger hunts.

CONNECTING NATURALLY

Another very important relationship we have is with our neighbors. We bring people together through guided walks and programs to show people the value of our conservation so they will in turn cherish the land. We love gathering with friends old and new so we may all rally behind a common thread: the importance of conservation.

Thanks to partnering with the Millers River Watershed Council and the City of Gardner Conservation Commission, NCLT helped lead a series of hikes at the Cummings Conservation Area in Gardner. ▼



▲ Weekly Wednesday Walks at Crocker Conservation Area in Fitchburg are a local favorite for many hikers no matter the season!



STEWARDSHIP

TERRACORPS YEAR RECAP



Oh what a year it has been! From day one of my TerraCorps AmeriCorps mission at NCLT I have been welcomed into a wonderful, growing community of dedicated people. Over the course of the year I worked with our team to put together community building events like our Conservation Conversations that brought valuable land conservation and open space planning speakers to our communities. Bringing together folks in our region to learn together and to network across town borders has been a valuable and successful program that has given me perspective about land conservation and conservation priorities in our area. Our trail volunteer community has grown just as much over the year and we were able to accomplish some great projects to improve our conservation areas. Day of Caring was my first experience leading a crew to cut a new trail and it was incredibly rewarding to see a new trail emerge for everyone to enjoy, it couldn't have been done without a great group of energized volunteers. I've built relationships with some of our wonderful volunteer Conservation Area Monitors and been out on the trail with them to keep our properties safe and enjoyable. It is inspiring to get to know these community members who are so generous with their time and energy. I cannot conclude without saying that the year was life-changing for me in many ways. I've changed careers, become part of a group of land conservation volunteers and professionals, learned so many things, and made memories I will never forget. - **Emily Merlino**



▲ A newly cut trail, Big's Switchback, provides a less steep option to popular Big's Bushwhack Trail at Crocker Conservation Area in Fitchburg.

United Way's Day of Caring 2019 provided the opportunity to have many volunteers from the community to work on the trails at Underwood Conservation Area in Hubbardston. ▼



VOLUNTEER HOURS: 386 | 3 NEW TRAILS: Big's Switchback at Crocker CA, High Ridge Trail and JC Trail at Underwood CA | 1 NEW BRIDGE: Hillside Trail at Rome CA



▲ New this year is the Trail Monitor volunteer position. They are responsible for walking each of the trails at a conservation area at least once a month.



▲ Jassy Bratko, Director of Land Protection, discusses management with volunteers at Dwelly Farm Conservation Area.

Building bridges takes a lot of work and couldn't be done without the dedication of volunteers. ▼

Trail work days, such as this one at Kirby Conservation Area, provide a great opportunity to connect with the land and with one another. ▼



SUPPORT



▲ Thanks to cultural council grants from several of our towns and cities, people can learn new, interesting facts about our natural world like here on a fungus walk.

Learning about the natural world during events like this winter tracking walk brings a greater appreciation of the importance of conserving our natural landscape. ▼



▲ Visitors on the Garden Tour were greeted by six completely different and magical gardens in Fitchburg and Lunenburg.



NCLT depends on a reliable stream of ongoing support from members, cultural council grants, business sponsors, and more to help us stay focused on our mission to protect our natural resources.

ROCK & LAUREL TRAIL RACE

Early March 2020, NCLT was ready to roll out the inaugural Rock & Laurel Trail Race. We had the logo, we had the route, and we had a plan! With newly printed brochures in hand we began visiting local community partners and businesses to ask for their support. But it all came to a quick halt with the unfortunate news of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hit the pause button on our efforts and discussed what should happen next.

We were disheartened but determined to not let this ruin our efforts. It was time to take a clue from nature herself and show just how resilient NCLT could be – after all, our work in land conservation was still important – perhaps even more so. We rallied together and pivoted to a virtual race format. Board members called upon their friends and local businesses, and we gained last-minute sponsors from true community partners. In total, we grossed more than \$12,000 with the support of 15 local businesses and many participants from a dozen states across the country.

It is true that the day looked different than we originally imagined. We masked up and hit the trails while maintaining our distances. And as if on cue, the mountain laurel proved to be just as beautiful as ever. Nature persevered and showed us the way. NCLT adapted appropriately and gained strength in our commitment to conserving land for the health and well-being of our region.



▲ Wendy Westwood participated in the race from Colorado. Folks from a dozen other states were able to join the trail race thanks to its being virtual.

