



# A Sense of Place

FALL 2022

WAHANEETA PRESERVE



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## MILESTONES

In September, Lauren, Erika, Marc, and I journeyed to New Orleans to represent the Westerly Land Trust at Rally 2022, the national land conservation conference hosted by the Land Trust Alliance. We were a small party of four in a sea of 2,000 land trust staff and volunteers, all gathered to network, garner best practices, and exchange ideas through seminars and sessions (and maybe enjoy some beignets, po boys, and hurricanes.)

While interfacing with colleagues and new friends, it became apparent that despite the varying sizes of our respective organizations, our challenges and opportunities are more similar than different. Whether staff-led or all-volunteer driven, we are all working out problems and celebrating milestones.

**But here's what struck me: The Westerly Land Trust is ahead of the pack in one key area.**

Other land trusts may have a 50-person staff, a billion-dollar endowment, and swaths of land that cross multiple state borders, but it was a true point of pride for me when a presenter asked incredulously, "*You have **how** many volunteers show up each week to help steward your land?*" We've always known that CCC is the heartbeat of the Westerly Land Trust but seeing the astonishment (and maybe a little envy) on the faces of our land trust colleagues really hit home.

Here's what I love most about the Westerly Land Trust: we may be small, but we are mighty. And when I say "we" I mean all of us who make this organization thrive: the people who forge new trails and maintain existing ones, the people who roll up their sleeves for our programs, the people who generously give what they can, and all the people who cherish our local green spaces and do what is needed to ensure their protection.

It was evident at Rally that despite being a small land trust in the smallest state, we are thriving. The commitment, enthusiasm and encouragement of so many people have helped us soar to new heights, and I can't wait to see where this positive force takes us next.

Jennifer Fusco,  
*Executive Director*

## WESTERLY LAND TRUST'S TEAM IS FLOURISHING

### MARC DOHERTY: LAND STEWARDSHIP MANAGER

We are happy to report that Marc Doherty, whose smiling face you may recognize from his 11-month TerraCorps service term with the Westerly Land Trust, has accepted the newly created position of Land Stewardship Manager. Executive Director Jennifer Fusco and the Board of Directors determined that with more than 1,700 acres in our care, WLT had reached a pivotal scope that called for an additional staff member. Marc was already an integral part of our team, making informed land management decisions with input from existing staff and seasoned CCC members (WLT's dedicated volunteer group), so the stars aligned, and Marc was selected to stay on in a permanent capacity. We feel so fortunate that this free-spirited nomad has chosen Westerly as his home for the foreseeable future.

Originally from Massachusetts, Marc earned a degree in environmental studies from the University of Colorado. He joined us from Kremmling, Colorado, where he worked for the Bureau of Land Management.



### INTRODUCING EMMA STAHL

Welcome to the Westerly Land Trust, Emma Stahl! Emma is WLT's 2022/2023 TerraCorps service member, assuming the title of Youth Education Coordinator. During her service period, she will be planning and implementing WLT's youth education programming with a specific focus on *Living Laboratories*. We were lucky to meet Emma at the beginning of the summer when she joined the team as WLT's summer education intern, sponsored by a generous grant from Southeastern New England Educational and Charitable Foundation. She proved to be a natural nature educator, and the students simply adore her, so we are thrilled to have her for a whole academic year.

Emma is a Westerly native and a student at Assumption University in Massachusetts. She is Westerly Land Trust's third TerraCorps member. TerraCorps is a faction of AmeriCorps that connects young adults with land conservation organizations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island for 11-month service terms.



## CELEBRATING OUR ACCREDITATION:

The Westerly Land Trust has renewed its accreditation through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, proving once again that, as a part of a network of more than 450 accredited land trusts across the nation, we are committed to professional excellence and to maintaining the public's trust in conservation work. Through this process, we continue to demonstrate that we have sound finances, practice ethical conduct and responsible governance, and can ensure lasting stewardship.

