

# What We Accomplished

## 2012 Annual Report



**Highlights** - RI Land Trust Council started new programs and had another very successful year. Top accomplishments:

- ✓ **Open Space Bond approved** by the General Assembly & RI voters provides **\$9.5 million in funding for land conservation** & farmland protection with additional funding for parks, and watershed protection and restoration.
- ✓ **Launched Land Trust Days to increase the visibility of land trusts** and the special places they are protecting. **33 land trusts and partners organized 50 activities in communities across the state** with great press coverage and good attendance at events.
- ✓ Produced and distributed *You Can Save Rhode Island's Working Farms*, a brochure for state and community leaders documenting the pressing need for farmland conservation.
- ✓ Conservation Defense legislation passed that helps to defend land trusts and land that is protected by conservation easements by preventing law suits and legal costs.

### State Legislation & Policy

**2012 was RI Land Trust Council's 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of success at the RI Statehouse.**

We pursue legislation to support land trusts and land conservation and to defend land conservation accomplishments. The Council's top 2012 priority was pursuing an open space bond referendum for the November ballot.

- **Open Space Bond** - The General Assembly placed a \$20 million Environmental Management bond referendum on the November ballot including **\$9.5 million for land conservation** (farmland protection \$4.5 million; Local Open Space Grants \$2.5 million; State Land Acquisition \$2.5 million; Local Parks Grants \$6.5 million; Bay & Watershed Restoration \$4.0 million). Many land trusts made calls, sent letters to their representatives, asked their towns to adopt resolutions endorsing the bond and helped to build grass roots voter support for the bond. On Election Day, nearly 70% of the state's **voters approved the Bond** with a strong majority in every municipality.
- RI General Assembly adopted the Council's 2012 **Conservation Defense** legislation that **reduces the threat that non-profit land trusts and their conservation easements** face from lawsuits by people who are not connected with the easements. **This helps land trusts reduce their risks and avoid legal costs. Rhode Island is one of the few states with this protection.** This legislation also re-enforces the fact that the Attorney General CAN enforce conservation easements and the public benefits they provide. Thank you to our legislative sponsors - Senator Sosnowski & Representative Walsh.
- **Campaign Finance Reporting Legislation** - passed with significant amendments to **protect land trusts' ability to promote state and municipal open space bond referendums.**

### Opposed Threatening Legislation

- **"Dry Lands Bill"** - **did NOT pass.** This legislation **proposed to restrict municipal authority to protect wetlands, groundwater quality and steep slopes** by limiting local government's ability to establish lot size requirements in areas with these sensitive environmental characteristics. Paul Roselli, President of the Burrillville Land Trust and RI Land Trust Council Board Member, coordinated and led the grass-roots opposition that stopped this legislation. More than 10 Town Councils adopted resolutions opposed to this legislation.

### Additional Highlights of Council Initiatives

- The Council's Director was invited to participate in a select **National Roundtable on Conservation Easement Amendments**. The Council's inclusion in this roundtable is a recognition of our accomplishments establishing state policies and legislation to defend conservation easements.
- **Agriculture Conservation - continuing our initiative to improve farm conservation policies and practices.** These efforts build on the recommendations from the forum we held in February 2010: *FarmRI 2.0 – Crafting the next generation of farm conservation strategies*. The Council:
  - Published and distributed a brochure, *You can Save Rhode Island's working farms*, that distills the key information, issues and recommendations from the *FarmRI 2.0* report. This short brochure is designed to provide information to community leaders. Both publications & a video are on our website: [www.RILandTrusts.org](http://www.RILandTrusts.org)
  - Is a member of Land For Good's New England Land Access Project - Non-Farm Landowner Working Group which published two handbooks in 2012:
    - Handbook for Land Trusts, Municipalities & Institutions on Leasing Land for Farming
    - Handbook for individual property owners on Leasing Land for FarmingBoth guides are on the Council's website. The first Handbook is based on an earlier version the Council wrote for Rhode Island. The project is also researching innovative tenure arrangements and developing land linking to connect farmers with people with land to lease.
  - Is a member of American Farmland Trust's - *Keep New England Farmland in Farming* project. We participated in an October farmland protection retreat for federal and state agency staff and land conservation leaders involved in farmland protection in New England.
  - Is an active member of the RI Agriculture Partnership which developed a 5-year *Rhode Island Agriculture Strategic Plan* and is working on implementation.

### Networking, Capacity Building & Resources

- **9<sup>th</sup> Land & Conservation Water Summit** - our signature event of the year - held March 10, 2012 - offered 30 workshops and was attended by over 300 people.
  - Keynote Speaker: Lisa Wong – Mayor of Fitchburg, Massachusetts spoke about: **“Urban Conservation as a Revitalization Strategy.”** She described how land conservation & watershed protection are playing a core role in Fitchburg's revitalization despite a difficult fiscal climate.
  - **Presentation of Land Trusts' 2011 Top Accomplishments** - Paul Roselli (Council Board Member & Burrillville Land Trust President) gave an inspiring report for the Council's Annual meeting.
- **Launched Land Trust Days** - a great success! Land Trust Days (an initiative from the Council's 2011 strategic plan) was initiated to:
  - **increase the visibility of land trusts and the special places that they are protecting** in communities across the state; and
  - encourage more people to get outdoors, find and enjoy the protected land in their communities.

33 Land Trusts and partner organizations sponsored 50 activities between August 1 and September 30. Land Trust Days activities included guided walks and a wide variety of other activities: full moon walks, star gazing, geocaching, doggie poker (a game for people and their dogs), campfires, hotdog roasts and family festivals. A kick-off was held Friday, August 10 at Neutaconkanut Hill in Providence with Mayor Angel Taveras and coordinated with RIDEM's Great Outdoor Pursuit. Land Trust Days received great media coverage including front page in the Providence Journal, EcoRI and other electronic media, newspapers across the state. The “closing” celebration - on Sunday, September 23 – was a Rally for Open Space at the South Kingstown Land Trust Barn complete with live music, wine tasting and remarks from RIDEM Director Janet Coit about the land conservation bond on the November ballot.

