

Our Year in Review

2022-23



Vermont Land
Trust





Dear Friends,

2023 has been filled with many things, but the devastating July floods stand out. The images of flooded downtowns, damaged homes, ruined crops, and washed-out roads will stay with us for a long time, as will those of thousands of volunteers mobilizing to help. Alongside grief, there was hope, caring, and resourcefulness.

Less visible was the stabilizing impact of conserved lands: forests helping to absorb rainwater, wooded areas along streams slowing floodwaters, and wetlands storing water. All the land supporters like you have helped protect played an important role in mitigating damage downstream.

Vermont's conserved land, including the 630,000+ acres we helped protect, strengthens our ecosystems and benefits all forms of life. We are so grateful to those who, over decades, have conserved and stewarded their land to benefit all of Vermont, and beyond.

This year, nearly 30 landowners joined these ranks, working with us to conserve over 4,100 acres of farmland and more than 10,000 acres of forest. Landowners like Anne and Joe Tisbert of Valley Dream Farm also joined us in improving the health of our watersheds—dedicating space for rivers to flow freely and protecting wetlands on their 306-acre farm in Cambridge and Underhill (see page 14).

These are the types of natural climate solutions that conservation creates, but we need to do more.

Thanks to some forward-thinking lawmakers and advocates, a new Bill will help expand conservation. Vermont's Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act was passed into law this July, and we were proud to support this legislative success.

The Act has set a goal to permanently conserve 30% of our land and water by 2030, and 50% by 2050, but we need funds to make it happen. Your support is essential in helping us leverage state and federal money to engage landowners, buy development rights, and restore land.

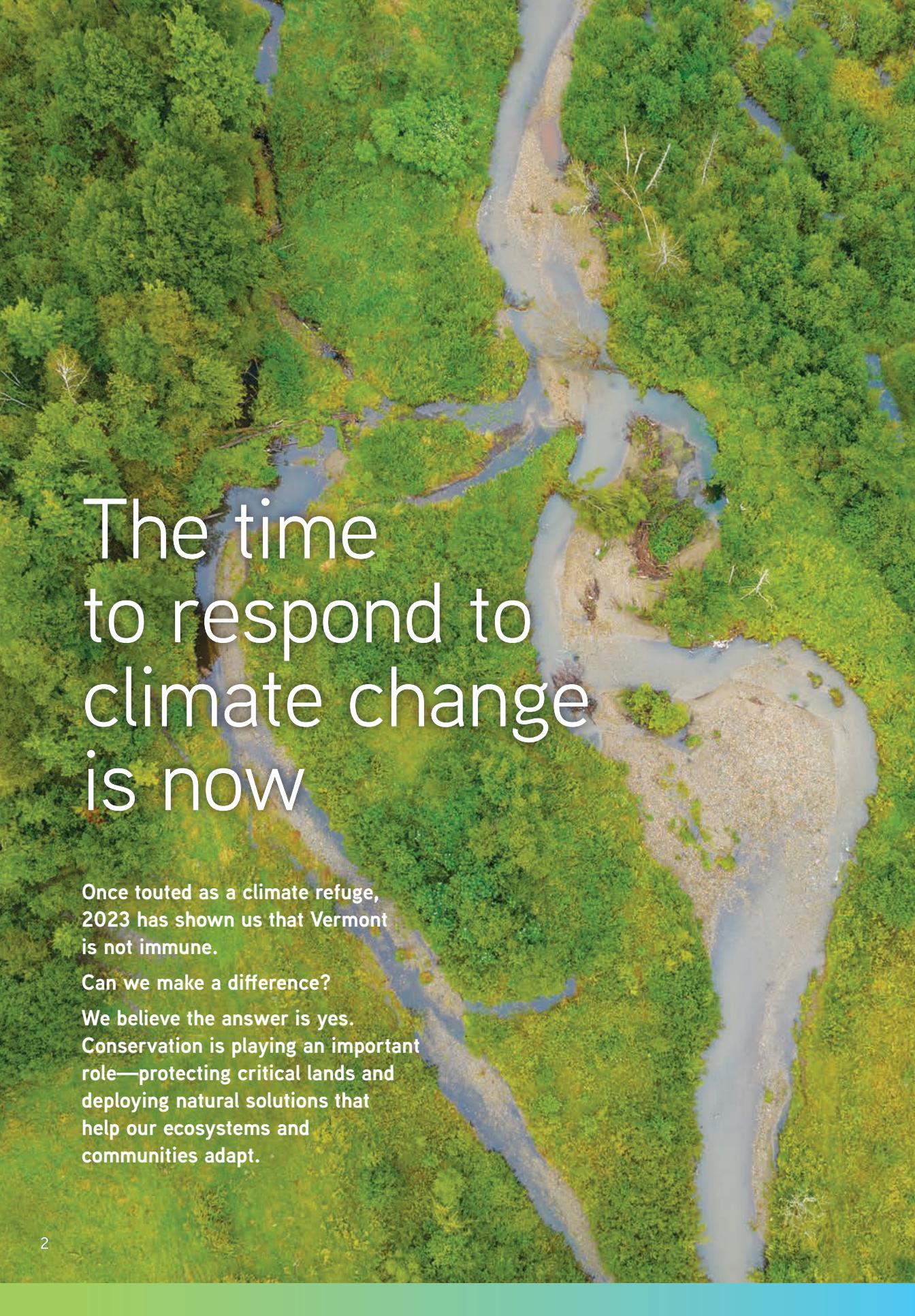
2023 has heightened our sense of urgency. Conservation has the power to protect people, places, and wildlife in the face of more intense and devastating storms. Let us continue to protect and care for the home we share.

