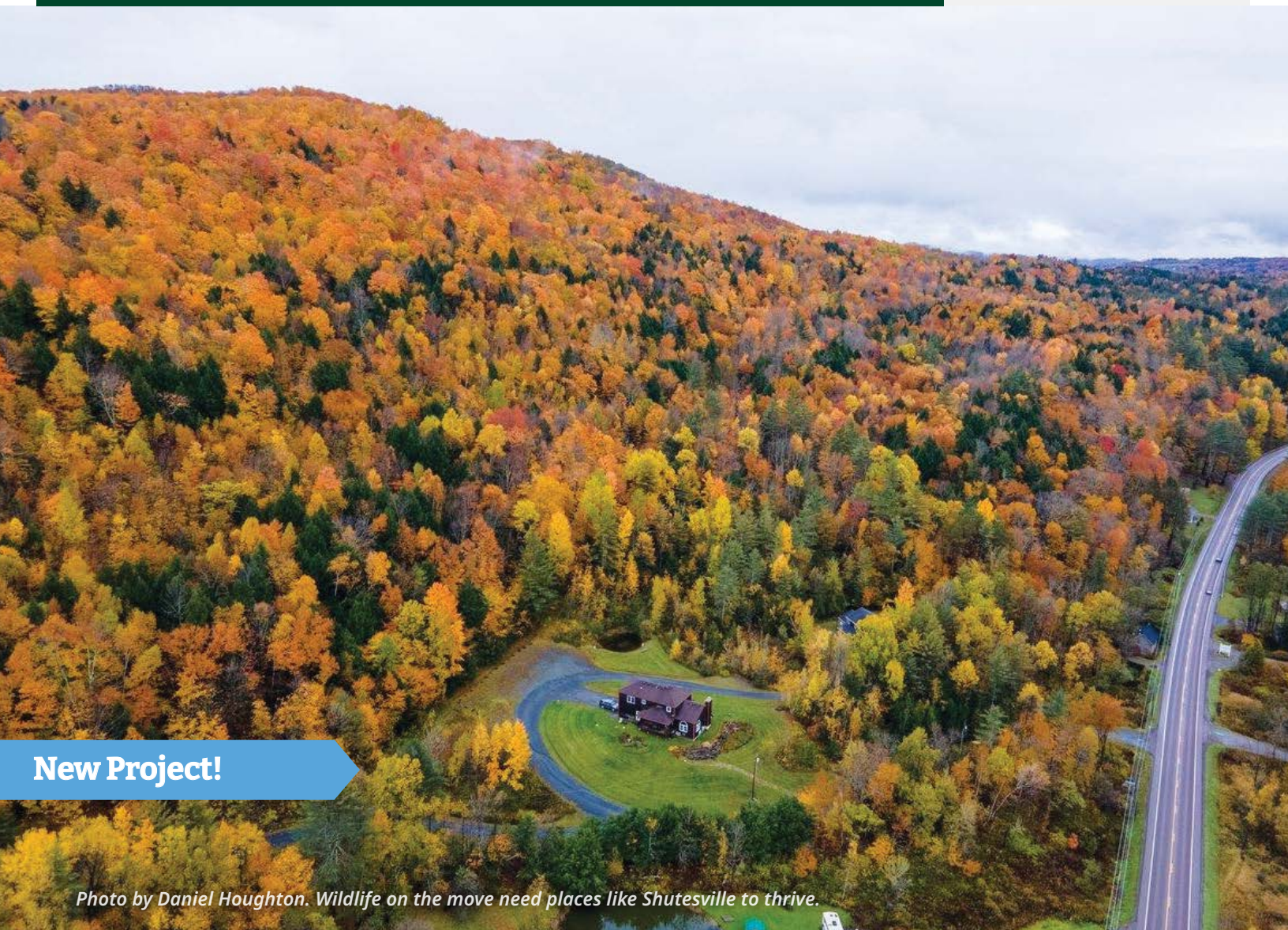


Mountain Views

Fall/Winter 2023

News from
STOWE
LAND TRUST



New Project!

Photo by Daniel Houghton. Wildlife on the move need places like Shutesville to thrive.

Local Habitat, Regional Impact

The time to protect the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor is now.

"The moose stopped in the middle of Route 100, right by the "Welcome to Waterbury" sign," says Walt Looney. "Took a long look at us, then slowly continued into the woods. Even though we were in a car, it felt like we were on its turf."

