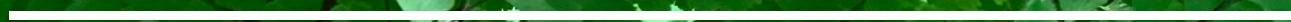

SEPTEMBER 2023

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Nature
Conservancy



PROTECTION: RESILIENT & CONNECTED NETWORK

In North America, TNC science has identified a Resilient and Connected Network (RCN) of lands that serve as our road map for where and how we will conserve terrestrial biodiversity over the long-term. The RCN covers 57% of Vermont’s lands and yet only 28% of these high priority lands are permanently protected for biodiversity. Through TNC acquisitions, partner assists, disseminated science, policy improvements and other interventions, we are committed to increasing the amount of protected land in the RCN by 237,000 acres by 2030, and improving the ecological condition and connectivity of the entire network.

Connecting Lands for Wildlife in VT and NH’s Tanguay Project:

The Tanguay acquisition is the latest installment in TNC’s decade-long focus on land protection and restoration along the Upper Connecticut River. The project will advance TNC’s two primary goals for the region—to protect and restore active floodplains and to support connectivity for wildlife between the vast forests that lie on either side of the river and its developed floodplains.

The Tanguay farm, which contains ~200 acres in VT and 138 acres in NH, is a fitting testament to the sustained focus and cooperation between the VT and NH chapters of TNC. Together, TNC owns and manages ~1,200 acres in the Maidstone Bends Natural Area. The Natural Area is a mixture of intact, high-quality floodplain forests, leased agricultural lands with restoration potential, and associated uplands that connect the floodplain to the surrounding forest. This is the VT Chapter’s fifth fee acquisition along the Upper Connecticut main stem (340.2 acres for the first four + ~200 for Tanguay). The VT chapter also assisted with the protection of the 850-acre Johnson farm, now a VT Fish and Wildlife Department Wildlife Management Area.



Maidstone Bends Natural Area



Beyond its contribution to floodplain protection, the Tanguay parcel is strategically located to provide connectivity for wildlife at the landscape scale. The property is within the Northern Mountains and Headwaters Focal Landscape- a 3.1 million-acre area that stretches from the Vermont border to the western Maine mountains area. It provides connectivity between conserved lands in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, the White Mountains National Forest, conserved lands in the Upper Connecticut River watershed, and conserved lands around Moosehead Lake, the Katahdin region, and the West Branch of the Penobscot River in Maine. This region has been a long-standing priority area for the Staying Connected Initiative, of which TNC was a founding partner

Funding for this effort came from: New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund, a fund established by the Federal FERC relicensing of the various dams upstream from White River Junction, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and private donations.

Like other TNC lands in the Maidstone Bends Natural Area, the Tanguay parcel will be managed for multiple objectives, including restoration. Initial efforts will experiment with natural regeneration of abandoned agricultural fields and will capitalize on recent learnings by our team's efforts to restore American elm to the floodplains of the Upper CT River. For more information on this effort, refer to the stewardship section.



Tanguay Parcel-Maidstone Bends Natural Area

PROMOTING NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS: STORING AND SEQUESTERING FOREST CARBON

Vermont is 78% forested. The trees and soils are naturally sequestering and storing atmospheric carbon helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change. TNC is advancing innovative ecosystem market solutions like the Family Forest Carbon Program and Forest Carbon Co-ops to help Vermont landowners access financing to improve and conserve their forests. Our own Burnt Mountain Carbon Project is generating revenue for forest protection projects and demonstrating how carbon financing can advance forest protection.

Vermont continues to lead the region in landowners enrolling in the Family Forest Carbon Program with 649 landowners holding a collective 159,000 acres expressing interest and meeting the basic qualifications for the program. To determine the right practices and forest stands to enroll, we need to review the forest management plans and if necessary, visit the property. As of the end of July, 122 properties covering 39,692 acres had moved to this next level review. We are accelerating the review of plans and now have 25 contracts signed covering 5,468 acres. Our goal for calendar year 2023 is 8,500 acres and we believe we are on track to meet the goal.



STEWARDING OUR LANDS

We are committed to the thoughtful and enduring care of the lands and waters that we have protected. Guided by the best available science, we approach this goal through three strategic pillars: **(1) Legal Compliance**, which upholds our commitment to permanent conservation through required monitoring and reporting tasks **(2) Managing for Resilience** compelling us to manage for conditions that maximize biodiversity in a changing climate **(3) Leveraging our Lands** which includes our public access, science and research, and community engagement activities that provide opportunities for all people to connect with the natural world.

