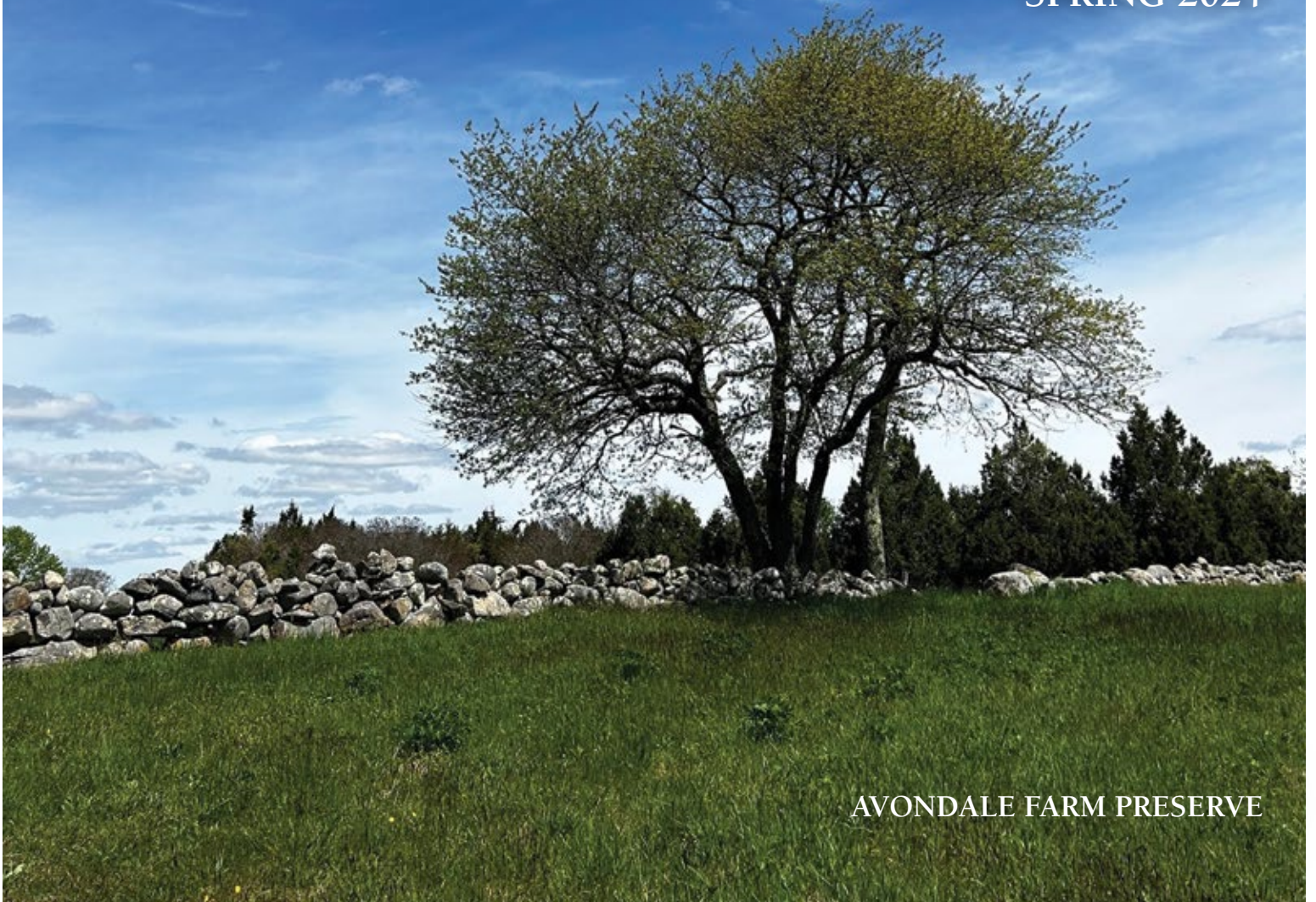




A Sense of Place

SPRING 2024



AVONDALE FARM PRESERVE

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MILESTONES:

Amidst life's toughest moments, when grief threatens to overwhelm, there exists a profound opportunity to find sanctuary in unexpected places. Never has this been more evident to me than this year, after losing my mom, my anchor to the world. As I grapple with grief, trying to reason my way through feelings of unimagined loss, Nature sends gentle reminders of renewal and resilience. I see signs of my mom everywhere and feel her

presence especially in the rare times I find myself alone, outdoors. Here in the quiet stillness, I receive an invitation to surrender to the rawness of grief but also to the emerging feelings of interconnectedness. For me there is peace in the vision that we are all a part of a vibrant, vast, and intricate tapestry.

Witnessing the pure joy and curiosity of children as they explore the wonders of nature through our land trust programs is incredibly uplifting. Their unbridled enthusiasm for the world around them reminds us of the magic that exists in everyday moments. Whether it's the fascination with an insect, the delight in dip netting in a stream, or the laughter that erupts from trailing butterflies, children have a remarkable ability to infuse joy and hope into our lives through their connection with nature.

I aspire to honor my mom's memory by embracing her zest for life and cherishing her childlike curiosity, humor, and spunk. And in the process, I know I will rediscover the capacity for boundless joy and unwavering hope as this tapestry of life unfolds.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Jennifer Fusco in black ink.

Jennifer Fusco,
Executive Director

DAVID HANNON

David Hannon spent his entire career in the world of education. With a lifelong love of history, he earned a B.A. from Bates College with concentrations in American and European history, and an M.A. in Russian/Soviet history from American University. He taught at Fay School and The Hill School and recently enjoyed a return to the classroom to teach on the life of Joseph Stalin for five days at The Williams School.

In 1995, David was named director of development at Pine Point School where he served for 26 years. He is particularly proud of his efforts with the endowment, building it from \$150,000 to \$6.5 million.

Since 1995, David and his wife, Jane, have called Westerly home. It's where they raised their two daughters. For years, one of their favorite walks was with their dog Scout at Avondale Farm Preserve. Three months into his retirement, he joined CCC, and he finds the work to be the perfect mix of meaningful activity, time outdoors, and engagement with a group of dedicated and interesting individuals. He looks forward to the day when he and Jane can take their three granddaughters for hikes on the many Westerly Land Trust trails.



STEVEN RUZZO

Steven Ruzzo earned a BA from Providence College in 1973 and a decade later earned an MBA from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. He put both degrees to good use in his time at Electric Boat Corporation, where he served as Director of Strategic Planning. Among many responsibilities, Steve liaised with national and international political and military officials, as well as industry representatives, in support of marketing, legislative and business objectives.

Upon his retirement in 2011, Steve was invited by his friend Jim Crowley to join CCC. In 2016, Steve had to put down the saw and shovel to undergo elbow surgery, but he didn't give up joining the crew for their Tuesday morning coffee. He asked Sheilia Beattie, then Board President, if she might assign him some administrative work he could accomplish with an arm in a sling. Steve has been researching and writing the Westerly Land Trust history booklets ever since!

Like many folks in Westerly, Steve and his wife Maggie split their time between Rhode Island and Florida, opting for warm sunny days all year round.



A FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Throughout 2023, the Westerly Land Trust board and staff took the time to examine the organization's mission and goals in a strategic planning process which would yield a roadmap to guide our work for the next five years. The Westerly Land Trust exists to serve our community, so through this process, many members of our community were surveyed and consulted. We learned aspects of our programs that were most appreciated, things that people believed should have more emphasis, and helpful suggestions for the future.

With this feedback, the Board and staff thoughtfully drafted a plan under the guidance of Emily Boedecker of Momentum Communications, LLC. We are happy to share the following pillars of our strategic plan:

protect the lands we cherish

Since 1987, WLT has protected more than 1,700 acres for wildlife habitat, native biodiversity, water resources, agriculture, education, and public recreation and enjoyment.