With gratitude,

Tracy Zschau
President & CEO

Cheryl Morse
Chair, Board of Trustees





The time to respond to climate change is now

Once touted as a climate refuge, 2023 has shown us that Vermont is not immune.

Can we make a difference?

We believe the answer is yes. Conservation is playing an important role—protecting critical lands and deploying natural solutions that help our ecosystems and communities adapt.

Flood safety and clean water

Over the past two hundred years, agriculture, community development, and commerce have re-shaped our landscape. For example, 75 percent of Vermont's streams today are disconnected from their floodplains, increasing the likelihood of floods. The land struggles to absorb the heavy rains that are now all too common.

As you'll see in this report, this year alone we protected 518 acres of wetlands, conserved land along 59 miles of rivers and streams, and with our partners—including landowners, the State, other land trusts, watershed groups, and volunteers—planted over 14,800 trees. These actions help the land to slow, filter, and absorb more water.

This approach works. Three years ago, we restored a farm field at the confluence of the Mill Brook and Winooski River to a more natural floodplain, then planted native trees a year later to help the forest return. Fast forward to July 2023, this restored floodplain filled with water as intended, helping reduce damage downstream.

Forestland conservation

Around 75 percent of Vermont is forested, much of it privately owned by families and individuals. These forests contain headwater streams, habitat that supports wildlife and biodiversity, and trees that absorb and store carbon while also slowing rain water. And yet for all the benefits forests provide, Vermont is losing over 9,000 acres each year.

Combating forest fragmentation and sprawl is an important way to slow climate change. This year, we conserved over 10,000 acres with our partners, including VHCB, USDA, private foundations, and others. This included over 1,900 acres in Caledonia County and close to 7,400 acres on the Northfield Mountains in central Vermont, both priority areas that add to large blocks of conserved forest.



You can make a difference

Who benefits from natural climate solutions? It's all of us—particularly the most vulnerable who live in densely-populated, low-lying areas. It's also the plants and animals who call Vermont home.