If you've spent much time traveling between Waterbury and Stowe, you may have had a similar experience. This is not a coincidence. The "Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor" crosses Route 100 on the Waterbury-Stowe town line and is the only viable connection between the Green Mountains and Worcester Range.

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Courtney being introduced to land stewardship in 2015

The connections you make possible.

When I first went out to Adams Camp with Courtney to show her the ropes of being a volunteer land steward, Owen was barely a bump in his mom's belly.

That was eight years ago. Since then, Courtney has logged hundreds of hours in Adams Camp's woods helping Stowe Land Trust staff keep an eye on the land, reporting potential problems, cleaning up trash and more. All while enjoying running and biking the trails at one of her favorite places.

These days, Owen – now seven – is old enough to help. This summer, he joined his mom in making some repairs to the main Adams Camp bridge. "It was a lot of fun!" said Courtney afterwards.

I love seeing Stowe Land Trust's volunteer crew growing in multiple dimensions as new people sign on to help care for conserved lands and volunteering becomes a family affair for people like Courtney and Owen.

Opportunities like these for people to build life-long connections between land and each other while helping to care for the Stowe area's trails, habitats, and community spaces are part of what your support of Stowe Land Trust makes possible.

And so much more. From protecting the farms and forests you love to creating healthy habitats for wildlife and people to ensuring recreation for all – you are making a difference. Thank you for caring. And your help is still needed. More than ever. Please renew your membership, join, volunteer, or donate today.

