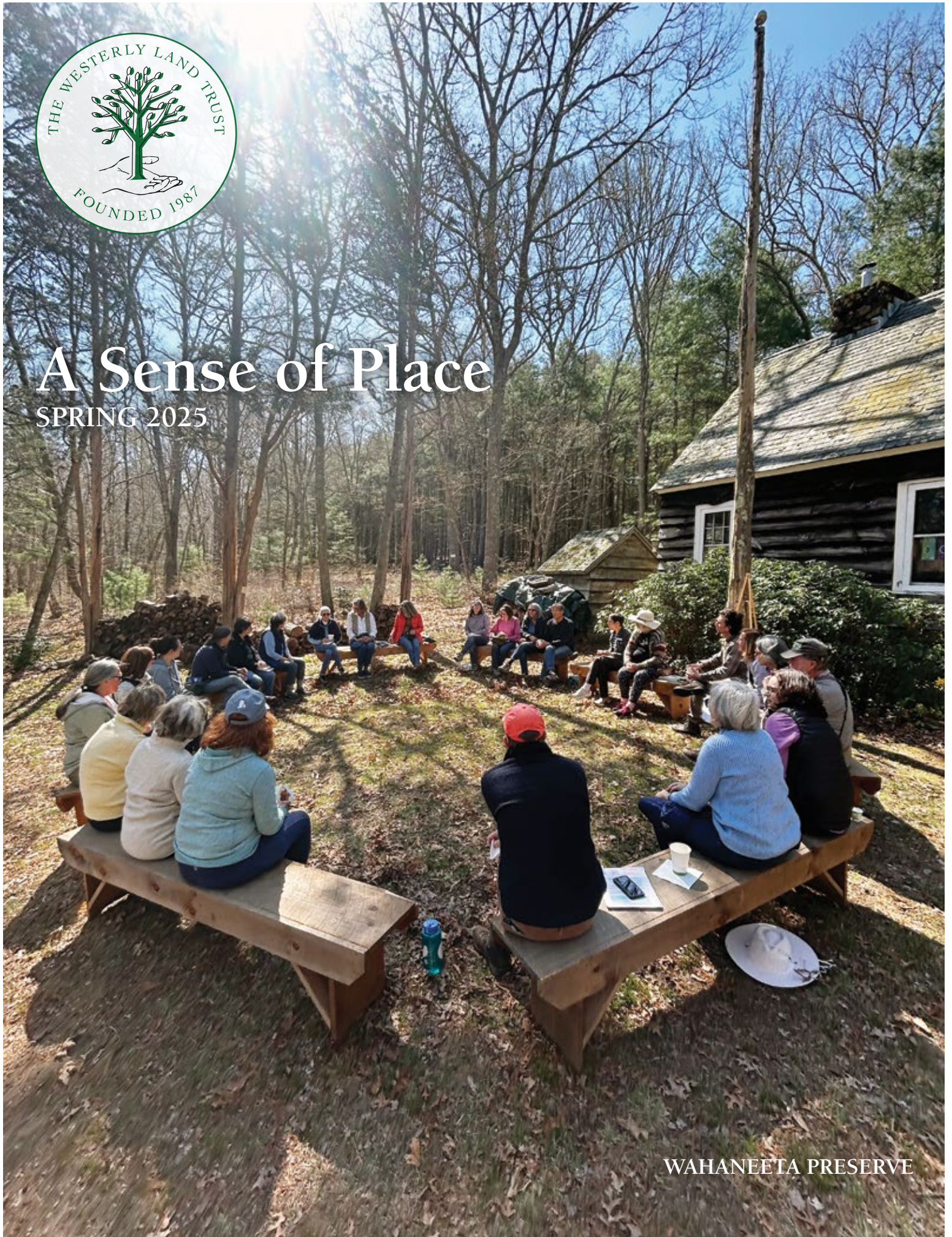




# A Sense of Place

SPRING 2025



WAHANEETA PRESERVE



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## MILESTONES:

The Westerly Land Trust's recent book discussion featured *The Serviceberry* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (see page 9). In preparation for our gathering, I rabbit-eared the book, marveling at how simple yet so foreign the idea of a "gift economy" has become, and how many communities have moved away from sharing support and resources with each other. That is—in many places *except* here at WLT. Here, the concepts of reciprocity and a gift economy are thriving and

fundamental to who we are.