We will hold steadfast to this pillar of our mission.



steward our lands for future generations

WLT will be an exemplary steward of our land by further refining our program to care for current properties and support ongoing conservation priorities. This includes implementing sound and sustainable practices, proper training for staff and volunteers, and reducing the environmental footprint of our stewardship activities.

enhance green space for every neighborhood

To provide access to nature for everyone, WLT will continue to steward our current urban properties and work to conserve green spaces in other developed areas of Westerly.



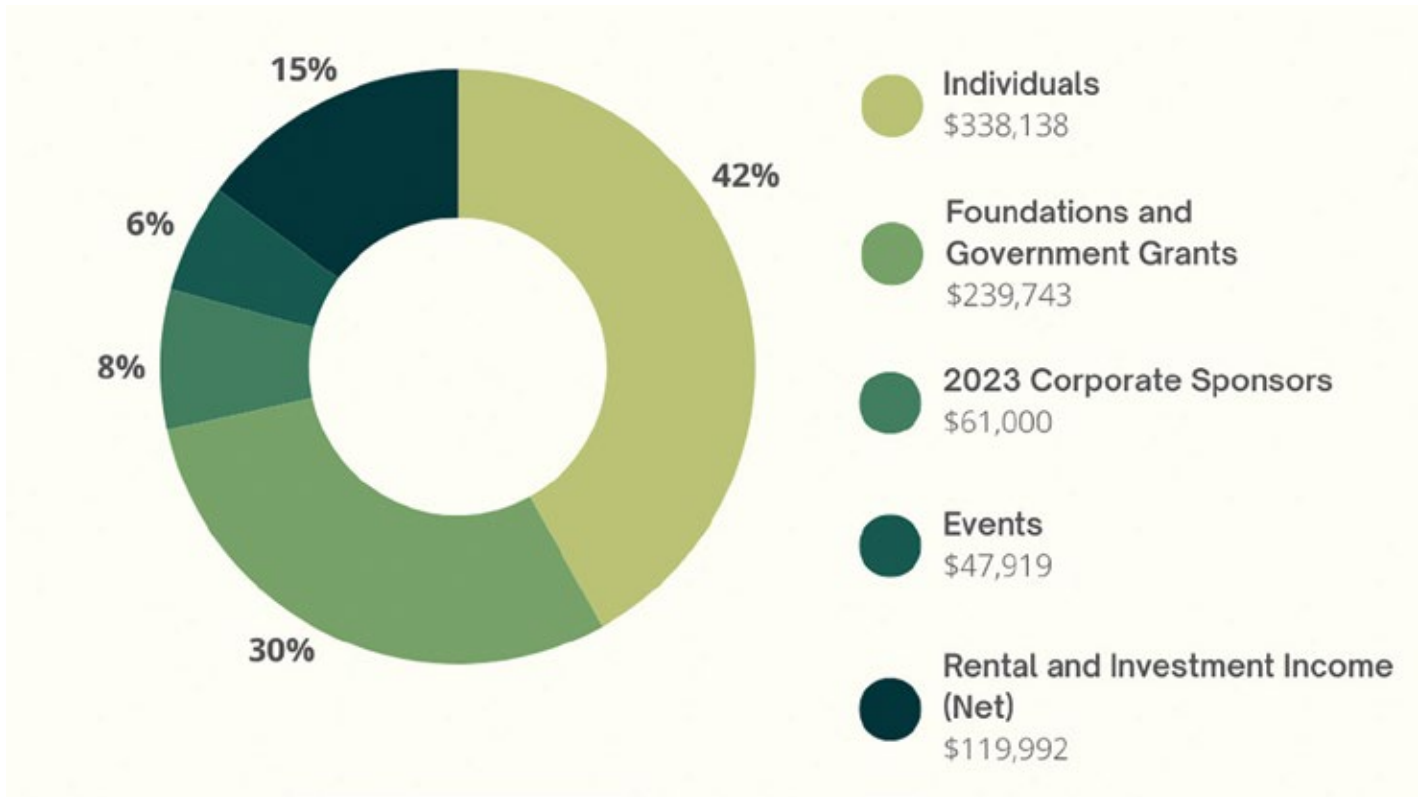
nurture lifelong love of nature

We have an opportunity and a responsibility to encourage meaningful connections between people and nature. We will engage the community through programs that foster appreciation of nature, spark imagination, expand knowledge and create memories.