THANK YOU TO OUR RACE SPONSORS

Lead Sponsor: Enterprise Bank

Major Sponsor: Aubuchon Hardware

Patron Sponsors: Northeast Promotions & Apparel; Minglewood, LLC; Tow Bandit; Rota Spring Farm; Pillar Profit Solutions; Curtis Construction Equipment, LLC; Lakeview Nurseries; Mark S. Mueller, CPA; Pamela Kelley, Realtor at Janice Mitchell Real Estate, Inc.

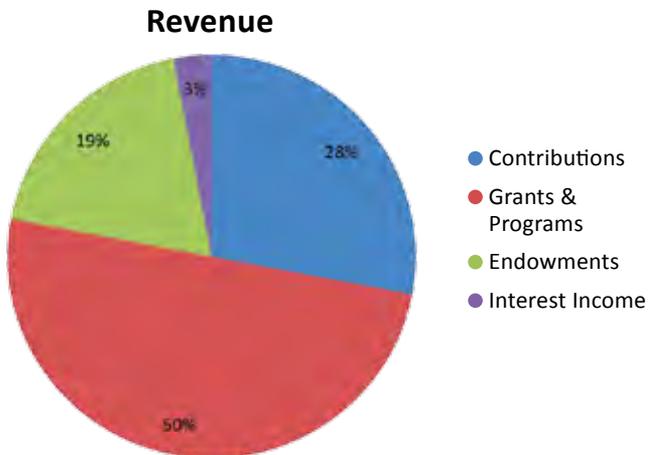
Supporting Sponsors: The Kitchen Garden; Central Mass Locavore, LLC; Modern Dispersions, Inc.



FISCAL YEAR 2020

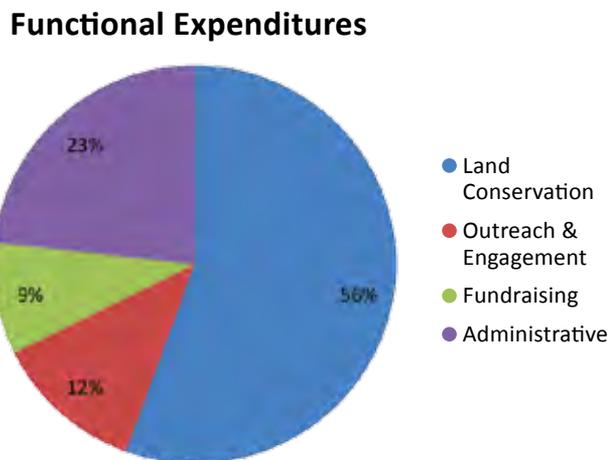
REVENUE

Contributions	58,268
Grants & Programs	103,726
Endowments	38,900
Interest Income	6,003
Total Revenue	206,897



EXPENDITURES

Land Conservation	114,193
Outreach & Engagement	25,507
Fundraising	18,175
Administrative	47,515
Total Expenditures	205,391
Modified Net Income	1,506



* preliminary results



NCLT is looking to expand to respond to the urgent need for conservation in the region. Please continue your generous support.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Foundations &

Charitable Funds

Bafflin Foundation
Beim Foundation
Douglas & Isabelle Crocker Foundation
Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts
Rollstone Bank & Trust Charitable Fund

Individuals

Jane Abbott
Claire Abisalih
Lucy & Tom Abisalih
Lisa & Chris Adams
Henry Allen
Kimberly & Scott Ansin
Robin Austin
Dianne Babineau
Patricia Baer
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Jessica Letendre
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Chris White Symonds
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Pat & Donna Wilkins
John Wilkins
Ryan Williams
Carolyn Wilson
Abigail Wolf
Joan Wotkowicz
Larry Zuaro

MA Cultural Councils

Fitchburg Cultural Council
Princeton Cultural Council

Organizations and Businesses

Aubuchon Hardware
Central Mass Locavore LLC
Chairtown Lumber Company
Curtis Construction Equipment LLC
Enterprise Bank & Trust
Gardner Ale House
Lakeview Nurseries
Lashua Door Company
Mark S. Mueller, CPA
Minglewood LLC
Modern Dispersions, Inc.
North Central MA Association of Realtors
North Quabbin Trails Association, Inc.
Panela Kelley, Realtor at Janice Mitchell Real Estate, Inc.
Pillar Profit Solutions, Inc
Rota-Spring Farm
Surroundings Gallery
The Kitchen Garden
Tow Mandit
Wachusett Brewing Company

Create a Living Legacy...

Your legacy gift is one of the most personal ways to ensure that your values will carry on for future generations. There are many ways you can make a significant difference in conserving what makes north central Massachusetts so special—its open space, farms, forests and cultural heritage:



You can make a lasting difference in land conservation.

**Please consider us in your estate planning
and charitable giving.**

EIN#22-3193109

North County Land Trust, Inc. is a
non-profit 501(c)3 organization.

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