With gratitude,

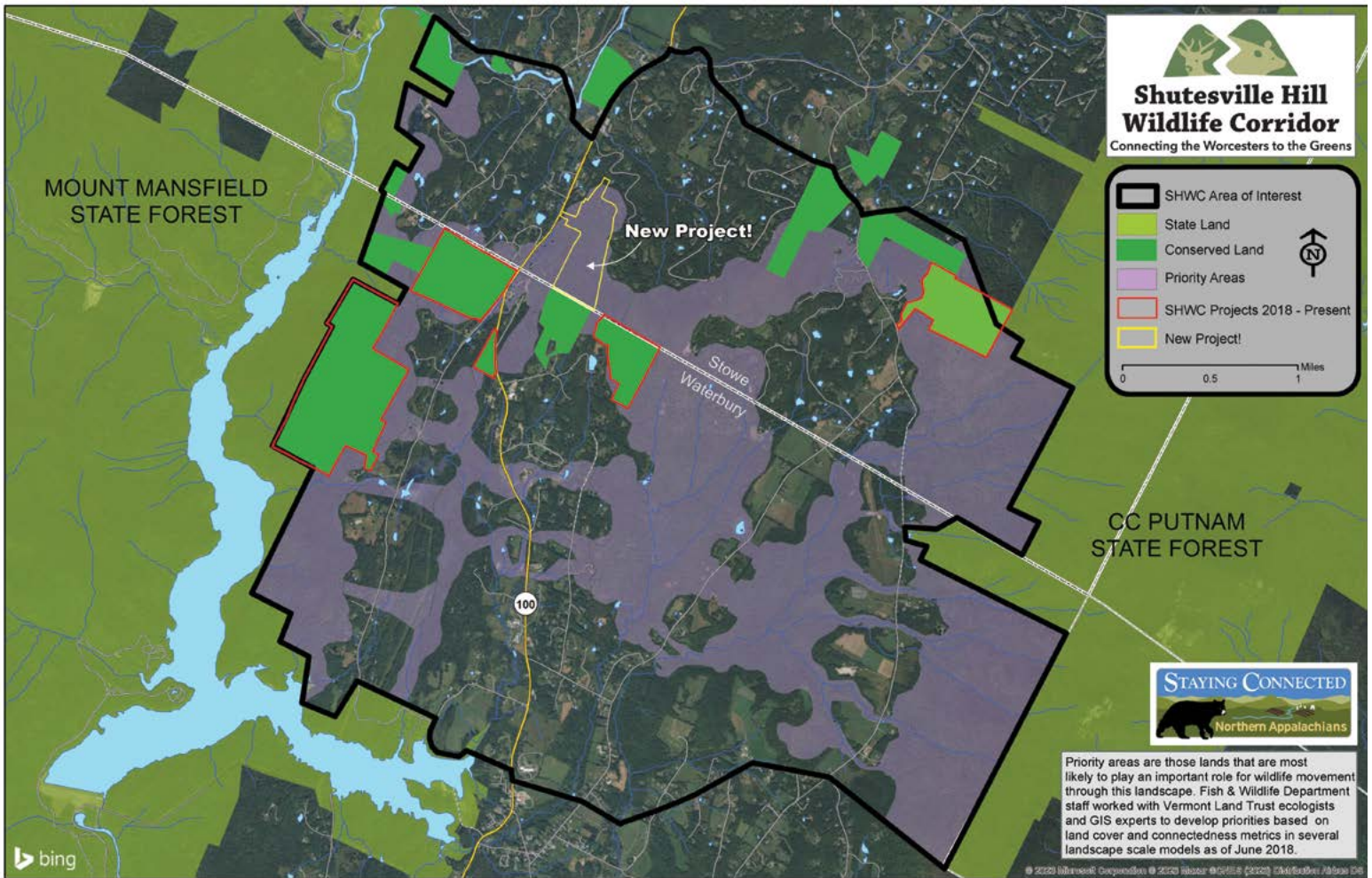
Kristen Sharpless
Executive Director





connect
to something
more

Owen connecting to conserved land and keeping trail structures accessible to all.



(continued from cover)

It is one of the five most important wildlife crossings in the state and a critical part of an international network of connected forest habitats in the northeast.

A far-reaching connection

To the passing motorist, only a handful of “Wildlife Crossing” signs hint at the importance of this several mile stretch of highway and the connected forest habitat it bisects.

“Shutesville Hill is an amazing, critical resource for wildlife,” says Jens Hilke, Conservation Planner with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. “It is the only pathway of large, connected forest habitat that links the Worcester Range to the Northern Green Mountains. It’s part of a much larger swath of forest that serves as a connected network across the entire Northern Appalachians. There’s simply no other connector in the region as important for wildlife on the move, especially in the face of a changing climate.”

Landscape under threat

Yet, the future of the corridor is far from secure. Previous construction has fragmented habitat for many species of wildlife, including hallmark animals like black bear, moose, deer, and bobcat. Mounting development pressure poses a looming threat to wildlife’s ability to migrate. In the face of a changing climate, 50% of species globally are on the move to find suitable and cooler homes according to

Dr. Greta Pecl, Professor of Climate Change Ecology at the University of Tasmania. Ensuring there is a safe route through connected, higher quality blocks of forest is vital to ensuring Vermont's wildlife will thrive for generations to come. They need our help.

Stitching together the pieces

Since 2010, a group of local, statewide, and international conservation organizations have been coordinating with each other and local landowners and communities to find a solution. The Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor Partnership includes Stowe Land Trust, Vermont's Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Nature Conservancy, Vermont Land Trust, Stowe and Waterbury's Conservation Commissions, the Waterbury Lands Initiative, and more.

"It has been inspiring to see how much landowners in the Corridor care about their land and want to ensure that it provides quality wildlife habitat," says Bob Heiser, Project Director at Vermont Land Trust. "We have been partnering with individuals and families to conserve some of the most important and vulnerable parts of the corridor using tools like conservation easements."

Thanks to the commitment of a few visionary landowners and supporters who have partnered with Stowe Land Trust and others in the Shutesville group, the amount of already protected land in the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor has tripled since 2018. Now, nearly 20% of the 4,600 acres of the priority area within the corridor are permanently protected.

"We know that our property is just one small chunk of forestland," says Chris Curtis, who with his wife Tari Swenson conserved 63 acres of centrally located land in the corridor. "But we also know that only by being part of a group of likeminded landowners can a patchwork of animal-friendly forestland be assembled. It's going to take a team effort to make the changes we need."

More habitat to protect, new project

Early efforts to protect land in the corridor have shown that landowners, community members, and conservation partners alike are all committed to increasing the pace of conservation in the area. As wildlife face increasing pressure from new development and a changing climate, the time to act is now.

This winter, Stowe Land Trust has the opportunity to conserve the next piece of the puzzle: 83 acres of key forest habitat in the heart of the corridor. The land abuts an already-protected block of forest conserved by Vermont Land Trust and has been on the market for over a year.

With your help, we can purchase this next piece of the Shutesville conservation puzzle and build momentum for the next phase of conservation work in the corridor. Putting the pieces of a fragmented landscape back together requires a community effort, and we know you're up to the task.



For more information on the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor, successful and ongoing conservation projects and how you can help, visit stowelandtrust.org/work/projects/Shutesville-hill-wildlife-corridor

The Bigger Picture

Celebrating 10 years of building skills and belonging for local youth.

For over 10 years, Stowe Land Trust has partnered with educators and students from the Laraway School on annual volunteer projects at DuMont Meadow. Students have gained experience in invasive plant removal and have made significant contributions to the care of conserved lands.