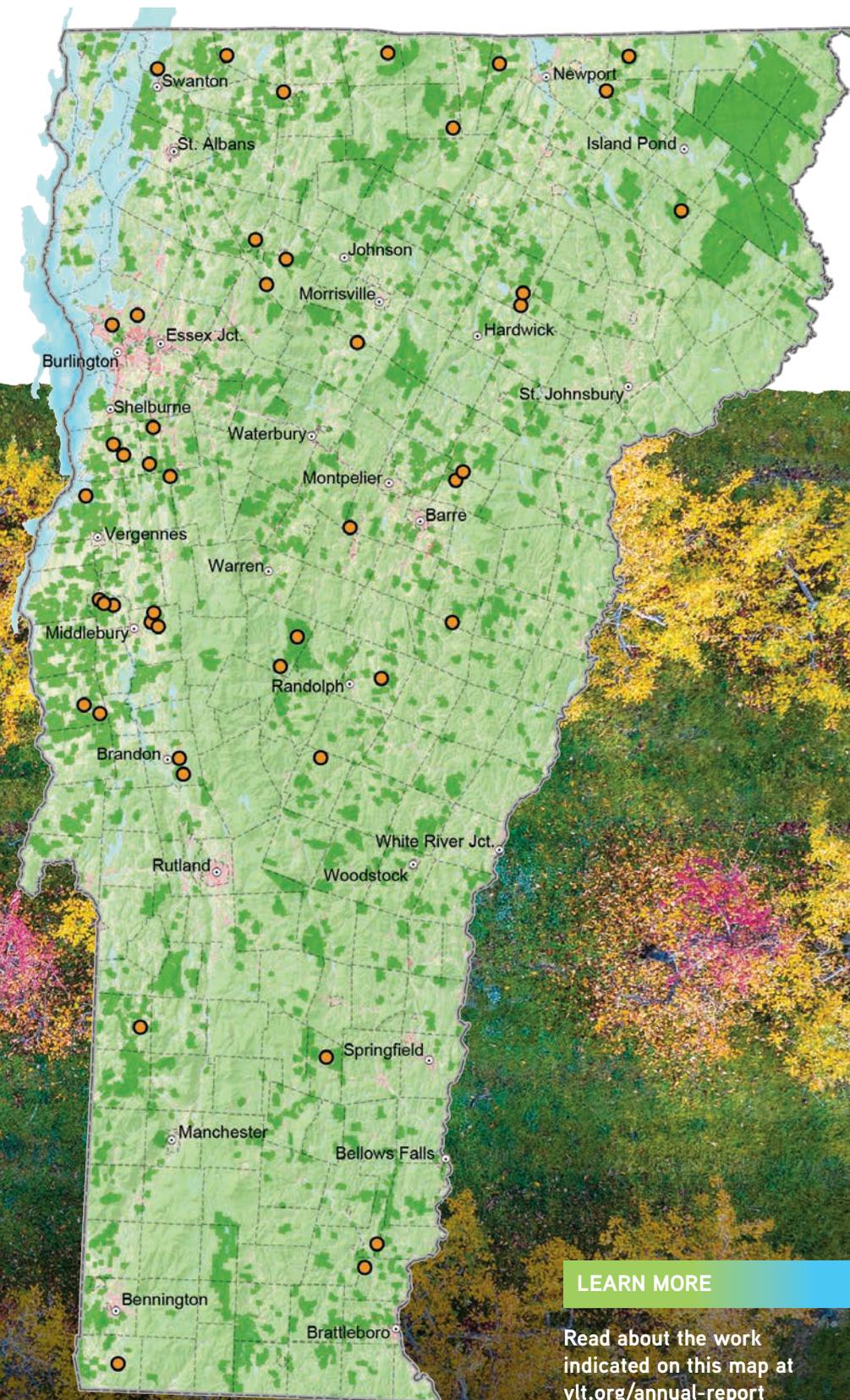
If this summer is a harbinger of things to come, we must do more.

With your help, we can double our efforts over the next few years, increasing our pace of protection and restoration. Our land and water—and our flood-prone communities—can't wait.

Our Work This Year

14,367 acres
protected in 2022-23

638,672 acres
conserved over 46 years



LEARN MORE

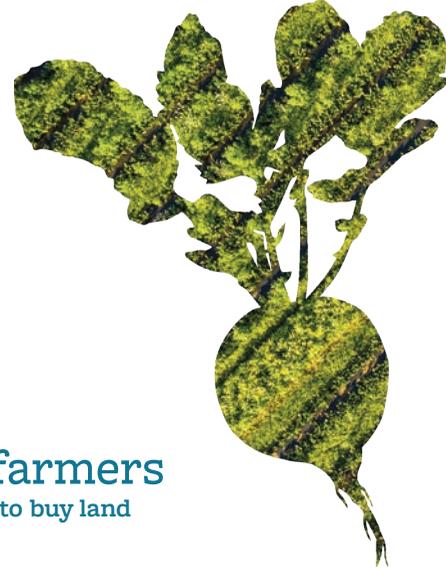
Read about the work
indicated on this map at
vlt.org/annual-report

Our Work This Year

Farms that sustain us

We focused on helping farm businesses flourish, securing land for new farmers, and supporting retiring farmers who want to see the next generation farm their land.

First-time farm owner Gus Griffin and his partner Mollie Podmore are growing local food for the community on 203 acres in Berlin. **Terry and Julie Rice**, third-generation farmers, are stewarding 498 acres in Highgate, with farmland, sugarbush, streams, and 150+ acres of wetlands.



4,100+ acres
conserved on 29 farms

7 new farmers
were able to buy land

Forests and wildlife

We prioritized the protection of large forest blocks to improve flood safety, store carbon, and support biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and livelihoods.