Innovative Science Based Restoration

In early August, TNC was awarded ~\$2.5 million from a private foundation to continue working with the United States Forest Service (USFS) to restore American elms. This is the third award, for a total of ~\$6.2 million, that builds on nearly a decade of work by both partners to identify American elms that are tolerant of Dutch Elm Disease and restore them to floodplains and urban forests across New England. It has also funded groundbreaking research at the USFS to accelerate the breeding program and develop best practices for American elm reintroduction.

At TNC, this effort was born in the former Connecticut River Program, but has always had an outsized presence in Vt. Our stewardship team leaned into this from the onset, recognizing the important ecological role that elm plays in the landscape and the necessity of this project to ensure the long-term function and resilience of floodplains in the northeast. As early as 2014, the team mobilized to investigate survivor elms, establish plantings of experimental elm trees, and reintroduce disease tolerant elms to floodplains at 10 TNC natural areas and 26 partner-owned sites throughout Vermont.



Senior Ecologist Gus Goodwin looking at Elm Trees



In total, this effort has yielded ~7,000 trees that represent 142 novel crosses between 23 survivor elms identified by TNC in New England and a several varieties identified by the USFS from other parts of the country. These trees are set to be tested for tolerance to Dutch Elm Disease in 2026, when each of these trees will be treated with a direct stem injection of the pathogen and monitored for mortality.

This is a story about an innovative, science-based approach to restoration. But it is also a story about lands and the people that manage them. Our natural areas are the stage from which our chapter can respond to our region's most pressing threats and most exciting opportunities. Projects that leverage landscape-level change as well as site-based ecological gains, provide a model for our chapter and enduring returns on our conservation investments.

Our stewardship team, with their deep commitment to the places they manage and willingness to commit to long-term projects that operate on nature's own timeline, deserve a moment of celebration for reaching this key milestone.



Elm Along Water

CONSERVING AND RESTORING WATERS

TNC is catalyzing a movement of watershed conservation. Approximately 75% of Vermont's river miles are disconnected from their floodplains and over 1,200 dams dissect our rivers, threatening human and ecological wellbeing. To secure the resilience of Vermont's freshwater systems into the future, we are conserving our waters by scaling our impact in three strategic arenas: **1) restoring river-floodplain systems and headwaters, 2) removal of nonfunctional dams and other barriers to connectivity, and 3) protection of river corridors.** Central to our success are approaches that empower local organizations and communities through capacity building and socially just engagement.

River Corridor Protection Priority in the Wake of July's Flooding

This Director's Report will be landing in your hands right around the twelfth anniversary of Tropical Storm Irene, the six-week mark of the flooding events in early July, and only a couple weeks after the flash flooding in Addison and Rutland counties. Between these three events, Vermonters have suffered 17 major flooding disasters, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars in damages to public infrastructure, homes, businesses, and our rivers. With an average of nearly 1.5 federal disaster declarations per year due to flooding, which [we know will only increase in severity and frequency](#), TNC has been asked what have we learned since Irene? What are we doing to better protect our communities?



State Street- Montpelier Flooding 2023. Photo credit: Jack Markoski

The answer to these questions is the same: we must stop building our homes, businesses, and roads in our river corridors. The river corridor – or the meandering zone of a river – plays an essential role during high precipitation events. It creates space for fast- and over-flowing rivers to store high waters and release energy. In areas where our river corridors are intact and undeveloped, flood damage is minimal, and consequently, river health and water quality is supported. Unfortunately, Vermonters have inherited historic development patterns from those who came before us – those who needed rivers to move and store goods. They understandably built the communities we now call home today close to rivers, making them (and not the intact river corridor) the recipient of those high- and fast-flowing waters. And despite centuries of repeated flood disasters, and all of the physical, emotional and financial trauma they cause, Vermont still allows these dangerous areas to be further developed.

This cycle of develop>flood>recover will continue unless we do something to disrupt it. Something big. TNC, staying true to its mission for both people and nature, is focusing its freshwater and policy programs on changing the way Vermont regulates development in these high-hazard areas. With a policy research analysis underway, a public polling effort scheduled for this fall, and ongoing work with partners and decision-makers to refine a must-pass river corridor protection bill for the upcoming legislative session, we are committed to changing our dangerous, detrimental status quo. And in doing so, will create healthier, more resilient watersheds – from our mountain streams to our river valley communities. Watersheds ready to weather our climate future.