In 2017, WLT underwent the voluntary, yet rigorous process to achieve accreditation for the first time. Accreditation is not a one-time action, but a tool to foster continuous improvement; therefore, participating land trusts repeat the process every five years to ensure growth and development of the organizations. Accredited land trusts now steward almost 20 million acres- the size of Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire combined.



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

## HIKING IN THE FALL: ORANGE REQUIREMENTS

Fall is a great time of year for a walk in the woods. It is also the start of hunting season. Please review these guidelines to ensure a safe fall for all:

- All hikers, bikers, horseback riders, etc. are required to wear 200 square inches of solid daylight fluorescent orange above the waist and visible in all directions.
- This requirement runs from the second Saturday in September to the last day of February and the third Saturday in April to the last day in May.
- If you are unsure if a property allows hunting, it is always best to err on the side of caution and wear orange anyway. And don't forget to "orange" your dogs, too!
- NOTE: During shotgun deer season (December 4-19, December 26-January 2), 500 square inches of orange are required.



## SUMMER EDUCATION

School may have been on break over the summer, but *Living Laboratories* sessions were in full swing! With a goal of keeping children engaged in science over the break, the Westerly Land Trust ran an eight-part series at the Barlow Nature Preserve. Here, local K-4th graders learned through hands-on exploration about pollinators, small-scale agriculture, and the wildlife that inhabits woodland and wetland ecosystems.

Also over the summer, Cranston Public Schools and the Tribal Youth Program based in Cranston, RI, partnered with the Westerly Land Trust to bring students and their families to Wahaneeta Preserve and Grills Preserve. In total, more than 100 students traveled from Cranston to explore trails, discover wildlife, and connect with each other and nature.

To register your Westerly Public School K-4th grader in upcoming academic year *Living Laboratories* sessions, please visit [westerlylandtrust.org/education](http://westerlylandtrust.org/education).



## POLLINATOR SAFARI

In August, the Westerly Land Trust partnered with Dr. Rachael Bonoan, head of Providence College's Pollinator Lab, to lead an all-ages group of citizen scientists on a "Pollinator Safari" at Avondale Farm Preserve. A pollinator is anything that transports pollen so a plant may be fertilized, including bees, beetles, moths, butterflies and even bats. The goal of this mission was to identify, count, and record as many pollinators as possible so that Dr. Bonoan can establish baseline data for future population studies. On this day, more than 20 different species were identified, including a rare golden Northern bumble bee. By incorporating our community into research projects, WLT strives to build awareness and

deepen connections with the natural environment.

ABC6's Kelly Bates joined in the fun and reported about the safari. To see her full story, please visit [abc6.com/pollinator-safari](http://abc6.com/pollinator-safari).

If you missed out on the safari, or even if you attended and would like to learn more about pollinators and Dr. Bonoan's research, please join us at the Barlow Nature Preserve on November 17 from 5:30-7pm for Providence College's Pollinator Lab Meet and Greet. See [westerlylandtrust.org](http://westerlylandtrust.org) for more information and contact Marc at [mdoherty@westerlylandtrust.org](mailto:mdoherty@westerlylandtrust.org) or 401-315-2610 with questions.





## WLT'S CHERISHED VOLUNTEERS

The Westerly Land Trust boasts the largest volunteer force of any land trust in our region, aptly nicknamed CCC for *Coffee and Clearing Club*, a nod to FDR's *Civilian Conservation Corps*. Whether clearing trails or forging new ones, razing buildings or constructing new ones, this dedicated group gets things done! Case in point: the focus of Barlow Nature Preserve's second phase of renovation has been the property's outbuildings. In 2021, CCC volunteers, led by Sheila and Tom Beattie, Dave Prigmore, Ed Conklin, and Gene Renz, demolished a decrepit chicken coop and, in its place, constructed a large shed rightsized for all the necessary equipment required to maintain more than 1,700 acres. In 2022, volunteers rallied to build a multipurpose pavilion to serve as a farmstand and education program space. WLT would like to thank Saint Construction for designing and constructing the pavilion and Jim Given and his son, also named Jim Given (and married to Cassidy Whipple of Frontier Farm) for installing the cedar shingles. Also, thanks to JRV Woodworks for donating supplies for the shed and the pavilion. Future Barlow projects include reroofing the barn and transforming the summer kitchen into an education cottage. Volunteers have already pledged to assist with the labor, which is invaluable for a nonprofit budget. These projects exemplify WLT's true community nature, and none would be possible without the cherished volunteers and their boots on the ground.