- **Land Trust Trails website** - In coordination with Land Trust Days, the Council is working to get all the land trusts' trails mapped and available on one website to increase public awareness and use of the trails. The Council is collaborating with the Blueways Alliance which developed *ExploreRI* – a website for paddling routes and boat launching locations around the state. We are expanding *ExploreRI* to include maps of walking trail maps. The Council has drafted trail safety information for the website and is providing coaching and consulting support to help land trusts get their trails mapped. The website will go live with trails at the 2013 Land & Water Summit.
- **Implementing the Land Trust Excellence Partnership with Land Trust Alliance (Alliance).** RI Land Trust Council and the Alliance are working together to help land trusts across the state implement Standards and Practices – the nationally recognized best practices for land conservation. In 2012, we began to provide consulting support to the first group of 4 selected land trusts (Barrington, Foster, Hopkinton, North Kingstown) to help them implement their priority Standards and Practices. We also held 2 workshops as part of this initiative (see below for details).
- **Workshops.** The Council & Alliance collaborated on 2 workshops in 2012:
  - **Accreditation Preparation Work Session** was held November 17. Sylvia Bates, from the Alliance, led a discussion and answered questions for land trusts that are preparing for accreditation. Four land trusts participated: Block Island Conservancy, South Kingstown Land Trust, Tiverton Land Trust, and Westerly Land Trust. Representatives from Sakonnet Preservation Association also shared their accreditation experience.
  - **How to Raise Funds for Conservation Stewardship & Legal Defense**, held on December 1, was designed to help land trusts fundraise for stewardship and legal defense.
- **RI Land Trust Council Website continues to be upgraded:** [www.RILandTrusts.org](http://www.RILandTrusts.org)  
The site provides information about the Council and provides links to: land trusts around the state; our agriculture videos and reports; and other resource information.  
The Council and the **Rhode Island Land & Water Partnership** also maintain a companion website: [www.landandwaterpartnership.org](http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org) with an **on-line stewardship library**.
- The Council continues to **represent the state's land trust community in statewide** coalitions, partnerships and policy discussions so that land trusts' interests are included in decisions and initiatives.
- **Conservation Stewardship Collaborative (CSC)** - The Council represents the land trust community as one of 7 members of this coalition. The CSC is working to improve stewardship of Rhode Island's protected lands and is supported by an endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation established by the Sharpe Family. **CSC initiatives benefit land trusts and their stewardship work.** Specifically, CSC gave grants in 2012 and 2013 for:
  - the Council's state policy work;
  - a 2nd pilot project testing a revised **baseline documentation protocol** and developing a **management plan protocol**;
  - research & development of guidance & purchasing information for **signs and trail markers**;
  - research about **liability issues related to land trust use of trail cameras**; and
  - technical assistance to **help land trusts prepare trail maps for the ExploreRI** website.
 See the CSC website for details of projects funded: [www.ricsc.org](http://www.ricsc.org)
- **Land Trust E-news** - the Council continues to promote networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news and action alerts. Additional emails are sent to leaders of each land trust (presidents, chairs and executive directors).

## **How We Accomplished this: Grants & Funding Support**

The RI Land Trust Council's work is made possible by the contribution of **100s of hours of volunteer time and expertise by the Council's Board members and land trust leaders** from across the state. The Council's work is funded by generous contributions from land trusts (our members), foundations and other organizations and individuals.

**We appreciate this support that makes our work possible!**

### **Land Trusts Supporting RI Land Trust Council in 2012**

- Aquidneck Land Trust
- Audubon Society of RI
- Barrington Land Conservancy Trust
- Block Island Conservancy
- Block Island Land Trust
- Bristol Land Conservation Trust
- Burrillville Land Trust
- Charlestown Land Trust
- Conanicut Land Trust
- Cumberland Land Trust
- East Greenwich Land Trust
- East Providence Land Conservation Trust
- Foster Land Trust
- Gloucester Land Trust
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Land Conservancy of North Kingstown
- Lincoln Land Trust
- Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust
- North Smithfield Land Trust
- Narragansett Land Conservancy Trust
- Narrow River Land Trust
- The Nature Conservancy of RI
- Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy
- Prudence Conservancy
- RI Farm Bureau Land Trust
- Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust
- Sakonnet Preservation Association
- Smithfield Land Trust
- South Kingstown Land Trust
- Southside Community Land Trust
- Tiverton Land Trust
- Tiverton Open Space Commission
- Watch Hill Conservancy
- Warren Land Conservation Trust
- Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation
- The Westerly Land Trust
- West Greenwich Land Trust

### **Grants & Major Donations**

**Thank you** to these foundations, organizations and individuals for their generous contributions to the RI Land Trust Council in support of land conservation and land trusts' work across the state:

**The Rhode Island Foundation**

**Conservation Stewardship Endowment @ The Rhode Island Foundation**

**van Beuren Charitable Foundation**

**Prince Charitable Trusts**

**Prospect Hill Foundation**

**Sharpe Family Foundation/Julie & Henry Sharpe III**

**Hazard Family Foundation**

**Woodcock Charitable Fund**

**Audubon Society of Rhode Island (in kind)**

**RI Department of Environmental Management Trail Grant**

**Land For Good**

**Board Members (current & former) of RI Land Trust Council**

**Thank YOU for supporting the RI Land Trust Council's Work!**