



Our Year in Review

2024-25



Dear Friends,

At the Vermont Land Trust, we've always known that conservation is powered by people. This year, as we face growing uncertainty and divisiveness, we are reminded just how deeply connected we all are — to each other, to the land, and to the communities we call home.

During these challenging times, our shared purpose to unite land and lives carries us forward. We stay focused on what we do best — helping people protect, care for, and connect to land across this incredible state. And this year there is much to celebrate. We have protected over 6,300 acres of forest and farmland, expanding our cumulative conservation footprint to more than 650,000 acres across Vermont. We've restored streambanks and planted over 7,400 trees. We've expanded public access to land and created more opportunities for learning and connection. We're also celebrating 20 years of our Land Stewards Awards, which have recognized more than 175 young Vermonters who are shaping the future of agriculture and forestry.

When we care for the land, it cares for us. In this report, we invite you to delve deeper into a few projects that exemplify this year's collective impact. Each demonstrates the power of conservation to unite land and lives across Vermont, today and always. And each pushes back against the national tide looking to stop or roll back the progress on things we value deeply and that cannot be taken for granted — clean water, fresh local food, healthy forests, and clean air.

As we look ahead, we know the challenges are real. But so is our resolve. Conservation is enduring. And it's made possible by people like you.

Thank you for standing with us.

With gratitude,

Tracy Zschau
President & CEO

Mike Donohue
Chair, Board of Trustees



“
Conservation
is enduring.
And it's made
possible by
people like you.”

Our Work This Year

6,381 acres
protected in 2024-25

653,826 acres
conserved over 48 years



Forests & wildlife

We protected a range of forests and habitats for wildlife, biodiversity, carbon storage, clean water, and livelihoods. We also conserved lands for communities to enjoy and care for — in Berlin, Dummerston, Monkton, South Burlington, and Westminster.

We conserved **1,214 acres of working forest**, wetlands, and headwater streams in Belvidere and Eden, adding to a large block of State-owned and private unfragmented forest along the Green Mountains. We helped the Town of **Monkton buy and protect 450 acres to create its town forest**. Jenny and Dave Emery donated conservation protections on 292 acres of predominantly forested land with **abundant wildlife in Rochester and Braintree**.

3,900+ acres
conserved

2,100+ acres open for
recreation

Town forests and
community lands in
5 towns

Bird habitat
improved on 15+ acres



Farms that sustain us

We helped farms flourish: securing land for beginning farmers, supporting retiring farmers so the next generation can farm their land, and adding protections for rivers, streams, and wetlands on farm properties.

In Bennington, farmer **Becca Knouss became a first-time owner** to support her growing goat dairy. In Williamstown, fourth-generation farmers **Rodney and Barbara Graham conserved their family farm** for their beef and maple business, and for the next generation of farmers in the family.

2,400+ acres
protected

15+ farm businesses
strengthened

9 farmers were able to
secure land

10+ farms added
protections for
clean water



Land for all

13,300+ pounds of produce
grown for people in need

1,250+ attendees
at 31 educational events

Accessible trails
built at 2 locations

~100 families
benefitted from community gardens

We deepened connection to the land and its care by offering educational events, supporting community access to land, and making the lands we own more welcoming to all — hosting community gardens, improving recreation trails, and supporting access to local food for people from all backgrounds.

We helped Green Commons of Vermont secure land for the longstanding **Putney farmers' market and community garden** downtown. We upgraded a mile-long trail at Brewster Uplands in Cambridge to **welcome visitors using wheelchairs and other mobility devices**.



Climate resilience & clean water

We redoubled our efforts to protect and restore Vermont's watersheds for clean water, flood safety, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity. We planted native trees and shrubs, added woody material to streams and gullies, and removed man-made barriers to restore floodplains and reduce flood risk.

In Dorset, **we removed a small dam on conserved land owned by Jeff Simpson** to restore a headwater tributary of Otter Creek to its natural state. In Hinesburg, **we planted nearly 1,000 native trees and shrubs** along a tributary of the La Platte River on the conserved Ballard farm.

Planted 7,400+
native trees & shrubs along waterways

Protected 40 miles
along rivers and streams

640+ acres
of wetland conserved

Projects in
10 counties



Joy in nature

A wild haven for youth to call their own

Mike Foote still remembers the look on a group of high schoolers' faces last summer as they climbed out of their canoes at Camp DREAM's waterfront. "I had never seen high schoolers giddy in that way," he said. "It's wonderful to see that real-time impact — those a-ha moments."

The program offers transformative outdoor experiences, free of charge, for youth from affordable housing communities — many of whom might not otherwise experience such programs. At DREAM's wooded camp on the shores of Metcalf Pond in Fletcher, campers explore, play, garden, and become stewards of the environment. Former campers return as mentors, and families see lasting impacts.