## VOLUNTEER CORNER: GENE RENZ

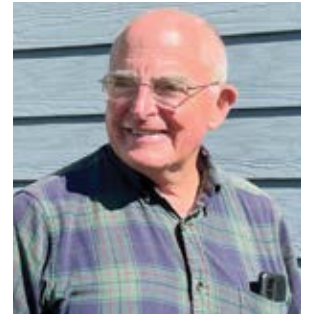
Many locals know Dr. Gene Renz from their regular teeth cleanings and oral checkups, but today, this former dentist is wielding a different type of drill as a part of the Westerly Land Trust's CCC. Gene was first introduced to WLT by one of his patients, Paul Meyer, soon after the Avondale Farm Preserve acquisition, but it wasn't until he traveled to Kentucky, leading a church youth group in a mission to construct handicap ramps for underprivileged residents that Gene developed a passion for outdoor, philanthropic construction projects. In 2014, shortly after retiring, Gene joined the volunteer-based CCC and went straight to work constructing the Wahaneeta Preserve pavilion. In 2016, he was elected to the Board of Directors, where he still serves today.

When we sat down to talk with Gene about his relationship with the Westerly Land Trust, he selflessly gave credit to the others on the volunteer team, repeating his mantra, "all for one, one for all." Many of the CCC's projects are physically demanding, from hauling bridge building materials into the field or clearing trails with a chainsaw, and Gene understands how to keep the team moving safely and efficiently. He noted that through mutual respect and working shoulder-to-shoulder, one can really learn each other's limits. And knowing this you

can make sure the job is done right and everyone goes home happy. "We aim for perfection, and that includes not being critical of each other."

When Gene is not constructing bridges and outbuildings on WLT land, he serves on the Board of the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, running their garden which feeds many Stonington, North Stonington, and Westerly residents. Since 2017, Gene has built 19 raised beds in this garden, and this year it produced 1,900 pounds of food for our community. The Westerly Land Trust was fortunate to have Gene's expertise when the WLT Community Garden on Main Street was relocated and rejuvenated in 2019.

The Westerly Land Trust extends our gratitude to Gene for his many years of service and commitment to our community, both in his current work in land conservation and local agriculture and in his long career spent preserving our town's pearly whites!



## BECOME A WLT VOLUNTEER

The Westerly Land Trust is fueled by this community, and volunteering is one way you can make a marked difference. Our volunteers lend a hand in a variety of meaningful ways, whether it is maintaining trails, leading hikes, or inspiring the next generation of conservationists. Whatever your background and expertise (or even if you're willing to learn new skills), we'd love for you to join our team. For more information, please visit our website at: [westerlylandtrust.org/support-our-work/volunteer/](https://westerlylandtrust.org/support-our-work/volunteer/) or connect with Marc at [mdoherty@westerlylandtrust.org](mailto:mdoherty@westerlylandtrust.org) and 401-315-2610. We look forward to getting to know you.



# WAHANEETA POND RESTORATION

This summer, the Westerly Land Trust broke ground on the long-awaited pond restoration at Wahaneeta Preserve, concluding a project that began in 2017.

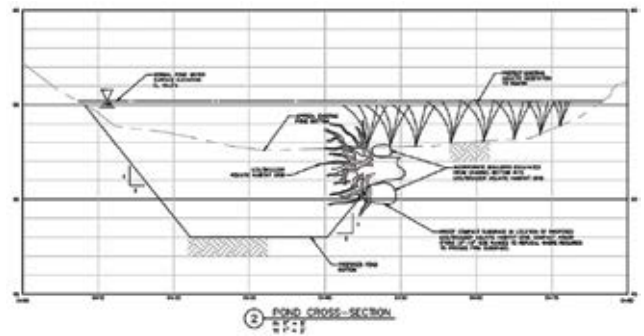
The pond, situated near the center of Wahaneeta Preserve, was created in the 1700's when a dam was constructed to support a sawmill. Research indicates the original pond was several acres in size and stories of fishing, swimming, ice skating, and even rowing adorn historical accounts. Over time, however, sedimentation and dam failure shrunk the pond to only a quarter-acre and decreased its depth so that grasses and other plants filled the pond during the growing season.

