



A Sense of Place

SPRING 2021

AVONDALE PRESERVE

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MILESTONES:

It has been just over a year since the pandemic hit home for all of us, and thankfully things seem to be opening up. Most of our dedicated WLT volunteers and staff have been vaccinated, and state restrictions are easing, allowing WLT's programming to pick up steam. We have also been busy building bridges, clearing trails, and monitoring our properties. As we move from crisis management to the hopeful return to life as we knew it before 2020, I have been thinking a lot about our "why."

If COVID taught us anything, it was that slowing down was okay. At the beginning, I found myself frazzled by the stillness, unsure of what to do without a stacked appointment schedule or jam-packed social calendar. Our pets actually thrived in this strange state of pause, and for my husband Jay and me, our dog Sully was our *why*—his world only got better while we were hunkered down at home, our little pack of three. The frenetic pace which was once normal slowed to a halt. We discovered new places to walk and hike, and made new friends, both human and canine, who had the same idea.

Over the past year, many of you may have discovered nature for the first time and felt a similar feeling of mystification at being thrust into this seemingly new world. Maybe you found your *why* on WLT trails, whether it be a favorite scenic view, a stream your kids or dogs like to splash around in, or just the still, pristine serenity of the middle of the woods. Nature represents something different for all of us, but provides a constant, enriching benefit regardless of the *why*.

We lost our beloved Sully in April, and even now are grappling with grief. My walks feel very different now, but I find solace in their regularity. The outdoors remains relatively unchanged, and our trails and preserves remain a respite and sanctuary, teeming with new life and new beginnings. I encourage you to get out there, explore, find your own *why*, make your own memories, and know that the natural world heals what ails us. No matter how you are feeling one year later, no matter what you are going through, I hope you can find peace and joy on our preserves.



Jennifer Fusco,
Executive Director

GOODBYE, MEG

In January the Westerly Land Trust said goodbye to Conservation Programs Manager Meg Lee. WLT will miss Meg greatly, as she was a ball of energy, eager to lead hikes and share her knowledge about the natural world. Meg was instrumental in developing our education program and made many connections with local schools and partner organizations. She managed the Farmers Market, helped organize events, and worked right alongside CCC during their Tuesday morning land stewardship projects. Meg is working towards her master's degree in Environmental Studies as she takes on a new role as Senior Environmental Analyst in Upstate New York. She is taking advantage of her new terrain, rock climbing and hiking with her dogs, Kaia and Oakley (and her husband, Chris). We will be following Meg's journey and she will be following ours too!



WELCOME BACK TO THE BOARD, BILL MCKENDREE

We are excited to announce that Bill McKendree has rejoined the Westerly Land Trust Board of Directors. As Founding Partner of the Clarion Group, Bill is well-versed in developing organizational strategies and will be a creative asset to WLT. He and his wife Kathy were instrumental in WLT's first land acquisition, Avondale Farm Preserve, and they have been Farm Dinner committee members since the inception of our signature event. Welcome back, Bill!



REMEMBERING: TOM AND MARGUERITE MOORE

The Westerly Land Trust lost two dearly loved family members recently, Tom Moore, and his wife Marguerite. Much like the textiles manufactured at their family business, the Moore Company, Tom and Marguerite were part of the very fabric of WLT. They are survived by seven children.

We are grateful for having known this exemplary couple, and for having Tom's expertise and guidance through the years. He was a brilliant man, a leader by example. The other members of the CCC rallied around Tom whenever he arrived, hoping to glean a little more of his knowledge and insight with each week. Not only that, Tom was the best dressed CCC member (no doubt with a little help from Marguerite) donning pressed khakis and a collared shirt out on the trails.



As we said goodbye to Tom and Marguerite, we were making decisions on some of the landscaping needs at WLT's new home at the Barlow Nature Preserve. To welcome visitors to the Barlow property, we planted one of Tom's favorite tulip trees in the front yard, along with 96 bulbs at its base, one for each year of his long life. The blooms of crocus and daffodil have emerged this spring, a memento of Tom's indelible mark on our lives.



BUILDING BRIDGES

Westerly Land Trust's Coffee and Clearing Club (CCC) has been hard at work building bridges on our preserves with of goal of increasing accessibility to these beautiful pieces of land. With wooded wetlands, streams, and ponds, some of our preserves can be soggy and unsteady in parts, but thanks to the ingenuity of our volunteers, the bridges will render stable footing and dry hiking boots. Wahaneeta and Grills Preserves have been the recent focus, and WLT is grateful to the Town of Westerly for the large donation of wood that made possible the construction of these bridges and many more.

If you would like information about volunteer opportunities, please contact us at 401-315-2610 or info@westerlylandtrust.org



UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

On February 26, an adventurous group braved the cold and dark to hike Grills Preserve under the full moon. Donned in hats, gloves, headlamps and face masks, the hikers were treated to hot homemade soups prepared by hike leader and Board Secretary Donna Anderson. Then they all made their way into the woods to catch a glimpse of Grills after dark. As much as the property is loved in broad daylight, it really comes alive at night, especially when illuminated by a full moon. Hikers listened for owl hoots and other audible evidence that life was active all around them.

