

NORTH COUNTY LAND TRUST

ANNUAL REVIEW 2022-2023



Lake Monomonac
Winchendon, MA



Staff and Board photo: Rear L to R: Wilson Acuña, Alan Rousseau, Desiree Demski-Hamelin, Carrie Novak, Maggie Agurkis, Ben Howard, Linda Mack, Emily Merlino, Angela Kearney, Jo-Anne Crystoff, Max Lutz, Megan Walsh, Ryanne Flynn Rossi. Front: Lucy Crocker Abisalih, Anna Wilkins, Elizabeth Reid, Laura Barooshian. Not pictured: Mary Cringan.

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- Ben Howard, *president*
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- Laura Barooshian, *treasurer*
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- Carrie Novak
- Elizabeth Reid
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- Emily Merlino
- Megan Walsh
- Anna Heidorn Wilkins

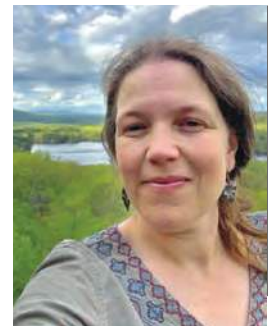
Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Reader,

There are many accomplishments and challenges overcome in the last year that make me proud to be part of this growing organization. New faces and energy on our staff and board brought in thoughtful perspectives as we dove into updating our Impact Agenda. Underlying it all is a sense of urgency in our work. Supporting local land conservation is a powerful and accessible way to make an immediate and lasting difference for our region and the planet. Working together, concentrating our money, time, and talent towards this effort, we can have a greater impact, right here, right now.

Happy Trails!

Anna Wilkins
Executive Director



Growing Wild: A Year of Conservation



68 acres of land protected

For critical natural habitats and precious headwaters of the Millers River in Winchendon.

344 acres of conservation projects in progress

Five parcels of open land in Fitchburg, Leominster, Shirley, Westminster, and Winchendon are on track for protection in 2024-2025.



Merged with Townsend Conservation Land Trust

The addition of four new properties elevates our presence in Townsend, expanding our conservation and outreach opportunities in the community.

Two brand-new trails constructed

The Trillium Trail at Dwelly Farm, Templeton and the Keyes Homestead Trail at Ebenezer Keyes Conservation Area, Gardner both access new areas within our existing trail networks



Hosted 35+ outreach events, reaching hundreds

From guided hikes, to bird watching, and so much in between, NCLT invited people of all ages in to grow a little closer to the great outdoors.

The Ones Who Make It Possible

Last year, a whopping **112 volunteers** planted native species, pulled invasive species, and achieved more for open land than we could have ever done alone. Go to northcountylandtrust.org/volunteer or scan our QR code to learn how you can join our force for positive change:





Photo: Terry Holland and LandVest

A New Hope for Troubled Waters

A Story of Perverseance and Partnership to Protect Monomonac Hill

Winchendon resident Renee Tambling looked out at the wooded landscape across from her small, lakeside home. She could hear the noise of the logging equipment on the hillside above. Her mind was swimming with worry. Over 350 acres of land were listed “For Sale” on Monomonac Hill around the southern portion of Lake Monomonac in Winchendon, MA. And now, a timber harvest was taking place.

Renee’s worry was not unfounded. She and other lake residents had already observed pollutants, lawn chemicals, and loss of natural vegetation and soils causing real harm to the water quality. Increasingly, it resulted in toxic algae blooms and water channels clogged with invasive pond weeds, affecting the lake and the Millers River downstream.

Members of the Winchendon Springs Lake Association like Renee have worked in tandem with the Monomonac Lake Property Owners Association in Rindge, NH to address these rising problems. But ultimately, the sale of Monomonac Hill for potential development left the health of the lake and water supply up to chance.

At one point, it looked like it would be sold to develop over 200 camp lots. More recently, a proposal to clear-cut at least 50 acres for ground-mounted solar panels was proposed. Any development project would cause greater harm to the lake. The question was just how much. Then, Anna called.