In 2017, the Westerly Land Trust commissioned an environmental engineering company, Fuss & O'Neill, to study the feasibility and ramifications of restoring the pond. The results indicated that increasing its depth would yield many environmental, educational, and recreational benefits. Wildlife surveys found more than 24 different species, including 14 bird species. According to research done by Dr. Charles Clarkson in 2017-2018 for the RI Bird Atlas, more than 70 species were observed at Wahaneeta Preserve. Dr. Clarkson noted that Wahaneeta Preserve had the richest species density in the region, presumably in large part due to the pond's open water habitat.

Following the Fuss & O'Neill study, WLT secured proper DEM permitting, raised necessary funds, and selected Suchocki and Sons of Preston, Connecticut, known for their high environmental regard, to reverse the effects of sedimentation by dredging the pond. The project commenced on July 16, 2022.

This restoration work markedly increased the depth as intended. The contractors reinforced the banks with fallen tree trunks to prevent future erosion and strategically placed logs and root balls to create nooks of healthy aquatic habitat. A portion of the pond was left as a small, shallow wetland to act as a flood plain during times of high-water level and to maintain some of the aquatic vegetation, such as bur-reed grass, to provide cover for ducks and other critters.

The dredged material consisted of two components, organic and



inorganic. The organic material is essentially “underwater compost”, nutrient-rich and a great asset for creating healthy soils. If left in place, it could take years to dewater and remediate, so WLT offered the overabundance to the farmers at Barlow Nature Preserve to use as soil fertilizer. Approximately 50 cubic yards were transported to Barlow to create healthy, natural soils. Suchocki and Sons used some of the finer inorganic sediment to create an accessible shoreline, which will improve water access for public enjoyment and education programs. WLT will closely monitor the area in the coming months for any environmental impact, soil erosion, and sediment control, and manage the land accordingly.

The Westerly Land Trust would like to thank the following organizations for their generosity which ensured the completion of this project: ParsonsKellogg, Forrest C. and Frances H. Lattner Foundation, Horace A. Kimball and S. Ella Kimball Foundation, the Bafflin Foundation, the Paul G. Arpin Charitable Trust, and the Fields Pond Foundation.

Formerly the Girl Scouts of Rhode Island's Camp Wahaneeta, this 73.7-acre property consists primarily of wooded wetlands and boasts the pond in discussion, a stream, an extensive trail system, and the former Girl Scout lodge. WLT purchased this land on May 9, 2012.







Photo credit: Tom Champagne

## 12TH ANNUAL FARM DINNER GATHERING TOGETHER BACK OUT ON THE LAND

After a three-year hiatus, one of Westerly's most favorite traditions, the Farm Dinner, was hosted outdoors, as originally intended, at Avondale Farm Preserve, and it was glorious! On August 27, the longest table in town was set for 272 guests to enjoy a four-course, farm fresh meal in celebration of local agriculture and small-scale farmers. The day was picture perfect with blue skies yielding way to the preserve's iconic golden hour. Twinkle lights zigzagged overhead, illuminating the length of the table with a romantic glow as the sun set. But the best part was that the whole community was represented at this table: farmers sitting next to doctors sitting next to teachers, conversation flowing, people laughing and enjoying their dinner together. Together. A word we missed so much over the past two years. And what a wonderful way to be reunited.

Thank you to all who made this event a reality:

To South County Tourism Council, the Farm Dinner Presenting Sponsor; to the guests who waited so patiently for this event to return and who supported the Westerly Land Trust's conservation efforts through their reservations; to the Farm Dinner committee, the volunteer force, the talented chefs who made magic happen even in the field, and, of course to all the hard-working and often unrecognized local food producers who keep our community nourished.