Downtown Montpelier Flooding 2023. Photo credit: Jack Markoski

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

For TNC's mission to be successful, impactful, and enduring, it requires people who are connected and inspired by the work to become ambassadors for nature. As the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loom large with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities, we are working to become better neighbors, advocates, and storytellers who promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity into all facets of our work while continuing to grow our network of nature champions.

In the News

With the flooding came a flood of media requests, some of which have yet to be aired. We fielded nearly a dozen inquiries from both local media outlets and national outlets such as The Weather Channel, Bloomberg News, and National Public Television. The recent media exposure signals a big shift in TNC Vermont's reputation and influence since the Irene flooding event from twelve years ago when TNC VT wasn't even part of the larger state conversation on these issues. It is a direct result of the launch of our freshwater and policy programs, focus on natural climate solutions, and investments in strategic communications and media engagement. The earned media hits are helping us build the runway for an influential river corridor policy push as outlined in the freshwater section of the director's report.

Live interview with **Eve Frankel** on the national Weather Channel, view it [here](#).

TNC senior conservation planner, **Gus Goodwin**, initiated this [25-minute Brave Little State podcast](#) episode on rivers that was a feature of a [Vermont Edition segment](#) that **Shayne Jaquith**, our watershed restoration manager, joined to help answer questions.

Lauren Oates' perspective as a former hazard mitigation officer for the state, and her current role as Government Relations and Policy Director, was in high demand as multiple media requests were made by outlets such as Vermont Public (yet to be published), [Bloomberg](#), and [the Associated Press](#), as they investigated the state's progress around flood and climate resiliency goals since Irene.

Brenda Gail-Bergman, Director of Freshwater, was featured in this latest [VT Digger article](#) about the VT floods. We anticipate several more local and national stories coming out in the next 4-6 weeks.

Community Engagement Building Blocks

This summer we continued our partnership with Vermont Professionals of Color, and spent time outdoors. Our events are an opportunity for people who identify as BIPOC to get together in community in the outdoors lead by TNC staff. These events have an average of 10-15 participants per outing, and are always a great place to meet new people, connect about our love for Vermont, and enjoy new places. We will be hosting one more of these events in the fall. Anyone interested in participating is welcomed to come, this space is an affinity space for BIPOC individuals.



VTPOC x. TNC at the top of M.t, Philo State Park

New Board Fellow Joins Board

One new Board Fellow joins our board, Lara Monteiro. Lara Monteiro is a Brazilian ecologist currently undertaking her Ph.D. studies in Natural Resources at the University of Vermont. Her research is focused on understanding what the existing incentives to promote the restoration of grassland and savanna ecosystems are, and what drives farmers to restore their lands.



New Board Fellow, Lara Monteiro

Nature S.O.S Events

The “Safeguarding Our Species” series continues with our upcoming VT’s Secret is in our Soils Webinar on September 21st that will feature, **John Binhammer**, Director of Land Protection, Carol Adair, UVM Professor hosted by **Tom Rogers**. This webinar will be followed by an outing to our Equinox Natural Area on September 30th.

Head to: [nature.org/vtevents](https://www.nature.org/vtevents) to register.

UPCOMING:

SEPTEMBER: VT’S SECRET IS IN OUR SOILS WEBINAR/
NATURE WALKS AT EQUINOX NATURAL AREA

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

How we approach our work is as important as the work we do. TNC's ability to achieve our mission depends on our people. When our people thrive, our organization thrives. Only then can we succeed in the urgent work of conserving the lands and waters on which life depends. Skilled managers and accountable leaders (including our Board of Trustees) are at the heart of this, nurturing and supporting an inclusive culture, diversity, employee engagement, career growth, work-life balance, strong financial and operation management, and team performance. Organizational excellence is the backbone of what helps TNC grow.

Flooding

This summer has been a very difficult time in Vermont due to the widespread flooding events. As you know, Montpelier was hit especially hard. Thankfully, our office building and the interior remained dry and undamaged. Our staff are doing well, though they, like our fellow Vermonters, have had to navigate a range of flood related challenges, from soaked basements to disruptions in childcare. Once again, this team has shown resilience and perseverance throughout, despite the difficulties. Staff were supported in prioritizing their own needs and wellbeing, and in volunteering for flood recovery work for the equivalent of 3 workdays.