North County Land Trust saw the unique conservation value of Monomonac Hill and acted swiftly. Executive Director Anna Wilkins reached out to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, a partner organization, to form the Monomonac Hill Conservation Partnership. Together, the two organizations negotiated with a local conservation buyer to take Monomonac Hill off the market and allow them time to raise the \$757,000 needed to protect the land in perpetuity. The Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife contributed to the effort as well, purchasing 52 acres abutting their conservation land.

The Monomonac Hill Conservation Partnership, in coordination with the lake associations, has successfully raised over 80% of the critical funds needed to protect Monomonac Hill. But ultimately, the permanent conservation of these forested hills, vernal pools, wetlands, and river channel on the south end of Lake Monomonac will require broad community support. Once complete, Monomonac Hill will be open for recreation while continuing to provide critical wildlife habitat and support the health of Lake Monomonac.

***Learn more about the Monomonac Hill
Conservation Partnership***



Stories in Stewardship

A Year of Transformation at Dwelly Farm

In the third year of the Dwelly Farm Stewardship Plan, major strides were achieved to remove invasive plants, plant native species, and improve habitat. Volunteers for the United Way Day of Caring cleared a historic stone wall overgrown with invasives and spread mulch to guide the way around the pollinator field. Cushing Academy students cleaned up trails, picked up trash, and finished clearing the stone wall. Support from Templeton's Community Preservation Committee has remained strong, and grant money received from Mass Fish and Wildlife allowed additional invasive management work by Land Stewardship Inc. to continue controlling invasives. All of this work was supported by hours of invasive hand pulling at volunteer events. This continued work brings Dwelly closer to becoming a native haven for plants, insects, and animals with each season, and a wonderful place for all to enjoy.





Local Stewards for Local Land

How Volunteers Make It Possible

Relationships with our core group of volunteers have grown stronger over the last year. Dedicated volunteers join the Trail Team for general trail work or Invasive Erasers for invasive plant removal. Within both groups, friendships and a deep care for our lands is shared. We steward these lands with the help of our volunteer community better than we could ever do alone.

*Become a
Volunteer:*



Working from the Ground Up

Progress at NCLT's Gardner Lands

Rome and Ebenezer Keyes Conservation Areas have each undergone significant changes over the last year. Thanks to generous donations, Rome was expanded by 14 acres and gained an official parking lot and new trailhead. Keyes was revitalized thanks to volunteers from Bemis Associates cutting invasive Autumn Olive and the cutting of a new trail to the historic Keyes homestead cellar hole site by Eagle Scout and Gardner native Jameson Brinker. Continued improvements are ahead for both properties, including trailhead improvements for Rome and inland sandplain grassland habitat restoration for Keyes.





The Road Less Traveled

One woman's unexpected adventure with the GRIT Freedom Chair

Of the activities that fill her day, strolling outdoors is perhaps among Keilly's favorites. It may not always be easy in a standard wheelchair, but it hasn't stopped her and her caregivers from enjoying accessible trails and parks as often as they can.

On one such day, Keilly and one of her caregivers, Lucinda, were on a more strenuous, uphill journey when they were approached by passerby Megan Walsh, Community Engagement Coordinator for North County Land Trust. The conversation was brief, but fortuitous. They came away learning about a wheelchair built to withstand inclines and rougher terrain, two of which were nearby and available for anyone to use. They could borrow a chair to go practically anywhere they wanted—and they could do it for free.

In June 2022, North County Land Trust was awarded a grant from Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund to purchase two GRIT Freedom Chairs—outdoor, all-terrain wheelchairs—to help increase access to outdoor spaces for wheelchair users across our region. Since that time, the team has been working to spread the word about this resource while designing an easy, simple lending program available at no cost.

Among the recent users were Keilly and Lucinda. Their chance encounter with Megan left Lucinda with piqued interest in the GRIT Freedom Chair and ideas about where they could explore. Eager to visit beyond the more accessible areas at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, they decided to give it a try.

While they had visited Tower Hill before, the GRIT Freedom Chair empowered Keilly and Lucinda to venture into new territories within the gardens. Lucinda observed Keilly's pure enjoyment as they navigated through previously hard-to-reach areas. For Lucinda, the chair made it immensely easier to traverse hills and paths that would have been challenging or even impossible with a standard wheelchair.