## WESTERLY LAND TRUST IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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](http://WesterlyLandTrust.app).

Also, we invite you to sign up for our email list by visiting [www.bit.ly/WLTenews](http://www.bit.ly/WLTenews) and to follow us on Facebook and Instagram (@westerlylandtrust). We will always keep your information private.



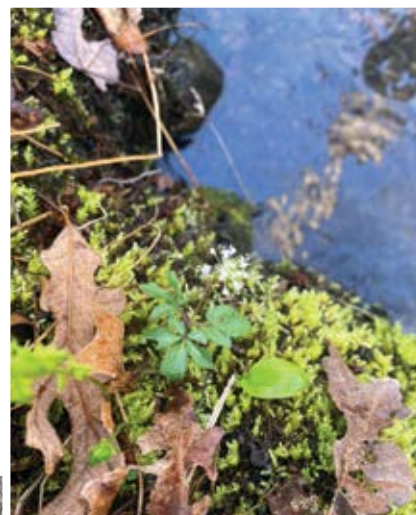
## MONITORING WATER QUALITY

In May 2022, the Westerly Land Trust, in collaboration with the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch, began a long-term, volunteer-based project to test water quality and record streamflow measurements in Mastuxet Brook. This short, perennial stream lies within the Lower Pawcatuck watershed and drains approximately 1,000 acres of highly urbanized land. Both Watershed Watch and Save the Bay have identified Mastuxet Cove, where the brook meets the Pawcatuck River, as a hotspot for pollution. Previously, no continuous water quality data had been collected along this brook. By filling this data gap, the Westerly Land Trust will help identify and address point-sources of pollution along Mastuxet Brook, which will help enhance water quality downstream in the lower Pawcatuck River.

Monitoring water quality and streamflow in Mastuxet Brook also represents initial steps towards protecting and enhancing native brook trout and American eel habitat. The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture identified the Mastuxet Brook watershed as brook trout habitat, leading the state to designate the brook as a Conservation Opportunity Area. Gathering long-term water quality data is a good first step towards assessing habitat health and creating a foundation for future restoration projects to protect both this small watershed and that of the lower Pawcatuck River.

WLT also strives to educate the public about the importance of monitoring and enhancing water quality in our local watersheds. WLT will install a streamflow gauging station and interpretive signage to educate the public about the Mastuxet watershed and the importance of water quality. This will further enhance both the monitoring and education programming, such as Living Laboratories, in which students will learn how to take streamflow measurements and the importance of water quality. We hope to expand this monitoring process to other WLT properties pending the success of the program at Mastuxet Brook.

Thank you to the Wild and Scenic Stewardship Council, who generously funded this pilot project, and to Steve Weiss, our dedicated volunteer who has been instrumental in data collection.



## THESE OLD WOODS

Often in life we spend time zooming out, looking back and attempting to find the meaning behind it all – seeing the forest, not the trees. Every once in a while, it is important to remind ourselves of the fractal nature of the universe; that the cosmos is reflected not only in the whole, but also within each of its parts – seeing the forest for the trees. So, let's talk about trees!

The **American beech**, *Fagus grandifolia*, is a large, slow-growing, moisture-loving and shade-tolerant member of the Fagaceae family, which includes chestnuts and oaks. Its bark stays smooth and gray throughout its life and reminiscent of an elephant's hide. The leaves are simple and serrated, going from a deep green to a brilliant copper in the fall, persisting well into winter. The winter buds are conspicuous, often over an inch long.



American beech is a prolific rooter, sending out many shallow roots, outcompeting other plants and serving as a form of reproduction. Beechnuts are an excellent food source and once helped support the billions of now extinct passenger pigeons that once soared in our skies. Sitting under a beech stand, one might find relief from the summer heat, a bed of cool, moist humus and the sound of squirrels chiseling away at a beechnut.