Based in Johnson, the Laraway School has been supporting students and families for fifty years. Offering a highly structured educational and therapeutic environment, the school serves families from a widespread community out of its main campus.

Dany recently spoke with Laraway School's Elementary and Summer Program Coordinator, Sarah Gazo, and Individualized Team Coordinator, Alicia Blair, for their impressions on how the school's partnership with Stowe Land Trust has benefited their students:

SLT: We are grateful for all the fantastic volunteer work your students have contributed. Getting kids outside is a key part of your philosophy, what have you noticed being outdoors adds to the student experience?

Alicia: Being able to say class is outside increases engagement 10-fold. Students are more likely to participate in heavy reading or writing assignments if you can do it outside.

Sarah: And that's what the research supports. When kids have access to experiential, hands-on learning, their education becomes more meaningful. They're moving their bodies, they're learning about invasive species by touching them and looking at them. When we do something like cidering here on campus, it feels good to them to be part of the process and reap the benefits.

SLT: What kind of benefits do you see working with community partners like Stowe Land Trust?

Alicia: When we look for partners, we're looking for challenging and unique experiences. Partnering with the land trust gives students an opportunity to give back and learn something new.

Sarah: We tend to think of their lives after Laraway too, and the skills that they gain from doing that work with community partners. It's really great when I'm out and I bump into students who are now working at a job. They'll run up to me they'll be like "Hey, look at me, remember that time we did this project? Now I got hired to do the same thing." That's awesome, that's success. We've done our jobs and those kids have now become a positive part of their community. That speaks to the bigger picture. We all want to feel like we belong to a community. These partnerships show them different ways that they can belong to something bigger than themselves. That's invaluable.

To read Dany's full interview with Sarah and Alicia, visit our website stowelandtrust.org/news/post/the-bigger-picture



*Conserved land connects human
and natural communities.*

“We all want to feel like we belong to a community. Our partnership with community groups like Stowe Land Trust shows our students different ways they can connect to something bigger than themselves.”

*Sarah Gazo
Laraway School Elementary and Summer Program Coordinator*

Common Ground

Building innovative housing and conservation collaborations for a sustainable future.

From the Stowe Reporter and national news to Town Meeting Day and the local coffee shop, the area's shortage of workforce and affordable housing is a frequent topic of conversation and consternation.

"Our service area, Lamoille County and Hardwick, is definitely in crisis mode," says Kerrie Lohr of Lamoille Housing Partnership, the area's leading affordable housing nonprofit. "We've got long waiting lists for all our affordable housing developments, even before they are completed. We continue to see a huge need for more housing options for people across the income spectrum, especially among low- and moderate-income earning families, older people, and survivors of homelessness."

In places like the Stowe region, rapid growth and shifts in the housing market have placed increased pressure on limited housing stock, and intensified calls for new development. And with Lamoille County identified as the most climate resilient county in the United States, even more growth can be expected as more climate migrants seeking refuge look to the northeast in the years ahead.

Making the connections

As regions across the country face similar housing crunches, many conservation land trusts are beginning to view their work through a wider lens.

"A lot of conservation land trusts are now looking at their mission, their resources, and their place in their communities, and asking themselves "What is our role here? How can we help?", says David Hindin, part-time Stowe resident and former director of the EPA's Office of Compliance. "And you'll see a lot of land trusts realizing they have an important role to play in creating sustainable communities, and this includes supporting affordable housing."



Affordable housing development in Stowe helps to meet a crucial community need.

With researcher and Yale graduate student, Katie Michels, Hindin recently completed a research project for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy on how conservation land trusts and organizations focused on community housing and development are increasingly working together to address their community's needs.

"These organizations often have missions that are complimentary. Each works to deliver a set of land-based community services, ranging from permanently conserved wildlife habitat to permanently affordable housing. By working together, they can do more." says Michels.

Locally, Stowe Land Trust and Lamoille Housing Partnership are in conversation about how to support each other's work, and increasingly, how to work together when opportunity knocks. "These aren't conversations many organizations like ours were having a generation ago," says Stowe Land Trust executive director, Kristen Sharpless. "But today, there are a growing number of examples we can point to where two different organizations came together to complete projects that were both great for housing, and great for conservation."

Community priorities, answering the call

While we continue to search for the right project on which to collaborate, Stowe Land Trust is committed to playing an active role in the conversations that will shape the next chapter in the area's history. With the upcoming rewrite of Stowe's Town Plan, there are plenty of opportunities for you to get involved as well. By taking an active part in the process and supporting organizations like Lamoille Housing Partnership and Stowe Land Trust, you can help build a sustainable community that works for all, now and into the future.