As a result of their positive experience, Keilly and her caregivers have become regular users of the GRIT Chair Lending Program. In Lucinda's view, borrowing the GRIT Freedom Chair has become a "life-changing" resource for Keilly. She and her caregivers have used the chair to stroll in various paths across the region.

North County Land Trust aims to extend this opportunity to more individuals like Keilly who could benefit from the increased ease and functionality of the GRIT Freedom Chair when accessing outdoor spaces. If you or someone you love might find value in this lending program, you can discover more information or book the chair through our website at northcountylandtrust.org/grit-chair-lending-program.

Learn more about the GRIT Chair Lending Program





INTRODUCING
THE
GROW
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In this crucial hour for conservation, N to a bold Impact Agenda to secure the

Facing the Global Climate Reality

When considering the impacts of global climate change, the consequences can often feel distant. But recently, residents of our region could not ignore them. Summer 2023 was marred by toxic haze, flooding, and record-breaking heat for weeks on end.

Global warming, deforestation, and biodiversity loss are growing problems on a local and global scale. They take their toll on the health of forests, drinking water, air, and wildlife, and could worsen without dramatic action.

To address these issues, planet-saving work is well underway with determined conservation efforts on a massive scale. Global leaders passed resolutions like the Paris Climate Accord, resolving to prevent climate change above 2° Celsius, as well as the 30x30 Resolution, aiming to protect 30% of land and water by the year 2030.

Scientists and conservationists, in turn, are working across the globe to conserve precious

natural resources, preserve plant and wildlife species, and ensure the best environmental outcomes for communities everywhere.

Making A Difference

As part of these massive, ongoing efforts to address environmental threats, regional land trusts play a vital role.

By protecting local land of high-ecological value, land trusts make their regions more resilient to the effects of climate change. They care for the land with habitat restoration projects and other initiatives that support precious wildlife and vegetation. In addition to their work directly for the land, they provide communities with a safer and healthier place to live.

These efforts result in regions becoming more biodiverse, more resilient to climate change, and more prepared to support communities for generations to come.



WTH PROJECT

North County Land Trust has committed best hope for the future of our region.

Here at Home

In north central Massachusetts, the work to protect our region is far from done. Despite broad public support for conservation efforts, human activities continue to jeopardize local forests, wetlands, and climate-resilient landscapes.

The forested landscapes of New England are a powerful defender against global climate change, yet Massachusetts loses an average of 65 forested acres a day. North central Massachusetts holds the headwaters for the Nashua, Millers, and Ware rivers, affecting over 600 miles of river downstream. This region supports thousands of native plant and wildlife species, 432 of which are threatened by habitat loss. It is also home to vibrant, diverse, and amazing human communities who are deeply impacted by global environmental threats. Precious and valuable, all of it is at risk without determined, focused conservation efforts here at home.

Our Commitment

North County Land Trust (NCLT) recognizes the vital significance of protecting our region and is eager to rise to the challenge. This commitment, however, demands an ambitious increase in organizational capacity. The NCLT Board of Directors and staff designed a bold, three-year impact agenda to enact essential structural changes, elevating our impact for all 16 communities in our region.

Through this plan, NCLT aims to strengthen our position as a resilient and equitable leader in conservation. By focusing on key initiatives, policies, and goals, we will ensure a more sustainable and vibrant future for our home.

This is our Growth Project—an unwavering commitment to safeguarding our region's natural wonders for generations to come.

Join us on this journey towards a more sustainable and prosperous future for our region.

The **Globally-Rare** Home We Share

Though it is often taken for granted, north central Massachusetts offers irreplaceable ecological value to the planet. Overlook its pressing need for conservation, and we could lose it forever.



Forests: Carbon Sinks, Climate Heroes

New England's forests take immense amounts of carbon out of the atmosphere and store it long-term, making them a powerful defender against global warming.

Massachusetts loses 65 acres of forest to development every day.

Harvard Forest Wildlands and Wetlands, 2017



Headwaters: Nature's Filter for Clean Water

The headwaters of north central Massachusetts are the birthplace of rivers that nourish our ecosystems and provide drinking water to millions. Over 600 miles of river flow downstream from these precious headwaters.

"All of these rivers are sources for municipal drinking water and in dire need of protection." —Marion Stoddart, environmentalist



Plant and Wildlife Havens

From Rose Pogonia to Whippoorwills, north central Massachusetts boasts a unique array of plant and animal species. Hundreds are threatened due to climate change and habitat loss.