Because this tree often favors fertile river bottoms, habitat loss has limited modern beech populations. Beech bark disease, a fungal infection spread by the non-native European beech scale (a small insect) feeding on the trees, poses an increasing threat, as well as the newly discovered and relatively mysterious beech leaf disease, thought to be caused by a nematode (basically a tiny worm) that feeds on the inside of leaves causing defoliation. This phenomenon has become increasingly evident in Rhode Island and, coupled with more frequent drought-stress, represents yet another stress on our beeches.

Riverwood and Mastuxet Brook Greenway both host some lovely beech stands, so go take a walk and say hello to our tree friends!

Marc Doherty, Land Stewardship Manager



*After a two-year hiatus, the Setting the Pace for Conservation 5K resumed at Avondale Farm Preserve on an August evening. Following the run, three food trucks and music by Sarah Luanne Thompson created a summertime party atmosphere for all the participants and spectators. Thanks to all who ran, walked, and cheered to support the Westerly Land Trust's conservation efforts.*

## 2023 WESTERLY LAND TRUST CALENDARS

Our community's photographers were at it again this year, snapping great shots all over the Westerly Land Trust's preserves as a part of the 2022 WLT Photo Contest. Twelve of our favorite pictures are being made into a 2023 calendar, available on our website at [westerlylandtrust.org](http://westerlylandtrust.org) in early November.

Congratulations to all the winners and thank you to everyone who participated!

## ANNUAL MEETING

The Westerly Land Trust invites all members to gather at Barlow Nature Preserve on Saturday, December 3 at 9am for the Annual Meeting. We will meet under the newly constructed pavilion, discuss current and future business, and then take a hike on Barlow's trails, weather dependent. If you order a wreath or a WLT calendar, this will be a wonderful opportunity to pick them up. Please stay tuned for more information.

## THANK YOU 2022 CORPORATE SPONSORS

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## THE WESTERLY LAND TRUST

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Thursday Hikes

**Regular guided hikes run Thursdays from 10am-12pm at various locations.** Check [westerlylandtrust.org](http://westerlylandtrust.org) or the Trails App for the complete schedule and information on how to sign up.

### Living Laboratories

**Various dates in November and continuing in the spring semester** This November, participating WPS K-4th graders will learn the importance of preventing litter in our natural environment. Stay tuned for information on the spring semester sessions. This program is FREE thanks to a partnership with Westerly Public Schools. Bus transportation is available to and from the programs. To register your WPS K-4th grader, please visit [westerlylandtrust.org/education](http://westerlylandtrust.org/education).

### Wine in the Woods

**Wahaneeta Preserve, Saturday, November 5, 1:30-4:30pm** WLT is partnering with Tapped Apple Winery for a happy hour hike, followed by a wine and cider tasting in the woods. For more information about how to register, visit [westerlylandtrust.org/event](http://westerlylandtrust.org/event).

### Providence College's Pollinator Lab Meet and Greet

**Barlow Nature Preserve, Thursday, November 17, 5:30-7pm** Meet the scientists from Providence College's Pollinator Lab and get a glimpse into the vital research they are conducting on Westerly Land Trust properties and throughout Rhode Island. *This event is free and open to all. Please visit [westerlylandtrust.org/event](http://westerlylandtrust.org/event) to register.*

### Knife Sharpening at Gray Goose Cookery

**Through November and December**, when you make a donation to the Westerly Land Trust at Gray Goose Cookery, they will sharpen your knives...Just in time for turkey carving!

### Westerly Land Trust Wreaths

This holiday season, adorn your door with a wreath handcrafted by WLT staff and volunteers with local pine and holly branches. Proceeds benefit our conservation efforts year-round. Check [westerlylandtrust.org](http://westerlylandtrust.org) and our social media for updates on how to order yours.

### Annual Meeting

**Barlow Nature Preserve, Saturday, December 3, 9-11am** The Westerly Land Trust's Annual Meeting is open to all members. Join us at Barlow Nature Preserve as we recap the 2022 and make projections about 2023. The meeting will be followed by a hike through the Barlow trails, weather permitting. Please stay tuned for more information about how to register.