Downtown Montpelier Circle July Flooding

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We have finalized our contract and scope of work with The Creative Discourse Group (TCDG) and our internal steering committee begins in-person planning work with TCDG in mid August. TCDG will begin by facilitating one-to-one interviews with BIPOC and other staff members who hold underrepresented identities to learn more about their experiences with the organization and the best way to center their needs and support them moving forward. TCDG will also conduct a survey of all staff, and 3 in-person meetings with the steering committee prior to our first all staff engagement at the end of October. We are enthusiastic to begin this work in alignment with TNC’s Global Diversity Equity and Inclusion goals.

Strategic Realignment

The strategic realignment team is deep in their work as they consider structural recommendations to support our refined and reframed conservation goals that fall into three buckets: protect land and water, climate, and leveraging our lands. This conservation re-calibration better aligns us with the organization’s 2030 goals and emphasizes areas of work that we are striving to advance more meaningfully, such as our people and climate mitigation goals. Jim Desmond, as project sponsor, will share more on this refinement during September’s board meeting.



Staff Changes- Recruiting and Hiring

Division Director

Terry Sullivan, Director of the Northeast Division, departed from TNC at the end of August to pursue new opportunities in his home state of Rhode Island. Frogard Ryan, has stepped in as interim Division Director. Frogard has been with TNC since 2011 serving as the State Director for TNC's Connecticut chapter. Her passion for nature, commitment to conservation and visionary leadership will undoubtedly serve the organization well during this transition.



Terry Sullivan

Interim VT State Director

Jim Desmond, Vermont Interim Director, has stepped in for departing Division Director Terry Sullivan as the hiring manager for the VT state director position. The position closed on July 28. We had over 50 applicants, at least 10 of whom have been determined by Carol Hodge, TNC's lead Executive Recruiter, as well qualified. Carol reports that 49 applicants at this point is unusually high for a State Director search.



Jim Desmond

There were 62 applicants and Carol talked to 12 by phone which was narrowed by Jim and Carol to 6 for a first round of interviews. Participating on one of the 3 interview panels (2 separate panels in Round 1, and one panel in Round 2 will be: Jed Murdoch, Rupa Datta, Frogard Ryan (Conn State Director and interim NED Director), Thomas Minney (WV State Director), Kathleen Brennan-Hunter (TNC North America Director of Equity in Conservation), Rebecca Stanfield McCown (trustee), George Burrill (trustee), Candace Page (trustee), Jim Desmond, and Johnny Quispe Ph.D, from the New Jersey chapter who heads their Cities Program, focused in Newark and a representative from TNC's Young and Emerging Professionals (YEP) employee resource group. Late in the process, there will be a chance for a small group of VT staff (5-6), to meet 1 or more finalists.



Finance Manager

We are excited to welcome **Sandy Marshall** to the team. Sandy is originally from Winston-Salem, NC and now resides in Raleigh, NC. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Salem College and a MBA from Queens University of Charlotte. Currently, she is working towards earning her CPA license. Sandy's entire career has been working in the nonprofit sector, including as Business Director for the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust



Sandy Marshall

Departures

Ben Matthews, River Restoration Coordinator, has taken a position as a River Management Engineer for the Northeast Division with the State of Vermont Rivers program. Ben has been a wonderful addition to our team and brought expertise in dam removal to our Freshwater program. Though Ben will be missed, we are pleased that he has this opportunity to follow his passions to further his engineering skills while helping our communities and rivers recover from this year's flooding.

Majen Goitia, Ecological Management Fellow, will be leaving TNC Vermont in early September. Over the last 18 months as a TNC Fellow, Majen has provided essential support stewarding TNC preserves, including substantial involvement in our American Elm restoration project, as well as contributions to the freshwater assessment on our preserves. Majen also contributed to TNC Vermont's DEIJ Design Team and to the Northeast Divisions TNC4Racial Equity process. We will miss Majen, and wish her all the best in her next endeavors.

PHILANTHROPY REPORT

Philanthropy provides the financial support that makes every aspect of our conservation work possible. We work with a mindset of abundance that brings into focus our donors' desires to have a meaningful impact in the world. Our relationships are not just financial transactions but opportunities for our supporters to follow their values and make a difference for conservation. We are stronger when trustees and advisors work in partnership with staff to become effective ambassadors, fundraisers, conservationists, and advisors. With staff, trustees, and donors working together, we can maximize our philanthropic impact to co-create a world where both nature and people thrive.