7,385 acres were protected on the Northfield range, with high-elevation peaks and headwater streams of the Connecticut River. **1,900+ acres** in Newark were conserved, with a sugaring operation, cliffside-breeding habitat for Peregrine falcons, and three peaks.



10,000+ acres
of new forestland
conservation

9,800+ acres
open for recreation

Land for all

We deepened community connections by holding events, welcoming visitors to lands we own, hosting community gardens, and supporting access to land and local food for everyone.

Chuda and Gita Dhaurali bought the 220-acre Pine Island Farm in Colchester after 10 years of leasing land from us while they built up their goat business. **Over 100 families** benefited from community gardens and 40 New American families received culturally significant food at lowered cost.



9,346 pounds
of produce grown
for people in need

2,466 attendees
at 54 educational events

Clean water

We redoubled our efforts to protect Vermont's watersheds for clean water, flood safety, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity.

14,800+ native trees and shrubs were planted along wetlands, rivers, and streams across the state, together with farmers, volunteers, and partners. We worked to **restore stream health** on two farms in Colchester and Fletcher by adding woody material to slow down sediment and water, create pools for wetland species, and help streams return to their natural state.



59 miles
of land along rivers and
streams conserved

518 acres
of wetland protected

Farming with intention

Growing healthy land

Monument Farms is a large dairy known for bottling its own milk, including the chocolate milk beloved by kids and grown-ups alike. How do they weather the ups and downs of the dairy industry? By growing slowly, said third-generation farm manager, Peter James (pictured in blue, with his son, Tyler James).

Conservation also helps. The Weybridge dairy owns more than 1,000 conserved acres of Champlain Valley farmland. "VLT has enabled farmers to continue their business, increase their business, and stay afloat," Peter said.

But Monument Farms doesn't just run a successful dairy. "They do it in a way that benefits the environment and the community around them," said VLT's Adam Piper.

This year, Monument Farms protected 35 acres of wetlands along a mile of the Lemon Fair River. Two years ago, they set aside another wetland area to hold floodwater and sustain wildlife. They use field buffers and cover crops to keep nutrients out of streams.

Off the clock, Peter loves spending time in the woods his family has conserved. "We chose to let the woodland grow up," Peter said. "Now you look at it, going, 'Wow, this is great.'"

LEARN MORE

vlt.org/monument-farms

“I'd rather see wildlife running around than trying to manufacture cropland where it shouldn't be.”

Peter James, Monument Farms

New farmers, old farm

Matching beloved farms and beginning farmers

It's one thing to start a new farm, another to take on an institution. But Dan and Elyse Wulfkuhle make it look easy at the beloved Wood's Market Garden in Brandon.

In 2000, we helped Jon Satz buy the farm. It was one of our early efforts to help beginning farmers find land. Jon built a thriving veggie business. After his passing two years ago, the land needed new farmers.

Dan and Elyse, who came from Washington state, had been searching for a farm for six years. Vermont came up in their search again and again.

"One reason we were drawn to Vermont is VLT," said Dan. "There's no way we would have been able to buy the farm without them."

This year, the farmstand was filled with flowers, starts, and produce—from organic corn to tomatoes.

But this is just the beginning. "We have tons of ideas," added Dan. "In the next three to five years we plan to grow more and maybe do some innovative crop rotations."

LEARN MORE

vlt.org/woods-market-garden



“We’re stepping into such a beloved institution.”
We’re really lucky to get the chance.
It makes everything easier.

Dan Wulfkuhle, Wood's Market Garden

A forested haven

Connecting trails, connecting habitat

The Putney Mountain Association has been waiting 30 years to protect Hinton Woods, a 140-acre parcel in Brookline and Putney. It's a haven of wetlands, vernal pools, forest streams, and an endangered sedge. It also connects 1,000+ acres of forest along Windmill Ridge.

The goal was a trail that went from Grafton to Prospect Hill in Dummerston. "We did that several years ago, through a combination of conservation and trail easements," said association board member Pat Shields. "Except we didn't have this central piece."

Until now. Libby Mills, a longtime association member, knew the Hinton family and helped establish a trail on their land in 2012. This year, the association was able to buy and conserve the property, connecting conserved lands north to south.

Now, a trail named Libby's Way beckons visitors to Hinton Woods. Expanded access encourages birders and hikers to go off trail.