WLT fosters a community built on reciprocal contributions and shared stewardship of the land. This cycle might begin with the gift of land itself, a foundational act of generosity for the benefit of current and future generations.

The initial gift then invites more giving. Our dedicated volunteers contribute their expertise, enthusiasm, and effort to advance a collective vision: a thriving natural landscape that enriches the community. And as a lovely unintended consequence, our volunteers tell us that they receive as much as they give—gifts of friendship, purpose, and community, which go far beyond any expectations they may have had when they joined. The same is true for people who give monetarily. They report feelings of impact and empowerment when they fuel WLT's good work.

Completing the cycle, the public has access to open spaces and educational opportunities that foster a lifelong love of the outdoors, and the Town's natural beauty and ecological integrity are kept intact. As the serviceberry fosters connection through shared resources and experiences, WLT cultivates a kinship bound by a shared appreciation and commitment to the land, where contributions, in various forms, sustain a common good.

*How can we expand this idea of a gift economy throughout our community? Maybe you have ideas...and we at WLT would love to hear them.*

Jennifer Fusco,  
*Executive Director*



INTERESTED IN A GREENER,  
CLEARER WESTERLY?

Join the Green Infrastructure Center & the Town of Westerly for an Open House to discuss and provide input on strategies for the Town to promote trees for reducing urban heat, mitigating flood damage, and improving community health.

Wednesday, May 28, 5-6:30pm at Westerly Library Terrace Room

Registration encouraged: <https://tinyurl.com/r6axu2w8>

## WELCOME DEIRDRE O'CONNOR

Deirdre O'Connor is from "a little bit of everywhere," she said, reflecting on more than 20 childhood moves due to her father's Navy career. She credits her mother for nurturing her deep connection to nature. No matter where they lived, her mother encouraged outdoor exploration, often supplying microscopes and magnifying glasses to fuel curiosity.

Deirdre studied at Penn State University and earned her medical degree from Bastyr University, becoming a naturopathic doctor. "I wanted to practice the kind of healthcare I wanted for myself," she said. "Care focused on lifestyle, natural foods, and herbal medicine."

Rhode Island stood out among all the places she lived. "The change in seasons is good for humans," she said. This drew her back to New England in 1987, and in 1988, she opened Natura Medica in Mystic, practicing naturopathic medicine until retiring in 2019. "Having a career so inspiring and growth-promoting is a privilege. I feel like I won the golden ticket."

After retirement, Deirdre became certified in forest therapy, which led her to the Westerly Land Trust. She began leading forest bathing hikes on WLT trails, calling it "a natural partnership." In January 2025, she joined the WLT Board of Directors. When not dedicating time to WLT, she enjoys birding, bicycling, and cultivating community.

Flip to page 10 for Deirdre's advice on trail safety with progressive lenses.



# CHAMPLIN FARM PRESERVE UPDATE

In October 2024, the Westerly Land Trust permanently protected the Champlin Farm Preserve, 90 acres of farmland and forest along the Pawcatuck River. We are now six months into our stewardship of—and relationship with—this land. Similarly to making a new friend, there's a lot to get to know about one another. The Champlin Farm Preserve holds many stories: How have people interacted with this land through history? What critters live here today? What role can we play to ensure the preserve thrives long into the future?