Urban Sprawl

Urban sprawl is encroaching on our natural spaces, threatening the delicate balance of our ecosystems. By protecting large areas of land and connecting them, we can create havens for wildlife to thrive, adapt, and navigate the challenges of a changing climate.

"[North central Massachusetts] is the frontline of urban sprawl and we need to permanently protect land while we still can." —Anne Gagnon, land protection specialist, Department of Fish and Wildlife

The urgency to protect north central Massachusetts' ecological wonders is undeniable. By collaborating, connecting, and committing to conservation, we can ensure that the beauty and biodiversity of north central Massachusetts endure for generations. **The time to act is now, before the window of opportunity closes and these irreplaceable treasures are lost forever.**

THE GROWTH PROJECT

NORTH COUNTY LAND TRUST'S IMPACT AGENDA 2023-2026

Protect Land on a Greater Scale

Corridor Connectivity

Participate in the protection of an additional **1,500 acres** of connected corridor scale landscapes, significantly improving ecosystem resilience for our community.

Proximity to Nature

Protect parcels of land that increase access to nature and advance the goal of getting everyone *Outside in 5*, an REI initiative.

Climate Resilience

Protect **500 acres** of land that enhance our communities' resilience to climate change

Care For and Steward Habitats and Ecosystems

Land Stewardship

Work in partnership with the community to provide high-quality care for **150 acres** of degraded land.

Community of Stewards

All **11 conservation areas** to have a robust community of stewards tending to the land for future generations.

Green Space Inclusivity

Remove the barriers that prevent underserved communities from enjoying the wonderful outdoors of north central Massachusetts.

Foster Stronger Relationships

Nature Programs

Elevate our programming to provide members of our diverse communities with opportunities to build connections with nature.

Conservation Advocacy

Inspire others to advocate for their community's land and *Take A Stand for Local Land*.

Partnerships

Partner with other community organizations to expand our mission with the speed, scale, and urgency this moment calls for.

Facing the Challenges of Our Time

Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

The extremes our community has endured in the past few years has cemented the urgency and importance of our mission to protect and connect people to nature. Scaling nature-based climate solutions and fostering human nature connection has never felt more important. This year's launch of our Impact Agenda defines our ambitious path forward to scale our impact and build a resilient community able to face the challenges of our time.



Our Impact Agenda kicks off with the land protection priorities of our diverse 16-community region. We are prioritizing protection efforts that improve access to nature so that the well-being benefits associated with spending time outdoors are available to all members of our community. We are also focusing protection efforts on large, connected nature corridors which significantly increase ecosystem resilience, especially in the face of a changing climate.

Our stewardship ambitions are centered around growing the community of people involved in caring for our conservation areas, restoring healthy ecosystems, and removing barriers to outdoor access. Growing our network of stewards, volunteers, supporters, and community members will allow for closer connection to these wonderful landscapes while also increasing our ability to remove the most critical barriers that impede equitable access to nature.

Our programs and partnerships are at the heart of connecting our diverse community with the wonders of the nature. These programs improve community health, well-being, and resilience through deeper human and nature connections. As we look forward, our Impact Agenda calls for scaling our Mission through elevated programs, deep community partnerships, and inspiring the community to advocate for the outdoors.

This Impact Agenda charts NCLT's path forward to scale our mission, create a community centered around human nature connections, build resilience in the face of a changing climate, and enable access to the wonderful outdoors of north central Massachusetts. It is grounded in tangible and ambitious goals that, to achieve, will require additional support from our community and the hard work of dedicated staff and volunteers. I am grateful for your support, engagement, and participation in this bold path forward and welcome you to join us on the journey ahead!