This hike was part of WLT's monthly hike series. For more information on future themed hikes, visit westerlylandtrust.org.



THANKS to our 2020 SUPPORTERS

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Marilyn and Stanley Russell

"To Maggie and me, the WLT is an amazing group of people, both professional staff and volunteers, that works tirelessly and with little fanfare, to preserve and protect natural, open space in Westerly; and to make this land accessible for anyone to enjoy. For us, supporting the WLT is simply doing our small part to help support these efforts that will provide future generations the opportunity to experience the natural beauty of Westerly."

~ Steve Ruzzo

THANKS to our 2020 SUPPORTERS

"During the past 16 months it has become very clear of the value of our local conservation organizations like Westerly Land Trust. While state and federal open space areas closed for a period of time, local properties owned and managed by land trusts stayed open, providing residents areas to escape their lockdowns. Land trust staff pivoted education programs to virtual learning. I happily contribute financially to support these efforts."

~ Rick Newton

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Elizabeth and Tom Santoro
Hilary Steinman
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Nancy Taylor
Laura and Gerry Tobin
Nancy and Gunars Vinkels
Heather and Anthony Viteritto
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Ernie Vetelino Jr.
Watch Hill Conservancy
Karen West-Federico
Elizabeth and Harold White



Debra and John Hanley

"In a time when the world has changed so much and we are being forced to be flexible and adapt, our natural environment remains a constant for us; a place where we can find calming force and serene beauty. It helps me breathe and take in all the goodness that we are blessed with."

~ Susan Brodie

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LIVING LABORATORIES

Since 2016 the Westerly Land Trust has prioritized environmental education as a critical objective. By connecting students to the natural world at a young age, we aim to inspire the next generation of environmentalists.

In 2020 when Rhode Island began recommending outside venues over inside ones, the Westerly Land Trust was already poised to fit the new needs of our community. We sprang into action, building upon our existing educational groundwork to create environmental and science-based curriculum and programming hosted outdoors and designed for the rising number of homeschool and distance learning families. In a serendipitous twist, the Westerly Land Trust had engaged for the first time with TerraCorps, a faction of AmeriCorps, to employ a full time TerraCorps member thanks to the generosity of General William Mayer Foundation. Joseph Barnes was hired as the Youth Education/Community Engagement Coordinator and went straight to work tailoring our content for parents who suddenly found themselves in teaching roles and for kids who were overburdened by screen time and feeling the stress of isolation.

And so was created *Living Laboratories*, five weeks of homeschool and distance learning programming for grades K-8, taught in person by a qualified staff member on three Westerly Land Trust properties, Grills Preserve, Wahaneeta Preserve, and Barlow Nature Preserve. It was especially rewarding to see students on the Barlow property, as the Land Trust and the Barlow farmers alike have put so much recent effort into realizing the land's full potential as a community resource. Throughout the *Living Laboratories* pilot program in October, group sizes were kept small, temperatures were checked, and masks were worn, but the kids were with their peers, learning on and from the land! The response was



overwhelming, so we conducted an abbreviated one week *Living Laboratories* class for Winter Break in February 2021 and continued the full program this Spring. We also introduced a spin-off, *Living Laboratories: Stations*, which invites parents and caregivers to accompany the students out on the land in more of a self-directed learning structure.



Additionally, we created downloadable lesson plans that can be accessed anywhere and used on any natural property. To date these plans have been downloaded predominately in Rhode Island, but also Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New York and Georgia.

Thank you to the Westerly Land Trust supporters who made these programs possible. To enroll your students in *Living Laboratories*, please visit westerlylandtrust.org.

VOICES OF THE LAND: CONSERVATION CONVERSATIONS

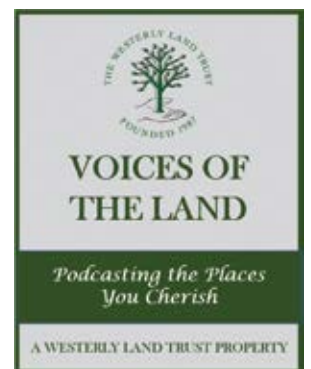


RIDEM's Mary Gannon was featured in Episode 5

When Joseph Barnes joined the Westerly Land Trust as Youth Education/Community Engagement Coordinator, he brainstormed novel ways to broaden Westerly Land Trust's reach while staying safe and socially distanced. Joe has a self-admitted obsession with podcasts ranging in topic from superpowered characters to myths and legends to environmentally focused news. He thought this type of media would be a great way to spread the word about the Land Trust's beneficial mission and the value of conserving land. And so, *Voices of the Land* was born.