This year, with help from VLT, Camp DREAM added something new: a one-acre island on Metcalf Pond, only a five-minute paddle from their home base. As a site for wildlife observation, ecology studies, and future overnight stays, the isle will help break barriers to nature access and nurture love for the natural world. "You're paddling out there, you get to an island and it's DREAM's, it's yours...," Mike said. "It's just something you will never forget."

“ They’re building connections to nature and strong relationships. These kids become fiercely loyal to that environment and are protective of it. ”

Mike Foote, co-founder and Empowerment Director, DREAM Program

Sowing hope

Farmers turn uncertainty into a bountiful future

Kagen Dewey and Elise Magnant spent five grueling years growing food and building their farm business on leased land. But without land of their own, the future felt uncertain.

When they finally secured over 70 conserved acres in Marshfield through our Farmland Access Program, they transformed Blackbird Organics — improving soil health, investing in infrastructure, starting a CSA program, and almost tripling revenue.

Their farm supplies local markets, co-ops, and food assistance programs. Being owners also means they can provide stable jobs for three employees.

For Elise and Kagen, conservation was the difference between being able to farm or not. “If it wasn’t conserved, we wouldn’t be here — we wouldn’t be able to afford it,” Kagen says.

Looking ahead, they plan to increase production, expand their CSA, and more. Their dream: a thriving farm that feeds the community and nurtures the next generation of growers.

“There’s a trickle-down effect of stability. Our employees feel invested in the work because they know this farm isn’t going anywhere.”

Elise Magnant, farmer, Blackbird Organics



Safe passage

Reconnecting Vermont's natural landscape

Vermont's Taconic Mountains, rich in calcium and biodiversity, form a crucial wildlife corridor between the Hudson Highlands and Lake Champlain. As the climate changes rapidly, wildlife needs safe passage to survive and adapt. Jens Hilke, a lead conservation planner with the state, emphasizes that connectivity is crucial for species survival. A single black bear crossing between populations can introduce vital genetic diversity. Even small parcels can have outsized impact, when they reconnect larger forest blocks.

That's the case with 334 acres in Sandgate that we recently protected with The Conservation Fund, linking up two other protected parcels and strengthening a north-south pathway. With Dry Oak Forests, vernal pools, and streams feeding into the Batten Kill River, the parcel has habitats essential for many species. "Protected land will remain undeveloped," said Jens. "That's critically important."

“ Protected lands often look like islands ”
in this sea of private land. But those lands
will remain undeveloped and that's
critically important.

Jens Hilke, Conservation Planner, Vermont Fish & Wildlife



Stewardship and wonder

Restoring a forest with curiosity and care

Wildlife biologists Emily Cayer and Robert Small have found purpose in a 300-acre forest in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. The land had been unsustainably logged in the past, and on their first exploration it felt "like we had stumbled upon a forest of misfit trees," Emily said. Inspired by the opportunity to nurture the forest, they bought the land and protected it with us.

Now they steward the land, blending scientific curiosity with wonder for the wild. They've traced five miles of paths to watch over and learn from the land, including observing wildlife through game cameras. Along the way, they've named beloved spots like Bobcat Cliffs and Baby Tree Meadow. Living beside the 111,000-acre Steam Mill Brook Wildlife Management Area, their land supports vital habitat connectivity. Building a timber-framed home and barn deepened their appreciation for sustainable forestry and the local wood economy.

Through it all, they say, they don't feel ownership over the land. They feel gratitude for the opportunity to be stewards of such a beautiful piece of the state.

“ It's like a sanctuary up here. I feel like we're living with our forest and with our land, instead of just on it. ”

Emily Cayer, steward of conserved land



Shared land, shared lives

Farmers unite for community and sustainability

In one of Vermont's busiest counties, a handful of neighboring farms have chosen an unfamiliar path: instead of competing for customers, land, and resources, they are building something together that could outlast them all.

The Agrihood Collective is a farmer-led nonprofit that owns conserved land and leases it back to mission-aligned farm businesses. It's a simple idea with lasting benefits: give farmers the long-term security they need to farm sustainably. For working farms, that shift changes everything. "You get time security and financial security," says founding member and farmer, Brandon Bless. "It lets you do your best work for the land and the farm business."

The Collective owns 360 acres in South Burlington that we conserved with the help of many partners. The group has begun stewarding the land and working towards shared infrastructure, farm worker housing, community space, and miles of public trails connecting to nearby conserved properties. None of this is about short-term gain. "We want healthy land, healthy communities, and healthy ecosystems for the generations that follow," says co-founder and farmer, Corie Pierce.

“Success is recognizing humans are intrinsically part of the natural world. We can make a living in balance with these ecosystems, and support many families, without extracting.”