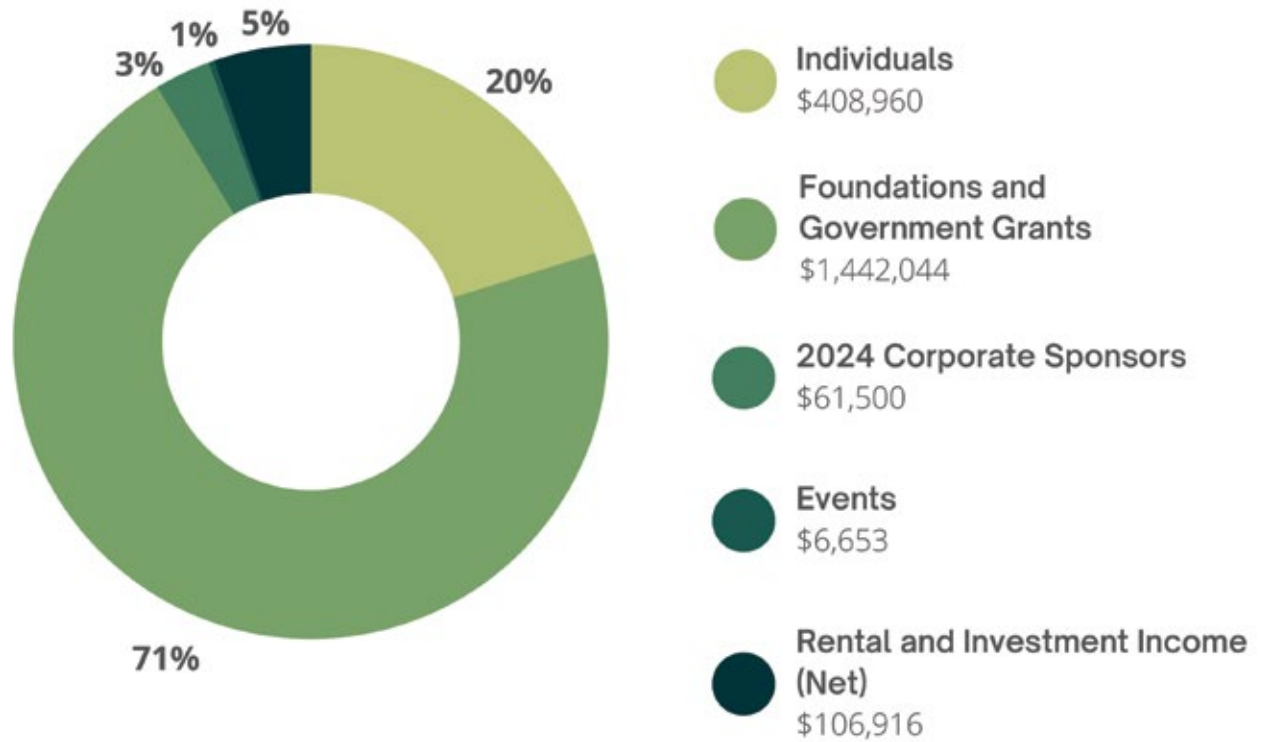
Here's how we've been getting to know this mixed-use conservation property in the first six months:

- **Unearthing History** — Walks and talks with the Champlin family, neighboring farmers from West Farm Organics and Beriah Lewis Farm, along with other community members have helped us weave together a historical timeline for the property, including stories of Civil War soldiers returning to homesteading, favorite rabbit hunting spots, old roads, and historic cemeteries. We've even taken a dive into geologic history, exploring exposed bedrock and glacial deposits with University of Rhode Island geoscience professor Dr. Thomas Boving.
- **Meeting the Residents** — The woods, fields, wetlands, and riverbanks have been and will continue to be the home for many wild creatures. Through the help of our naturalist partners, we have met mating kingfishers, ground-nesting bees, mussel-munching otters, and more. These observations, including those made at this coming summer's 4th annual mini Bioblitz, will be compiled in WLT's Baseline Documentation Reports and help shape future stewardship decisions.
- **Preparing for the Public** — Week after week, the CCC, WLT's stewardship volunteers, have explored the Champlin Farm Preserve, blazing hiking trails, managing invasive plants, exposing historical sites, and rebuilding stone walls. Our friends at Beriah Lewis Farm have been great partners, helping to dispose of old tires and resurfacing the new trailhead parking area. With more than 250 volunteer hours dedicated here, we are excited to welcome the public to the property this summer.
- **Reclamation and Remediation** — A 7-acre former gravel pit at the Champlin Farm Preserve poses a unique stewardship opportunity. The Westerly Land Trust has set a goal of remediating this area—transforming it into a productive grassland that supports native biodiversity and grazing livestock. To this end, we've begun developing a sustainable, comprehensive remediation strategy that will unfold over several years. We've also begun engaging project partners. **If you are interested in learning more about and supporting this innovative project, please contact Jennifer Fusco at [jfusco@westerlylandtrust.org](mailto:jfusco@westerlylandtrust.org).**