But it's not just the trail, explained Pat. "We really wanted to conserve the habitat for wildlife and plants, especially in terms of climate change."

LEARN MORE

vlt.org/windmill-ridge

“We really need to conserve as much land as we can, for people and wildlife and plants... You can cut a forest and it will grow back. But once you develop the land, it's gone.”

Pat Shields, Putney Mountain Association

Family farm works with nature

Letting rivers run free

In 1992, Anne and Joe Tisbert bought and conserved 306 acres in Vermont's idyllic Pleasant Valley. They called the farm Valley Dream: it was their dream come true.

Today they grow organic vegetables and host farm dinners, while their daughter Becky runs a flower business.

The Tisberts' four kids grew up playing in the Seymour River, which meanders through the woods and fields, flowing to the Lamoille River and then Lake Champlain. Protecting the water has always been a priority.

"Our water comes from the aquifer under this farm," said Anne (pictured far left). "I don't want to contaminate it. I don't want to destroy it."

This year, they protected 64 acres along the river, other streams, and wetlands at Valley Dream for clean water and flood safety. The river will have more space to move on this land, spreading into the floodplain forest when water rises.

The resulting oasis will support wildlife, from pollinating insects to large mammals, help the land adapt to a changing climate, and slow future floodwaters for the benefit of those downstream.

LEARN MORE
vlt.org/valley-dream-farm



“Nature and people need to work together.”

Anne Tisbert, Valley Dream Farm



We are grateful

Nothing you've read about in this report could happen without the dedication and commitment of supporters like you. You help us make meaningful change and protect what matters most. Your motivation drives us and your support enables us to conserve working lands and restore our natural environment.

We are so grateful to you.

LAST YEAR

3,300+ members
contributed \$3,712,289

Gifts came from
43 states

The top five
contributing states
(outside of Vermont) were
Massachusetts, New York,
Connecticut, California,
and Pennsylvania!

71% of members
who gave last year
gave again

Of those donors,
23%
have been supporting
VLT for 10+ years

Supporters protected
10,100+ acres
of their own land by
donating conservation
easements

Thank you, VLT community!



“I have three grandkids and they’re Vermont kids. They spend a lot of time outside. We watch the birds, look at snakes, look for salamanders... It’s something that I value. I feel really privileged to be able to enjoy nature and feel that I should give back in some way, particularly so the forest is there in the future.”

Margaret McNurlan
Hinesburg

The woods bordering Margaret McNurlan’s Hinesburg backyard are the jumping off point for dog walks and adventures with her grandchildren. Margaret became acquainted with our work as a supporter for the Hinesburg Town Forest’s conservation and expansion, which we helped achieve in 2022. Her experience inspired her to become a monthly sustaining member, providing a continuous source of revenue for our work. It’s a budget-friendly way to help protect the state’s natural beauty and resources.



“We came from the Midwest and were disheartened to see the mass development there. The farmlands that I used to drive through when I was a teenager are now housing developments and shopping centers. So, when we came here, it was like, ‘Wow, this is great.’ We now work as much as we can to help keep this land intact and as beautiful as it is.”

Lew & Claudia Rose
Enosburgh

Twenty-six years ago, Lew and Claudia Rose bought 120 wooded acres in Enosburgh. In 2012, they conserved their land with us, and this year they set up a legacy gift to donate their land to VLT. When we eventually sell their land, we’ll use the proceeds to fund more conservation in the region, in partnership with Cold Hollow to Canada. Their gift will support other landowners who want to conserve land so more forest can be protected.

Thank you to all the funders and partners who support the protection of Vermont’s landscape

VLT members and other individuals	Hinesburg Land Trust	Town of Plainfield	Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
Landowners, including those who donated land and conservation protections	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s New England Forests and Rivers Fund	USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service	Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Charlotte Land Trust	Open Space Institute	USDA Farm Service Agency’s Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	William P. Wharton Trust
Cold Hollow to Canada	Otter Creek Basin Clean Water Service Provider	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and their Partners for Fish and Wildlife program	Other private foundations and businesses
Davis Conservation Foundation	The Conservation Fund		
Freeman Foundation	Town of Charlotte		
Greensboro Land Trust and their Mary Witherbee Fund	Town of Middlebury	Vermont Community Foundation and their Green Mountain Fund	
	Town of Monkton		