Did you know that Vermont farms are facing a shortage of workforce housing too? The Vermont Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program through the Champlain Housing Trust provides forgivable loans of up to \$30,000 for farmers to make essential repairs and necessary improvements to their farmworker housing. Stowe's Percy Farm received a loan through the program last year to fix up the farmhouse at the Stowe Land Trust-conserved Bouchard Farm off the Mountain Road. This is just one way housing and conservation groups are working together to find innovative solutions to challenges facing local communities and businesses.

Learn more!

- Champlain Housing Trust's Vermont Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program: www.getahome.org
- Lincoln Institute's July 2023 publication "Finding Common Ground: Land Trusts and CLTs Explore New Collaborations": available online at www.lincolninst.org

Paul Percy supporting working farms through farmworker housing improvements.



Thank you Volunteers!

Caring for conserved land.

It has been a wonderful summer season! Volunteers have made significant improvements to the accessibility of Wiessner Woods - one of Stowe's most visited properties. One Stowe hiker remarked,

"I hadn't been to Wiessner Woods in a while, and I was amazed to see all the trail improvements when I got out on a recent walk. Bridge repairs and new walkways led me through the familiar woods I have enjoyed for so many years. Wow- all the work the staff and volunteers have been doing since I was here last- amazing! Where would we be without them?"

It is your dedication to conserved land that makes continuous stewardship possible.

Are you interested in getting more involved in the care of your favorite places? Join our volunteer list for upcoming opportunities or contact info@stowelandtrust.org, for information on how your organization or business can help keep conserved lands healthy, safe, and accessible to all.



AmeriCorps member Hailey Lynch excited to improve trail structures and accessibility



Stowe Parks and Rec summer camp hard at work to protect our native vegetation

“I want to do everything I can to keep the magic of this place alive.”

One family’s gift to the places they love and the next generation.

“My love for Stowe is deeply ingrained in my soul – there’s something magical about this place that’s hard to describe,” says Kelly Wheeler. “All I know is, I want to do everything I can to keep that magic alive.”

Kelly has been coming to Stowe since 1974, when her parents bought a parcel of land in Sugar House Hill.

“My father was attracted to the area because it reminded him of where he grew up in Bavaria, not far from where the von Trapp Family lived before settling in Stowe,” says Kelly. “We set about building our Bavarian style chalet and drove up from New Jersey every weekend during ski season and for entire summers.”



Kelly sharing her love of Stowe with her son Luke

Over the years, Stowe became a special part of a new generation’s life, as Kelly introduced the area to her husband Chris and their children, Kendall, Luke and Robby. The family found relaxation, excitement, and comfort on many of the area’s conserved lands, hiking to Sunset Rock and in Wiessner Woods, biking along the Rec Path by the Bouchard Farm and Landmark Meadow and enjoying a refreshing summer swim at Bingham Falls.

“We brought our children to Stowe every summer. Like us, they have that same deep-seated attachment to this special place. So much so that one of our sons lives here full-time now.”

For many years, Kelly didn’t connect the work of Stowe Land Trust with the places her family loved. Over time, however, the family began to see larger connections.

“It was really when Landmark Meadow was up for sale that we started to see an urgent need for more conserved land. We loved that meadow, and it was almost lost. Thankfully the property was preserved through a conservation easement organized by Stowe Land Trust. It’s so great to know the field will stay in agriculture from now on. Without conservation, that wouldn’t be possible.”

When the time came to revisit their will, Kelly and Chris had an easy decision to make.

“Making a planned gift to Stowe Land Trust’s Legacy Society was simple and straightforward. We know the land trust will continue to conserve and care for the places we love, and this gift will help that work continue into the future, for our kids, their families, and beyond.”

Planned gifts to Stowe Land Trust’s Legacy Society directly support long-term stewardship efforts, making sure the resources need to help conserved lands stay healthy, and welcoming future generations are there.

To learn more about how you can include Stowe Land Trust in your will through gifts of property, stock, life insurance policies, or other assets, contact Kristen Sharpless at (802) 253-7221. Your gift can make a lasting impact on the lands you love!



STOWE LAND TRUST

P.O. Box 284 • Stowe, Vermont 05672

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PO Box 284
Stowe, VT 05672
(802) 253-7221
stowelandtrust.org
info@stowelandtrust.org
@stowelandtrust



Photo by Seabamirum on Flickr.

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