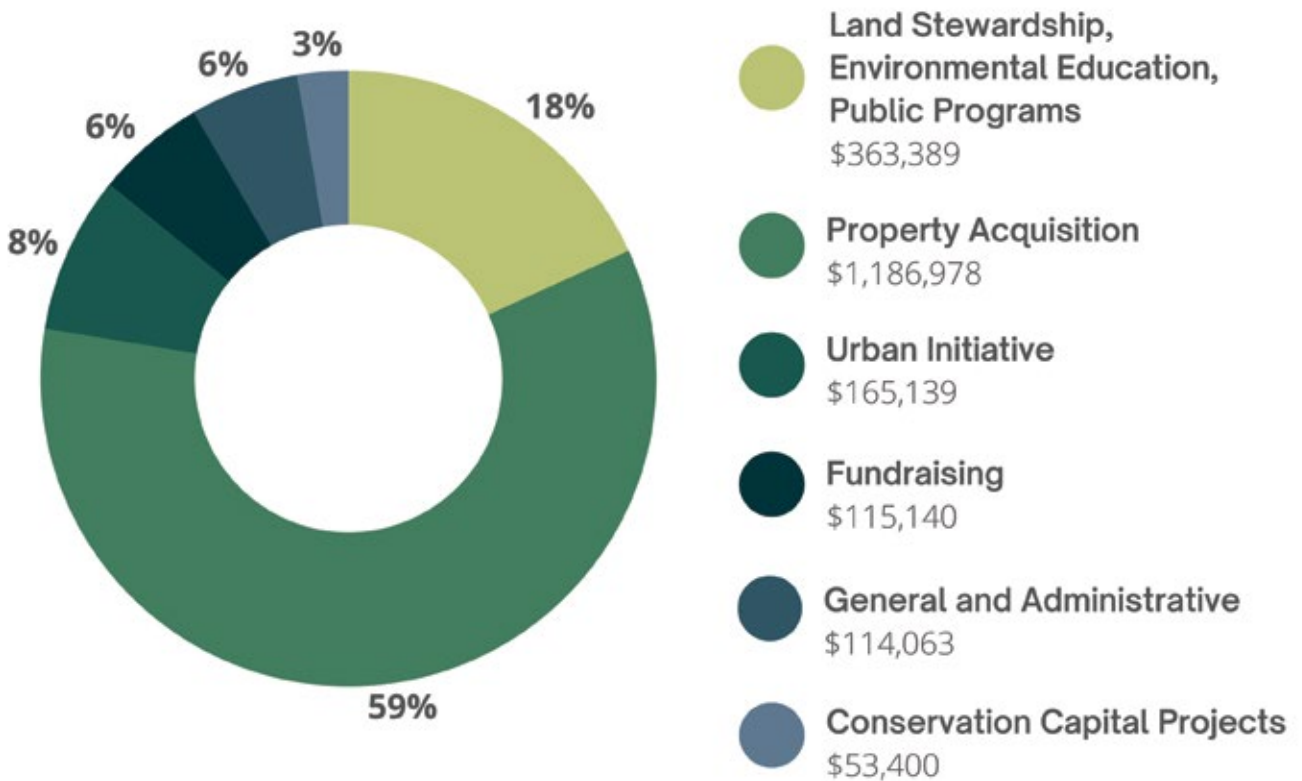




# WLT 2024 REVENUE



# 2024 AT A GLANCE



# THANKS to our 2024 SUPPORTERS

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*"The Westerly Land Trust is a treasure shared by all  
who live in our various shoreline communities.  
As donors, we are unified by a love of green space and  
productive farmland. We also have the profound joy of  
ownership of so many diverse parcels of land, forever  
protected." ~ Gale and Terry Hunt*



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*"The Westerly Land Trust is not only an organization that takes great pride in helping others in the community, but it offers a sense of belonging. Members develop friendships and there is a feeling of great camaraderie. We feel strongly about offering as much financial and physical support as possible in return for the pleasure and fun we have gained from being a part of this family of community members."*

*~ Jenny and Ian Sykes*





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CCC at Champlin Farm Preserve by Steve Fagin

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# A LEGACY OF STEWARDSHIP: THE TROMBINO FAMILY'S GIFT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

In 2024, Stano and Erin Trombino donated a tract of land adjacent to the Westerly Land Trust's 148-acre Riverwood Preserve. For Stano, this land holds deep personal meaning—he spent time nearby as a child, fishing at the neighboring Boy Scout camp. "If there's a way to let someone else have those same memories," he says, "then that means a lot." The gift is not just a contribution of land—it's an invitation to experience the same sense of wonder and belonging that shaped his own connection to nature.