Corie Pierce, farmer and founding member, The Agrihood Collective

Wet feet, lasting lessons

Students restore river in Jericho

On a bright spring day, Hadrian, an eighth grader, stood ankle-deep in the Lee River. He was planting willow stakes to restore the eroded banks on a conserved Jericho farm. Hadrian's class from the Willowell Foundation joined us to learn about erosion and river health through hands-on work.

For Hadrian, the day was "very, very fun" — a sentiment echoed by teacher Eric Warren, who believes outdoor experiences create lasting learning. Students remember the joy first, then absorb the science over time.

VLT ecologist Allaire Diamond involved students in planting willows along the bank and in gravel bars midstream, to mimic natural floodplain growth. Alongside, Allaire was teaching that healthy rivers are messy and dynamic. Splashing through pools and muck, students were connecting with the land.

The project is part of a broader effort to inspire future stewards. From tree planting to wetland walks, these immersive experiences help students understand more about the ecosystems around them. Eric summed it up: "Kids gain an appreciation for being out in nature simply by being there."

“ Being out in the water and getting their feet in the mud creates a more emotional and visceral connection. When kids have an emotional connection, they learn better. ”

Eric Warren, teacher, Willowell Foundation

Who makes all this happen?

You do.



Every thing you're reading about in this report happened because people like you stepped up to care for this land.

You help us protect what matters most at a time when so much of our natural world is under threat.

As a statewide land trust, our most powerful tool is the protection of land. Once a piece of land is conserved, it is **protected forever**. You make this happen.

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL AND WE CANNOT DO THIS WITHOUT YOU.

3,000+ members
contributed \$6,563,078

Gifts came from
39 states

The top five
contributing states
(after Vermont) were
Massachusetts, Pennsylvania,
Florida, New Jersey,
and New Hampshire.

71% of members
who gave last year
gave again

On average, our members
have been with us for
7 consecutive years

In Vermont alone,
donors came from
**284 towns
and villages**

Supporters protected
1,600+ acres
by donating
conservation easements

Thank you, VLT community!

Sam Hawkey | Wellesley, MA

Sam Hawkey has been a supporter for more than two decades. Raised in Massachusetts, he grew up spending vacations and weekends in Vermont with his parents, exploring the woods. Now, he and his wife Nicole are raising their three children in the same tradition — taking frequent trips north to introduce them to the outdoor activities that Sam still loves: bow hunting, hiking, chopping wood, prowling the woods, and more. “I hope when my kids are my age, Vermont will have the same open spaces, amazing feel, and opportunities for outdoor activities that make it so unique,” he says. “Seeing how effectively the Vermont Land Trust preserves land forever, and knowing my contributions help make that possible, has always been incredibly powerful for me.”

“Vermont has always been such a special place to me.”



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



Tom and Jeanette Berry | Colchester, VT

Conserved natural areas and farms play a significant role in the lives of Tom and Jeanette Berry — from the waters at Colchester Pond to backcountry skiing at Bolton Valley and farm-fresh produce as year-round CSA members at the Intervale Community Farm since 1992. They have donated to VLT each year since 2012, when they joined the effort to protect Bolton Valley. Tom is semi-retired from a career in conservation at the federal level and Jeanette is a retired accountant. In recent years, they started giving more and even donated some inherited stocks. “We are very outdoor-oriented and place a high value on access to Vermont open space and recreational lands, which are priorities for the Vermont Land Trust,” they shared.

“Once land is developed, you can’t undo that.”

We are grateful.

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|---|---|--|---|
| VLT members and other individuals | Fields Pond Foundation | Trees for Streams | Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, and its Recreational Trails Program |
| Landowners, including those who donated land or conservation protections | Freeman Foundation | USDA, its Natural Resources Conservation Service, and its Forest Service Community Forest and Open Space Program | Vermont Housing & Conservation Board |
| Volunteers, including students, AmeriCorps members, and community members | Friends of the Winooski River | Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports | Vermont Trails & Greenways Council |
| Audubon Vermont | Lintilhac Foundation | Vermont Association of Conservation Districts | Vermont Youth Conservation Corps |
| Bafflin Foundation | Lookout Foundation | Vermont Center for Independent Living | Watersheds United Vermont |
| City of South Burlington | Natural Resources Conservation Districts of Franklin County, Lamoille County, Orleans County, Otter Creek, Windham County, and Winooski | Vermont Community Foundation | Whipstock Hill Preservation Society |
| Cold Hollow to Canada | Open Space Institute | Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, and its Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Clean Water Service Providers Grant | Windham Foundation |
| Cornell Lab of Ornithology Land Trust Small Grants Program | The Conservation Fund | | William P. Wharton Trust |
| Cornell University’s Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative | The Nature Conservancy | | Winooski Clean Water Service Provider |
| Davis Conservation Fund | Town of Berlin | | Other private foundations and businesses |
| | Town of Calais | | |
| | Town of Enosburgh Conservation Fund | | |
| | Town of Monkton | | |