Financial Information

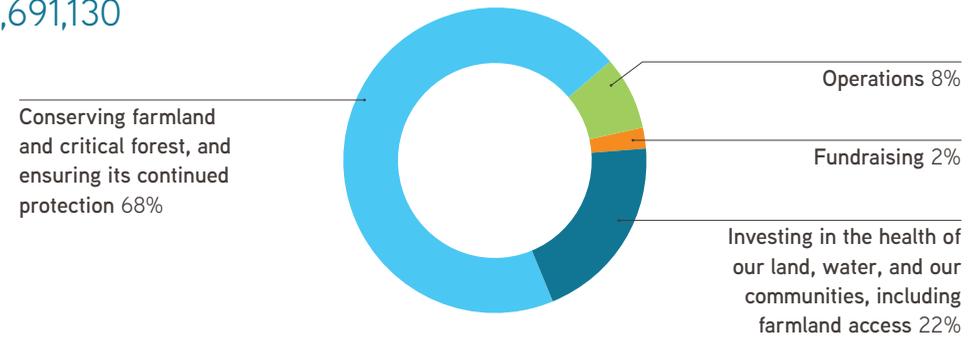
LEARN MORE

Find more information at vlt.org/annual-report

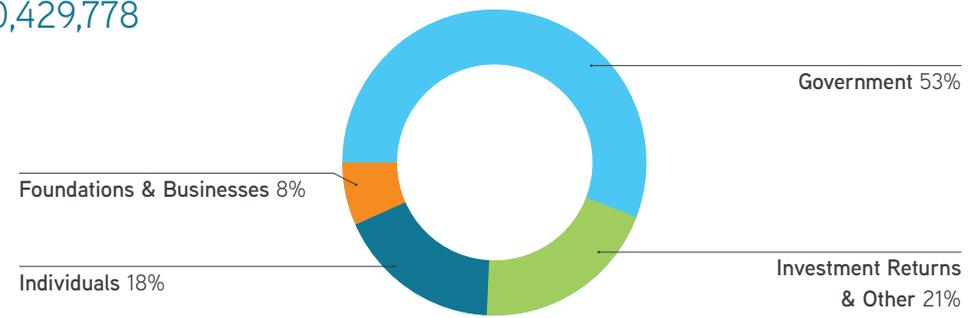
Fiscal year overview

Among the highlights of fiscal year ending June 30, 2023 were a rebound in investments—which grew our stewardship endowment—and new gifts of land. Our net assets decreased from \$45.8 million to \$44.5 million because of a one-time gift that was received in fiscal year 2022, but was allocated in fiscal year 2023. This use of assets explains the gap between Uses of Funds and Sources of Funds for this year. Over 60% of our net assets are restricted, and include specific project funds, land, and investments.

Uses of Funds \$21,691,130



Sources of Funds \$20,429,778



The Vermont Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) organization. This financial information is unaudited. Once completed, final financial statements and accompanying auditor's report will be available on request from our Montpelier office at (802) 223-5234.



Credits

Photos and locations

Front cover: Auriel Gray and Zoryan Ivakhiv-Gray on the Porter Brook Nature Trail at the Highland Lodge, Greensboro; by Kyle Gray. Inside front cover: Wetlands at Blue Ledge Farm in Leicester, holding water in August 2023 after the July storms; by Caleb Kenna. Back cover, by Caleb Kenna.

Stories

Rachel Mullis: pp. 8, 10, 12, and 14.

Design

Ruthless & Wellington

Printing

Leahy Press
This is printed on unbleached mixed percentage post-consumer recycled fiber that is FSC manufactured.

Interior photos by Caleb Kenna unless specified. Pg 2: Seymour River at Valley Dream Farm, Cambridge. Pg 3: Farmers Hannah and John Doyle plant native trees at Boneyard Farm, Cambridge; courtesy of Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District. Pg 4-5: Champlain Orchards, Shoreham. Pg 6: bottom, by Bob Heiser. Pg 8-9: L to R, Peter James and his son, Tyler James, at Monument Farms, Weybridge. Pg 10-11: L to R, Elyse, Theo, Clara, and Dan Wulfkuhle at Wood's Market Garden in Brandon. Pg 12-13: Hinton Woods, Brookline and Putney; by Ben Kimball. Pg 14-15: L to R, Anne, Jay, Joe, and Becky Tisbert at Valley Dream Farm, Cambridge. Pg 16-17: Prospect Mountain, Woodford; by David Middleton. Pg 18: top, Margaret McNurlan; bottom, Lew and Claudia Rose; by Kyle Gray. Pg 19: Boyce Hill Town Forest, Fayston; by Kyle Gray.





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