The donation is also a reflection of shared values. Like the Westerly Land Trust, the Trombinos believe in conservation as both a responsibility and a legacy. Their commitment to land stewardship began years earlier, in 2008, when they set out to find property they could one day pass on to their daughter—just as Stano's parents had done for him and his siblings, ensuring they could remain rooted in their hometown. Stano discovered a parcel off Moorhouse Road and began a nearly four-year dialogue with the landowner, eventually purchasing the property in 2011. At the time, the land had fallen into disrepair—the farmhouse gone, the fields overtaken by invasive growth. But the Trombinos saw what it could be.

With their daughter in mind, they got to work restoring the land. They brought back hayfields, rebuilt stone walls, and partnered with the

USDA and NRCS to implement a wide array of conservation practices. The land—now known as the Trombino Family Farm—sits adjacent to WLT's Wahaneeta Preserve and today supports local agriculture, supplying hay to Ever-Breeze Farm. The farm reflects the same deep care for the natural world and the desire to preserve it for future generations as Westerly Land Trust considers on our own properties.



The Trombinos' donation to the Westerly Land Trust is a continuation of that ethic—another act of stewardship rooted in love, foresight, and an enduring sense of place. Through their dedication, the Trombinos have ensured that the land they love will remain protected and meaningful—not just for their family, but for the entire community.

## INTRODUCING: BONNY BROOK PRESERVE

J&C Luzzi Homes, LLC, developers of a residential project on Ledward Avenue, have generously donated 8.1 acres of land to the Westerly Land Trust—demonstrating a thoughtful balance between responsible development and environmental conservation. This donation ensures that a portion of the natural landscape surrounding the new neighborhood will be preserved for generations to come, protecting local wildlife habitats and maintaining green space within a growing community.

This initiative exemplifies how development and land conservation can work hand in hand. As Westerly continues to grow, partnerships like this serve as a model for sustainable planning that respects both the need for housing and the value of open space. The donated acreage, now called Bonny Brook Preserve, will enhance the region's environmental health and recreational potential, aligning with the Land Trust's mission to conserve land that contributes to the community's well-being.

The Westerly Land Trust applauds J&C Luzzi Homes for their commitment to thoughtful development and their investment in the long-term environmental health of the Westerly community.





## VOLUNTEER CORNER: LAURA HOWER

Originally from New Canaan, CT, Laura Hower visited Westerly several times starting in the late 1970s. Coincidentally and unbeknownst to her at the time, her now wife, Katie, was also spending time here. Years later, while living in Massachusetts, the couple began dreaming of a place to retire, and Westerly, the spot that held so many fond memories for them—individually and together—was the natural choice. They began their property search in 2012.

It wasn't long after moving in that Laura and Katie met their neighbors, Jane and David Hannon. Their friendships began organically; Laura and David would work in tandem in their respective gardens, swapping tips and admiring each other's planting choices. When David got involved with WLT (first through CCC, then as a Board member), he knew Laura's passion for nature and community would be a perfect match. He suggested she check out the Coffee and Clearing Club.

In the fall of 2023, David's encouragement paid off. Laura joined the group—and instantly found her place. "It just feels easy," she says. "The group is welcoming, helpful, and warm. Everyone is eager to help others learn. Wouldn't it be nice if this could be how the world worked?"

For Laura, CCC is about more than stewardship—it's about connection. Through trail work, invasive species removal, and various conservation

projects, Laura has found a shared purpose with fellow volunteers from all walks of life. It's this blend of backgrounds and experiences, she says, that makes the group so rich and rewarding.

Now a dedicated CCC member, Laura embodies the spirit of charitableness that makes Westerly special.

"This town is blessed with so many fairy godmothers and godfathers who work to give something back," she says. "It makes my heart happy."

Her story reminds us that volunteering isn't just about what you give. In many cases, giving one's time has the reciprocal benefits of finding joy, friendship, meaning, and community connection. From a summer visitor to a cherished member of the WLT community, Laura Hower's journey has come full circle—rooted in place, and growing with purpose.