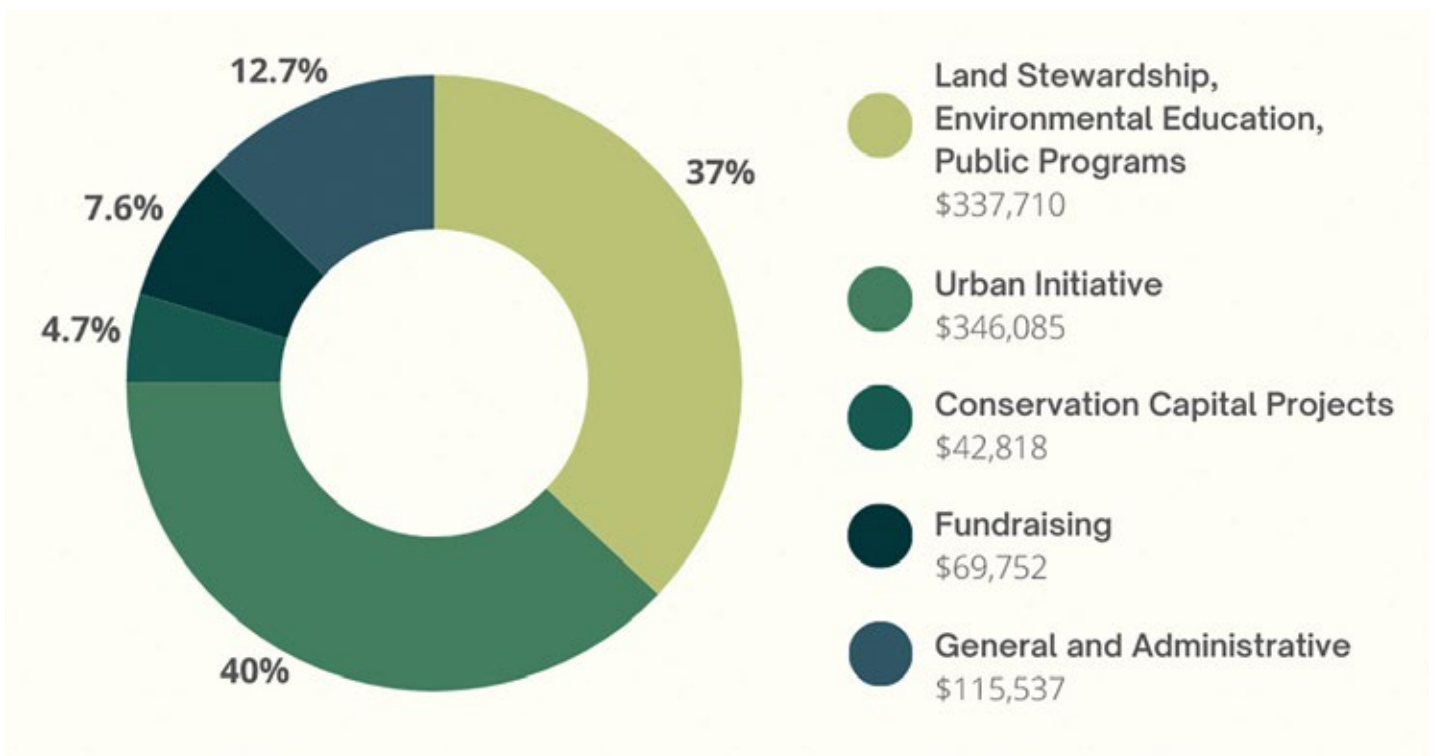
Hard copies of the plan will be available upon request and an electronic version will be available on our website.