Regards,

Ben Howard
President

A Year in Photos



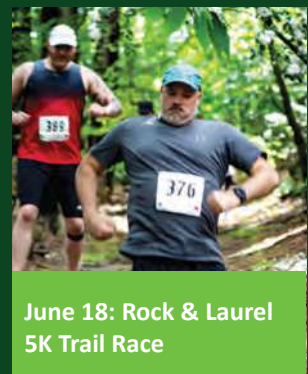
Sept 21:
Watatic
Dedication Ceremony



Feb 28: Will Evans
Concert



**WE WANT
TO SEE YOUR
NCLT HIKING
PHOTOS!**



June 18: Rock & Laurel
5K Trail Race



Dec 21:
Winter
Solstice

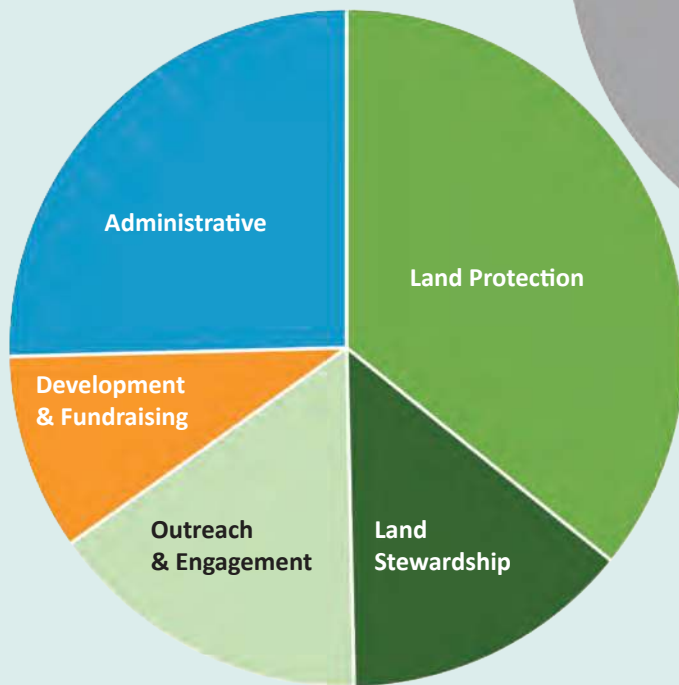
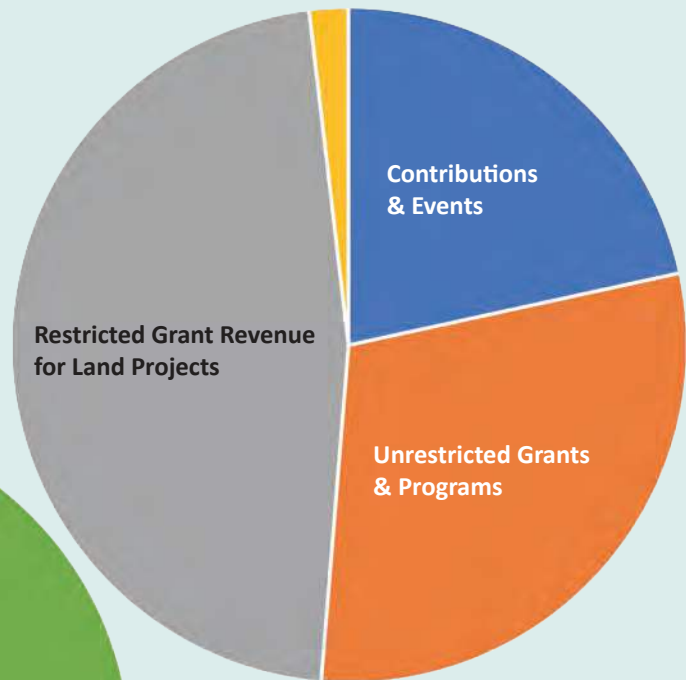


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LANDTRUST**



REVENUE

Contributions & Events	\$192,942
Unrestricted Grants & Programs	\$265,659
Restricted Grant Revenue for Land Projects	\$418,807
Interest/Other	\$16,681
TOTAL REVENUE	\$894,089



EXPENDITURES

Land Protection	\$170,000
Land Stewardship	\$65,854
Outreach & Engagement	\$73,853
Development & Fundraising	\$44,643
Administrative	\$120,740
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$475,089

Treasurer's Note: Revenue outpaced expenses due to large incoming restricted grants and fundraising for the Monomonac Hill Partnership Project in Winchendon and the Ebenezer Keyes Conservation Area's habitat restoration in Gardner. These funds are unavailable for the general operating budget and are only released as project work is completed. North County Land Trust continues to seek unrestricted donations and grants, essential to cover the operating costs of implementing our mission-driven work. The small uptick in administrative costs reflects an investment in our staff and organizational strength. Expert consulting and professional development have given us the tools to continue steadily; holding the bulk of our expenses in the projects which are our calling and purpose. —Angela Kearney, *Treasurer*

Make Your Gift, Then Watch It Grow

Every dollar given to North County Land Trust funds planet-changing work happening here at home.