## THE GIFT ECONOMY

As a part of the Westerly Land Trust's week-long Earth Day celebration, we hosted our 2nd annual book club in partnership with Westerly Library and Wilcox Park. This year, we read Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *The Serviceberry*, which illustrates how gift economies prevail in nature and how humans can benefit by following suit. Pictured on the cover of this newsletter, the group gathered in a circle outside the Wahaneeta Preserve cabin—the day was simply too perfect to sit indoors. We exchanged examples of how we had experienced, witnessed, or portrayed the gift economy in our own lives.

In the spirit of *The Serviceberry*, here are some partnerships Westerly Land Trust has nurtured in recent months:



In late April 2025, the Alan Peck of the **Wilcox Park** asked if the Westerly Land Trust might have any volunteers who would be interested in the annual pond cleaning project. Seventeen eager WLT volunteers spent two hours with the Wilcox Park team, getting deep in the mud and muck, removing 3,000lbs of leaf litter—and they were all smiles about it!



A crew of volunteers worked to preserve marsh hydrology at Winnapaug Farm Preserve. In partnership with **RI DEM and Save the Bay**, WLT installed and now maintains features called runnels which aid in the draining of freshwater off the marsh platform.



WLT worked with **Dunn's Corners School** to lend adventure backpacks to kids over Spring Break. These 20 backpacks were filled with supplies like binoculars, magnifying glasses, and packets of animal/plant identification information, so kids could spend the week exploring the natural environment!



Continuing last fall's work at Haversham Preserve in partnership with **Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation**, the WLT Building Crew (a faction of CCC) added a staircase to improve access to and from the newly constructed boardwalk that allows walkers to safely and scenically pass between Haversham and Noyes Neck Roads.





## REBUILDING THE CAIRNS

Driving on Shore Road past the Winnapaug Farm Preserve, it's hard to miss the three large cairns in the westernmost section of the property, separating the hayfield from the cornfield. Cairns have been built for millennia, standing as landmarks, navigation aids, burial markers, or other purposes, but these particular structures were built several years ago by WLT volunteers using stones gathered from the field. Over the winter, presumably due to natural shifts in the ground from freezing and thawing, one cairn toppled. Not to worry! CCC came to the rescue and safely rebuilt the landmark structure.



## FARM STAND AT BARLOW NATURE PRESERVE

One of the many perks of this region is the plentiful fresh produce. Early June will bring the reopening of the Barlow Nature Preserve's Farm Stand operated by Frontier Farm and Echo Rock Flowers. Find them at 449 Westerly-Bradford Road on Thursdays and Fridays from 3-6pm and, new for 2025, Saturdays from 12-4pm.



## A TIP FOR TRAIL TRIPS

BY DEIRDRE O'CONNOR

This past October while taking a lovely morning solo walk through Wahaneeta Preserve, I took a sudden tumble and hit the ground hard before I even knew what happened. After lying there for a few minutes, I picked myself up, checked my surroundings, hoping no one had witnessed my sudden fall from grace, and searched the trail for the culprit. What had tripped me? And there it was, a tripping root who I had identified on many walks before as a "bad actor". I wondered, how could I not have seen it this time? I had scrapes and bruises but what hurt the most was reckoning with the fact that I had to admit I was occasionally faltering on trails and looking for handrails on stairs, especially when descending, much more often than when I was younger.



Looking for something to read while I was icing my knees, I picked up a recent AARP Bulletin and coincidentally (or not) opened it right to *The Hidden Dangers of Progressive Lenses*. . . *Your glasses could put you at risk for serious falls*. I was hooked as I knew immediately that this was the likely culprit. . . I wasn't frail. . . I was simply aging out of my progressive lenses!

Progressive lenses or multi-focal lenses (bi-focals, tri-focals) allow us to have the convenience of a single pair of glasses to see both near and far distances. This convenience comes with a downside, as the lenses may create a distortion or visual blur when looking down through the lower part of the lens. As the prescription gets stronger, the more blurring occurs. This is a problem because balance and foot placement are mostly controlled by vision. This distortion of visual input from the ground increases the risk of tripping and falling, especially in unfamiliar environments or uneven surfaces like trails, curbs and stairs.

According to the CDC, 1 in 4 adults, 65 years and older, will take a fall at least once a year. Additionally, studies have confirmed that wearing multi-focal lenses more than doubles the risk of falling for active seniors.