Co-hosted by Joe and Donor Relations Manager Erika Lebling, *Voices of the Land* features local environmental heroes who work in farming, education and outreach, and research. The podcast tells a rolling story that explains the "why" of land conservation from all angles and perspectives, emphasizing the importance of open space, the rich biodiversity and ecological services in Rhode Island, and why land management and conservation is necessary.

New episodes are released on the last Friday of every month throughout 2021. You can find the show anywhere you stream music or directly from our website under the "Learn About Us" tab. Happy listening!



VOLUNTEER CORNER: SARA RACHLIN KEARNEY

Sara's love of nature began right here in Westerly, where she grew up spending her time playing in Wilcox Park and her summers at Camp Watchaug. She attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, lived there for twenty years and founded StyleAid, a full-service independent personal styling company. Her passion is helping her clients discover new designers and learn how to curate their own personal style in a fun, unpretentious, no-pressure environment. She moved back to Westerly in March 2020 with her husband, Tommy, and daughters Dorothy and Jane.



Sara at Lake Taboe

Sara joined CCC in fall of 2020. Her favorite part is working alongside the other volunteers. "They are all so knowledgeable and passionate about their work with the Land Trust. I learn something new every week and am most certainly receiving more than I'm giving." She says working outside feeds her soul. The biggest surprise has been how much fun she has had moving rocks and digging holes with projects like stacking cairns and building fences around historic cemeteries. Sara looks forward to her continued time at WLT and the skills she will continue to learn. "Perhaps operating the chain saw is in my future," she remarks.

Thank you, Sara, for your hard work and dedication with your upbeat attitude and generosity. We appreciate your help!



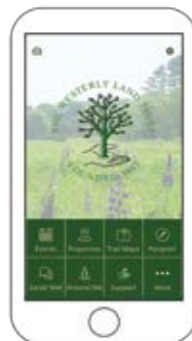
HAPPY EARTH DAY TO YOU!

To honor the 51st anniversary of Earth Day, WLT planned a full week of environmentally themed events beginning with a hike at Crandall Family Preserve. How better to celebrate nature than by being immersed in it? On Monday, WLT friends and supporters rallied together with seven other like-minded organizations across South County for simultaneous trash pick-ups, then were treated to a tasty brew by Grey Sail Brewing Company. The events continued throughout the week with a virtual Earth Day Story Slam, Barlow Nature Preserve farm tours, Living Laboratories: Stations at Grills Preserve, and a hike at Wahaneeta Preserve. On Thursday the Land Trust partnered with Westerly Library and Wilcox Park for a panel discussion featuring local environmental heroes from Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Save the Bay and Frontier Farm. The panelists engaged in a titillating conversation about all the ways they partner with and protect the planet.

We at the Westerly Land Trust are very proud of the role we play in the betterment of our natural environment and seeing our community participating and being energized by events like these is a great honor.

TRAILS APP

Get all WLT trail maps with GPS tracking and interactive maps, a calendar of WLT events, property photos, passport program, live updates of weather and recently spotted wildlife, and more all at your fingertips! Visit your app store and search "Westerly Land Trust" or go to WesterlyLandTrust.app.



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IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are so close to returning to "normal," but we should not let our guard down yet. We will continue to adhere to guidelines set by the State of Rhode Island. Please check our website for up-to-date event information at westerlylandtrust.org.

We look forward to seeing you face to face again soon!

Westerly Farmers Market

The Westerly Farmers Market will run on Thursdays from 10am-1pm beginning June 17th through September 16th at 85 Main Street in Downtown Westerly. Come shop for healthy and tasty locally sourced foods including fruits, vegetables, herbs, seafood, meat, and eggs.

Themed All Ages Hikes

Themed all-ages guided hikes will take place one Sunday per month. The hikes are free for members and \$10 per person for non-members and all details can be found at westerlylandtrust.org.

Thursday Hikes/Paddles

Regular guided hikes run Thursdays at 10am through June and then switch to paddles. Check westerlylandtrust.org or the Trails App for details. If you are interested in becoming a hike leader, please call 401-315-2610 or email info@westerlylandtrust.org.

Passport Program

If you're up for a challenge, register for the Westerly Land Trust Passport Program through our Trails App. Then find and scan all 24 QR codes scattered throughout our hiking trails. By doing so, you will join an elite group of hikers who have completed the program and you'll win a special WLT t-shirt to boot!

Photo Contest

We loved seeing all the images you captured for the 2020 photo contest, so we're doing it again! Send your favorite flora and fauna shots taken on Westerly Land Trust properties to Erika at elebling@westerlylandtrust.org by October 1. Twelve winners will be selected to appear in the 2022 Westerly Land Trust Calendar.

11th Annual Farm Dinner *Coming Soon!*

We were so hopeful that we'd be able to sit at our long table in the field this summer, but out of an abundance of caution (and because we wouldn't have a feasible rain plan), we'll have to wait one more year. Nonetheless, 2020's Farm Dinner was so special in a different way, and we hope we can recreate that magic! So work on your guest list and start planning your table now: we'll deliver delicious locally sourced meals to your small party at home! More info to come.