66¢ of every dollar raised goes directly to land projects and programs. The rest supports everything else needed to make our mission possible.



North County Land Trust ranks highly as a trusted charity according to Charity Navigator, America's largest independent charity evaluator.



For over 30 years, North County Land Trust has been a trusted name in conservation exclusively dedicated to the north central Massachusetts region.



DONATE

North County Land Trust accepts donations of cash, check, credit, and appreciated securities. Make your one-time or monthly donation online at northcountylandtrust.org.

Checks can be made out to:

North County Land Trust
325 Lindell Ave
Leominster, MA 01453.



GIFT LAND

Your land may be eligible to be protected in perpetuity by North County Land Trust through a land donation or a conservation restriction.

For inquiries, contact:

Jo-Anne Crystoff
Director of Land Protection
jcrystoff@northcountylandtrust.org

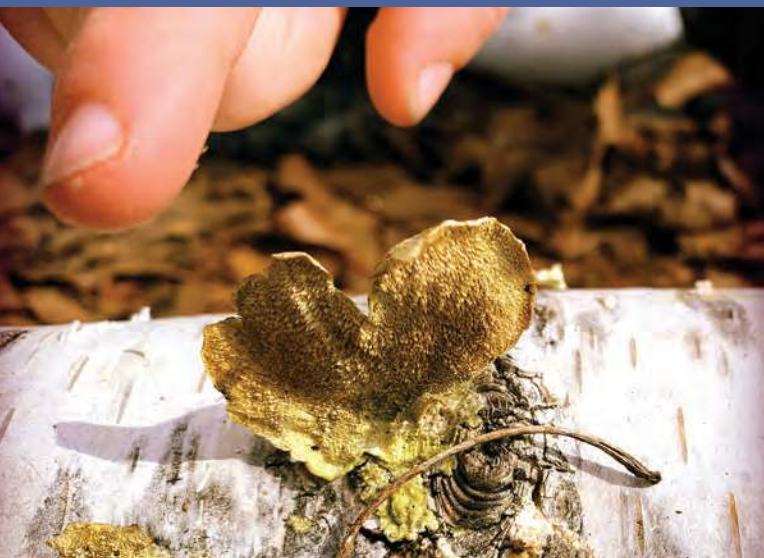


PLANT YOUR LEGACY

When you bequest a charitable donation to NCLT, your investment in conservation helps us ensure a lasting legacy of clean air, fresh water, and vibrant natural habitat.

For inquiries, contact:

Ryanne Flynn Rossi
Director of Advancement
rflynnrossi@northcountylandtrust.org



Donate Now

Make your one-time or monthly gift online at northcountylandtrust.org



Ryanne Flynn Rossi
Director of Advancement
978.466.3900
rflynnrossi@northcountylandtrust.org



Donors & Supporters

\$100,000+

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North Central Massachusetts

\$25,000-\$99,000

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Jack Becker
Molly Benevides
Kristen Bingham
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Jack Blanchette
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and Margaret Lyons
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Jennifer Reilly
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Bill Rideout
William Rideout
Phoebe Roberts
Jessica Robey

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Arlene Rome
Nick and Ryanne Rossi
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Larry Shoer
Charles and Nancy Sides
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Corrine Smith
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Kurt and Courtney Tanguay
Lisa Teong
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Sam Toulmin
Toan Tran
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Thirsty Robot Brewing
Worker's Credit Union

We strive to make this list as accurate as possible.
Please share your feedback with us directly at
rflynnrossi@northcountylandtrust.org.

"In our hands now lies not only
our own future, but that of all other
living creatures with whom
we share the Earth."

David Attenborough



NORTH COUNTY LAND TRUST

325 Lindell Avenue, Leominster, MA 01453

(978) 466-3900

northcountylandtrust.org

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