The solutions to this conundrum are: updating your eyeglass prescription to single distance lenses for use outside the home and car, or contact lenses, or no glasses at all. A recent study in Australia found that among seniors who regularly spent time outdoors, falls decreased by 40% for those who switched to single distance lenses from multi-focal lenses.

Since reading this AARP article and diving into scientific literature a bit more deeply, I am now wearing contacts or no glasses at all in the outdoors. I haven't fallen, and I do feel more secure knowing I am safer for now. I put my glasses back on at the end of the walk when I am doing a tick check! Of course, the most prudent action is to discuss this with your vision care professional and create a plan that will keep you safe on the trail.



# SUPPORT THE WESTERLY LAND TRUST WITH A TAX-SMART GIFT FROM YOUR IRA

## WHY GIVE THROUGH A QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION (QCD)?

If you're 70½ or older and have a traditional IRA, a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a powerful and tax-smart way to support the Westerly Land Trust.

This type of gift can satisfy all or part of your required minimum distribution (RMD), and because the funds go directly to charity, they don't count as taxable income. That means you can make a meaningful gift and enjoy tax advantages, even if you don't itemize deductions.

## HOW TO MAKE A QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION TO THE WESTERLY LAND TRUST

- 1. Contact Your IRA Administrator:** Request a Qualified Charitable Distribution be sent directly to the Westerly Land Trust. Some administrators have a simple form you can fill out.
- 2. Provide the Following Information:** Make sure your IRA administrator includes your name and address with the gift, so we can properly acknowledge your donation. Here's how the check should be made out and where it should be sent:  
**Payable to:** The Westerly Land Trust  
**Mail to:** The Westerly Land Trust, PO Box 601, Westerly, RI 02891  
You may be asked for Westerly Land Trust's EIN, which is 22-2864907.
- 3. Let Us Know:** We'd love to thank you! Once your gift is on the way, please contact Erika Lebling at [elebling@westerlylandtrust.org](mailto:elebling@westerlylandtrust.org) or 401-315-2610, ext 2 to let us know.

## Questions?

Talk to your financial advisor or IRA custodian to see if a QCD is right for you. And feel free to contact us—we're happy to help.

## HOMESCHOOL AT WLT

In Fall 2024, the Westerly Land Trust added a new set of youth educational programs aimed at engaging our community's homeschooled students. Together, we've explored Wahaneeta Preserve in waders, getting up close and personal with crayfish in the streams, and we've harvested honey from the hives at Barlow Nature Preserve, a sweet and sticky job. If you know a homeschool student who is interested in adventuring with WLT, please contact Lauren at [lbarber@westerlylandtrust.org](mailto:lbarber@westerlylandtrust.org).



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

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



### Tree Canopy Townwide Open House

**May 28, 5-6:30pm, Westerly Library Terrace Room** Join the Green Infrastructure Center & the Town of Westerly for an Open House to discuss and provide input on strategies for the Town to promote trees for reducing urban heat, mitigating flood damage, and improving community health.

### Bee Series with Cail Calder

#### **May 31: Caring for your Colony, August 21: From Hive to Jar**

Dive into the world of honey bees under the expert tutelage of Cail "The Beeman" Calder.

### Barlow Nature Preserve Farm Stand Operated by Frontier Farm and Echo Rock Flowers

**Early June through September** Enjoy fresh veggies and beautiful flowers from two local farms working on Westerly Land Trust land. Swing by 449 Westerly-Bradford Road to shop, Thursdays and Fridays 3-6pm and new in 2025, Saturdays 12-4pm.

### BarreCoast Fitness and Yoga Events at Winnapaug Farm Preserve

**May 18, June 20, July 13, August 10, September 22** Connect your mind and body with nature in these outdoor wellness sessions led by our partners at BarreCoast. Westerly Land Trust members receive a special discounted rate.

### Echo Rock Flowers Summer Events

**Summer 2025** Echo Rock Flowers will be hosting a variety of flower-inspired events including a Summer Solstice flower crown workshop on June 21 and date night picnics amidst the blooms. They have generously pledged to donate 10% of all workshop proceeds to support the Westerly Land Trust's conservation efforts.

### WTAC's Trail Races

**September 13 and October 25** Join the Westerly Track and Athletic club for their trail races at Wahaneeta Preserve (September 13) and Grills Preserve (October 25). For more information, please visit [westerlytrackclub.org](http://westerlytrackclub.org).