WLT 2023 REVENUE



2023 AT A GLANCE



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*"It is now hard to drive around town and not see a
WLT property in your journey. That did not happen
by accident. Find one, go there, really look around,
it may be just what you needed in the moment."*

~ Rebecca Woodward



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Rene Dion



"WLT has great talks where I learn more about the natural world. It hosts wonderful outings where I can enjoy, learn and help preserve nature. And its properties are wonderful places to spend time with old and new friends who care about the same things I care about."

~ Freddy Miller Davis

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AVONDALE FARM PRESERVE POLLINATOR STUDY

Avondale Farm Preserve is a unique coastal grassland at the head of Colonel Willie Cove on the lower Pawcatuck River. Initially cleared for farmland by early European settlers, a mix of hayfields and native meadow now roll into tidal marshland -- it is a birding hotspot and boasts significant pollinator biodiversity, plus a paved loop and gentle grass trails make it a perfect place for a peaceful stroll.

Part of Westerly Land Trust's stewardship mission is to help connect and facilitate environmental research on our properties. At Avondale, the Land Trust has facilitated biodiversity research by the Pollinator Lab at Providence College and is now excited to be working with the URI Bee Lab studying bumble bee nesting habits. PhD-candidate Ren Johnson proposed her artificial nesting box study and, with the help of WLT's CCC, installed over 60 artificial nesting boxes.

Johnson chose Avondale in part because of its recorded bumble bee biodiversity, including the rare and declining golden Northern bumble bee (*Bombus fervidus*). Johnson is researching the nesting preferences of queen bumble bees, who emerge from hibernation in the leaf layer (reminder to "leave the leaves" when you can!) in early spring and seek out a nesting site. Some artificial nest boxes are lured with rodent urine and pheromones, as previous studies indicate a preference for nesting in old rodent burrows. The eggs these queens lay support the entire summer's population of bees, so understanding their preferences is critical to supporting habitat for these essential native pollinators.

Johnson and others from the URI Bee Lab will be monitoring these sites over the next 3 seasons, so if you see them out there, say hi and maybe you can tag along! And if you are interested in seeing Avondale's insect biodiversity first-hand, join us for the third annual Pollinator Safari on July 10th.



WALDEN BOOK CLUB

As part of our Earth Day celebration, the Westerly Land Trust partnered with Westerly Library and Wilcox Park to host a *Walden* book club. The Library generously furnished attendees with fresh copies of the book, and then on a rainy morning in late April, we gathered around the fire in the Wahaneeta Preserve cabin at to discuss Henry David Thoreau's life and works. The discussion ranged from Thoreau's life as pencil maker to his interpretation of the word "wildness" to the time he spent living at Walden Pond. Following the discussion, the group explored the trails of the preserve with Thoreau's words about nature and conservation fresh in their minds.

Thoreau once wrote, "it would be worth the while if in each town there were a committee appointed to see that the beauty of the town received no detriment." We at the Westerly Land Trust are proud to play a role in preserving Westerly's charm and character by protecting open spaces for the enduring benefit of our community.



VOLUNTEER CORNER: ED MAROLDA

Ed Marolda, a Marist College graduate, grew up a boy scout near Poughkeepsie, NY, and spent his summers in the woods of the Catskills, so it's only natural that he navigated towards the Westerly Land Trust. He and his wife Kathy moved to Westerly from East Greenwich, RI, following the call of the shoreline. As Ed contemplated retiring from his 25-year career with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, his friend and neighbor, Gene Renz, began planting seeds, so to speak, about joining the CCC, the Land Trust's Tuesday morning volunteer group. In Fall 2021, upon his retirement, Ed did just that.

"This is my happy place," Ed said after a full morning of hard work at the Barlow Nature Preserve. "There are always opportunities to learn, and volunteering here keeps me physically active." He added that each week he is in awe of "the sheer wealth of talent amongst the volunteers," noting that the group is comprised of health care professionals, educators, businesspeople, engineers, tradesmen, and others.