Financial information

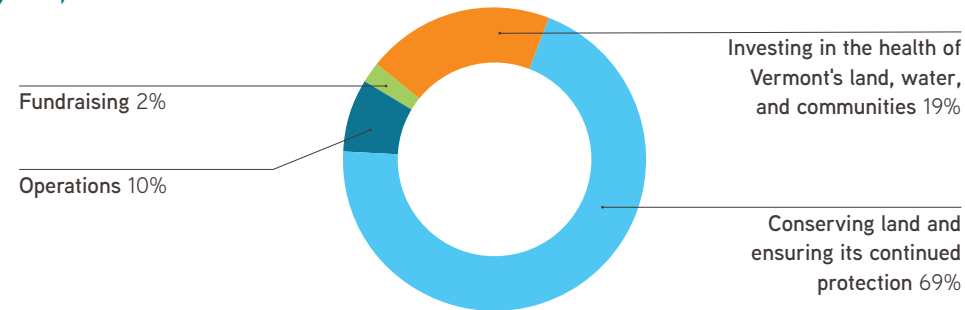
LEARN MORE

Fiscal year overview

The fiscal year ending June 30, 2025 saw an increase in our net assets. Several revenue events — including bequests, gifts of land, contributions to our stewardship endowment, along with favorable interest and investment income — contributed to this growth. Overall revenue was down from the previous year, primarily due to a reduction in government grants which had been historically high the year prior.

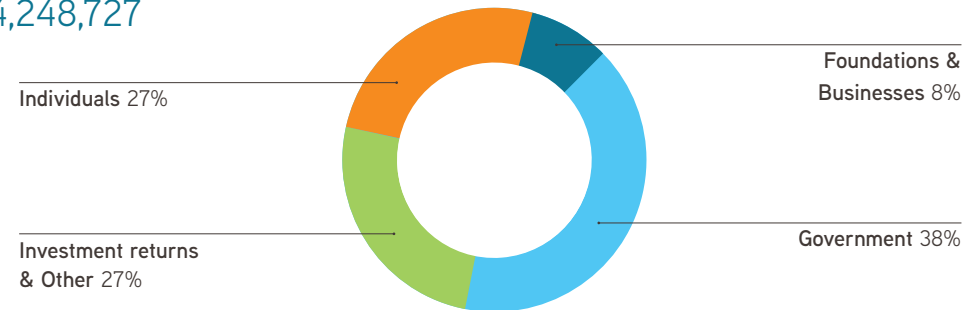
Uses of Funds

\$17,910,774



Sources of Funds

\$24,248,727



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 by Caleb Kenna, unless specified.

Front cover: Elise Magnant of Blackbird Organics, Marshfield, by Kyle Gray. Inside front cover: Merck Forest & Farmland Center, Rupert.

Pg 2-3: Berlin Pond, by Kyle Gray. Pg 4: top, Indigo bunting, by Patrick LaClair; bottom left, Catamount Community Forest, Williston; bottom right, Pratt Refuge, Duxbury, by Kyle Gray. Pg 5: top, conserved Pawlet farm, by David Middleton; bottom left, conserved Danby farm, by David Middleton; bottom right, Becca Knouss of The Goat Project in Bennington, staff photo. Pg 6: bottom left, VLT staff during trail building, Pratt Refuge, Duxbury, staff photo; bottom right, Berni Kunztlmann, new accessible trail, Brewster Uplands, Cambridge, by Kyle Gray. Pg 7: top, Wells Lakeside Park, Wells; bottom left, tree planting along tributary of the La Platte River, Hinesburg, staff photo; bottom right, dam removal to restore a headwater tributary of Otter Creek, Dorset, staff photo. Pg 8-9: Azuri Benjamin with fellow campers at Camp DREAM in Fletcher. Pg 10-11: Elise Magnant and Kagen Dewey of Blackbird Organics in Marshfield, by Kyle Gray. Pg 12-13: Taconic Mountains, Sandgate. Pg 14-15: Emily Cayer and Robert Small, Stannard, by Kyle Gray. Pg 16-17: L to R, Brandon Bless, Breana Killeen, Kieran Killeen, and Corie Pierce of The Agrihood Collective, South Burlington. Pg 18-19: Students, teachers, and VLT staff at Lee River restoration project, Jericho, by Kyle Gray. Pg 20-21: Catamount Community Forest, Williston. Pg 22: top, Sam Hawkey with his wife, Nicole, and their three children, courtesy of Sam Hawkey; bottom, Tom and Jeanette Berry. Pg 23: Vermont Youth Conservation Corps at trail building project, Pratt Refuge, Duxbury, staff photo.

Inside back cover: VLT staff at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park's Forest Center, Woodstock. Back cover: Fox kit, Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, by Bob Heiser.

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