Project Spotlight

Philanthropy Assessment: The philanthropy team has gone into retreat to address the recommendations from the Philanthropy Assessment. Our annual work plan is centered in helping to create a shared language with Trustees, Advisory Council, and staff around our conservation vision; qualifying the new top 20 prospects that were presented to us from the research the team conducted during the assessment; as well as strategically aligning donor intent with TNC writ large conservation priorities while continuing to meet our dues and contribution's goal for unrestricted VT dollars.



Legacy Challenge: Huge and wonderful kudos to all of you and especially Annie Crawford for her work on the legacy challenge for our Trustees. Our Board is now 2nd in the entire Conservancy for percentage of members who have committed a portion of their estate to TNC. This accolade has helped to raise the chapter's visibility across the Conservancy and will be celebrated at the Leadership Summit in DC this fall. Very special thanks to new Trustee Legacy Club members **Candy Page, Stephen Kiernan, Fran Stoddard** and **Rebecca Stanfield McCown**.



Sphere of Influence: Coming out of the Northeast Leadership conference discussion on the need for more collaborative fundraising across state borders for TNC's greatest conservation priorities, Catherine Newman is creating a sphere of influence analysis for all the Northeast Trustees with the goal of chapters being able to identify and activate Trustee networks beyond state borders to cultivate new donors.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Al Short

Al is a 95-year-old former federal employee who recently moved to Bennington from Boston. He is an ardent conservationist and his most meaningful relationships in his life have begun with a shared love of nature. He recently contacted the Vermont chapter after receiving the newsletter about Heather's departure and the impact of legacy gifts, as he decided he wants his estate to help conserve the nature he loves. After several meetings, Al has decided to leave his entire estate to TNC and has directed it to support the Appalachians work as he has enjoyed nature all along this landscape.

Beth Springsteen

Beth is the sister-in-law of former TNC VT Director of Science and Freshwater, Rose Paul. After the recent flooding, Beth reached out to TNC VT to make a \$25,000 gift to support our policy work as she believes it is how best to sustainably impact conservation advancements in the state. In talking with Beth about the impetus of this gift, she shared that her interactions with Rose over the years made clear to her the impact the chapter is having on the state. Catherine Newman coming to Easter dinner at Rose's house and talking about the recent success in our policy arena were the icing on her cake. A great reminder that you never know when the interactions you are having in your role as an ambassador for TNC will resonate with a donor.



Henry Butler

Henry is another new donor that reached out to TNC VT after receiving the newsletter about the impact of legacy giving on Heather's tenure at TNC. Henry, who lives in Burke, VT, lost his wife to breast cancer after a long battle that started at the height of the pandemic. They shared a love of wild spaces and were avid hikers until just months before her death. Suma Lashoff met with him to discuss how he could include TNC in his estate plans. During her conversation she learned that he has the ability to have impact now and was open to further conversation about it, in fact hinting that his estate would not be the \$6M noted in the newsletter but would make us "very, very happy." On August 31, Suma and our WO Planned Giving Officer, Nikki Peters, are meeting with him again at his home to further explore his options. They will also learn more about his interest in engaging deeper with TNC as his current volunteer commitments are minimal. Stay tuned.

Trustee and Advisory Council Impact

Huge thanks to Advisory Council member **Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux** for partnering with **Lauren Oates** on a recent Bloomberg article addressing the climate causes for the recent flooding in Vermont.

In the wake of the recent flooding events, former TNC Board fellow, **Jesse Gourevitch**, and current trustee, **Beverley Wemple**, teamed up with TNC's **Lauren Oates** and retired Rivers Program Manager, **Mike Kline**, to [pen this joint op-ed.](#)

Many thanks to our Trustees working to select a new State Director for Vermont. **Jed Murdoch, Rebecca Stanfield McCown, George Burrill, and Candy Page**, we are counting on you! 😊

Thanks again to **Annie Crawford** for leading such a successful Trustee Legacy challenge!

RAISED TO DATE

Fundraising at TNC is tracked differently than our Operating Budget. We have annual fundraising goals and targets aimed at raising the largest gifts possible for the Nature Conservancy, which may include supporting our national and international programs.

	Fiscal Year Goal	As of March 30, 2023
Overall Fundraising Goal FY23	\$1,500,000	\$2,202,992
Deferred Gift Goal	\$750,000	\$10,015,236
Deferred Gift #	6	7
High Impact Credit*	\$100,000	\$20,124

**High Impact Credit (HIC) are funds raised for critical priorities at scale and outside of VT*