In addition to the regular Tuesday morning spots, Ed takes full advantage of other volunteer opportunities, like the runnels project at the Winnapaug Farm Preserve in partnership with Save the Bay and last fall's chainsaw training. But he also enjoys simple tasks like picking up trash during the annual property monitoring. He credits this to the motto he learned as a boy scout, leave it cleaner than you found it. "Plus," he adds, "this is when you can really talk to people."

Ed and Kathy have four grandchildren who visit regularly in the summer. Inspired by his time spent with his own grandparents on their 100-acre property in the Catskills, Ed enjoys being an outdoor guide for his grandkids, introducing them to the ocean, river and pond via kayaks and boogie boards.

Thank you, Ed, for always bringing your positive, can-do attitude every Tuesday morning and beyond!



THESE OLD WOODS: THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT

Many of you may be familiar with the story of the American chestnut -- once a fixture of the eastern hardwood forests, now relegated to stump sprouts and lone survivors after the introduction of a fungal blight in the early 20th century. Besides its tremendous ecological value as a member of the oak family, the American chestnut is woven into the fabric of North American civilization with its delicious nuts and versatile lumber. Ever since its eradication, people have been working hard to discover and proliferate a blight-resistant American chestnut.

In 2007, WLT teamed up with The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) by planting an experimental breeding orchard at Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park. The orchard includes Chinese chestnuts, which have inherent resistance to the blight, offspring of a surviving American chestnut from Massachusetts, and F1 hybrids, which are a first-generation cross between American and Chinese chestnuts. TACF's goal is to create blight-resistant trees that preserve the genetic

diversity of American chestnuts and to support the planting of disease-resistant, diverse trees across the landscape.

In 2022, after great care from both WLT and TACF volunteers, the Glacier Park orchard finally matured enough that their blight resistance could be tested by intentionally inoculating the trees with the blight and measuring their response. This spring, after teaming up with the Ocean Community United Theatre to co-host a screening of TACF's documentary film *Clear Day Thunder*, representatives from TACF and WLT cruised the Glacier orchard to review the result of inoculation. The blight took a toll on many trees, but a few individuals show significant resistance and will have their genetics further studied.

As generations come to know the eastern forest without the chestnut, we risk forgetting what once was and still could be. This is why every chestnut planted is important. Not only does it increase chances for the species' survival, but the act of planting also keeps the American chestnut alive in the hearts and minds of people. Last fall, a long-time steward of WLT lands collected seeds from the Glacier Park orchard and planted them. Will they survive the blight? Likely not. Will they keep hope alive for a species on the brink? Absolutely.





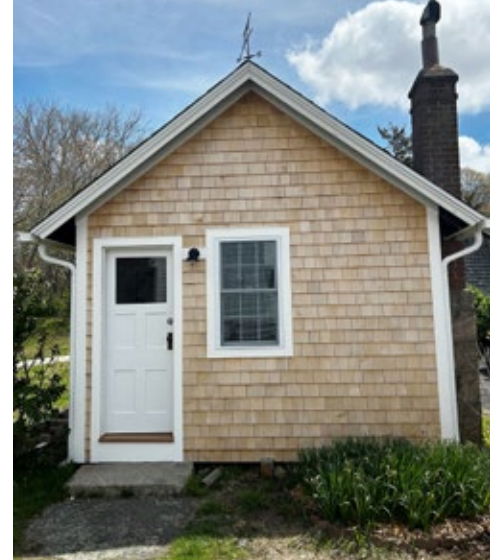
YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

This spring started off soggy, but that didn't dampen our education experiences, figuratively anyway. Speaking literally, the students got soaked—and they loved every minute of it. Our educators doled out waders and raincoats and led the troops of K-4th graders through the ponds and streams at Wahaneeta and Grills Preserves. They took full advantage of the weather to find salamander eggs and tadpoles, uncommon treasures on drier days. It is a good reminder for us all that rain can bring as much joy as sunshine.

As the school year winds down, the field trips ramp up. We are excited to host elementary and middle school students in June. Expanding our curriculum to include older students is a goal of our recent strategic planning process. This year, students from Westerly Middle School and St. Michael School will visit Westerly Land Trust properties to learn the importance of environmental conservation.

Looking ahead to the summer, the Westerly Land Trust will continue our partnership with Westerly Public Schools at the Barlow Nature Preserve with a program called Farm Squad, where students will take full advantage of the two farms on this property to learn all about agriculture. We have been working diligently to rehabilitate the old canning cottage at Barlow and transform it into an education space. It was completely overhauled inside and out, and we hope the Farm Squad students will be able to make good use of it this summer.

If you know a Westerly Public School K-4th grader who would like to be a part of the Farm Squad this summer, please visit westerlylandtrust.org.



CHAINSAW TRAINING

Chainsaws are necessary machinery for trail clearing and land stewardship but can be dangerous when used improperly. Not only is the tool itself hazardous, but the heft and positioning of the tree and limbs can pose additional threats. This past fall, thanks to a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, a group of staff and volunteers underwent a rigorous two-day chainsaw safety and maintenance course, led by Bill Girard of Game of Logging. Through this course, each participant earned a Bucking and Limbing Certification.

At the root of our mission, the Westerly Land Trust has a responsibility to make our conserved properties safely accessible to our community, and this includes keeping our volunteers safe. Training sessions like this allow the Land Trust to invest in the people who spend their valuable time and energy stewarding the land, clearing trails, and forging new paths.

We are proud to report that the Westerly Land Trust has the largest volunteer force of any Rhode Island land trust. To get involved, please contact Land Stewardship Manager Marc Doherty at mdoherty@westerlylandtrust.org.



WESTERLY LAND TRUST BIRDHOUSES

Our volunteers sure are an industrious bunch: they looked at a pile of wood scraps and thought *What could we make?* And with spring rapidly approaching, they proposed the first Westerly Land Trust birdhouse fundraiser, which brought in more than \$1,800! The crew cranked out 100 hand-crafted



birdhouses through an organized assembly line and for an added touch, branded each with the Westerly Land Trust logo. Now countless robins, doves, wrens, flickers and even screech-owls will have extra opportunities for shelter. Thank you to all who built and bought these avian dwellings. We like to think the birds will thank you, too!

CAN YOU NAME THE WLT PROPERTY?



1. Dr. Lewis Pond 2. Grills Preserve 3. Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park
4. Wabaneta Preserve 5. Crandall Family Preserve 6. Winnapaug Farm Preserve

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Scan the QR Code to the right for our full calendar.



Historic Cemetery Tour

May 23 There are nearly 90 historic burial grounds in Westerly, five of which are on Westerly Land Trust properties. Join us at Winnapaug Farm Preserve where you'll learn the interesting history of those who lived here before us. Plus, enjoy a fad from the past: a picnic at the cemetery!

Forest Bathing (Wellness in the Woods)

June 8 and September 28

Deepen your connection with nature on a gentle and mindful walk through the woods, led by Certified Forest Therapy Guide Dr. Deirdre O'Connor.

Awesome Blossom Hike

Mid to late June, depending on the blooms

We'll keep an eye on the forecast, but it is up to Mother Nature to schedule this hike! Stay tuned... we'll let you know when and where we'll gather for ultimate bloom-peeping hike.

Spring Sip & Shop with Second Serve

June 13

The Westerly Land Trust is partnering with Second Serve Resale again, this time to refresh your closet just in time for summer. Join us at Barlow Nature Preserve to sip, snack and shop. Second Serve curates donated clothing collections to lower consumption of new clothing and promote the benefits of resale. 85% of your shopping proceeds will benefit the Westerly Land Trust's conservation efforts.

Farm Dinner, Winnapaug Farm Preserve

SAVE THE DATE! Saturday, August 24

Reserve your seat at the longest table in Westerly to dine al fresco amongst friends and neighbors who have all gathered to celebrate local farmers, food producers and chefs. Details coming soon!

WTAC's Trail Races

September 14 and October 26

Join the Westerly Track and Athletic club for their trail races at Wahaneeta Preserve (September 14) and Grills Preserve (October 26). For more information, please visit westerlytrackclub.org.