

Comings and Goings at Rural Lands

From WRL President Greg Islan - I am happy to serve as the new President of WRL at a time when our resources are needed and being used more than ever. During our months of Covid 19 confinement, WRL trails and properties were open, and brought safe, outdoor pleasure to many Williamstown area residents. We know that in the past year, more than ever, people were hiking and going to open spaces where they could escape the confinements of home. I want to thank you, our loyal Rural Lands members, for your continued support and hope that you will help spread the word about our lands and work, and encourage others to support us.



Welcome back - This spring, we welcomed back Julia Morgan to Rural Lands. Julia worked for WRL from 2007-2013 as Events Coordinator running family programs such as the Pie Contest, Rhubarb Festival, Sheep to Shawl, Winter Tracking, and the Firefly Hike. With her background as an artist and art educator, Julia also taught art classes at Sheep Hill and other Williamstown conservation sites.

Julia rejoins Rural Lands as Programs Coordinator, bringing her artistic talents to our children's programs and school field trips. Additionally, Julia is developing adult programming including speakers, demonstrations, and guided nature walks. She is also assisting the Events Committee with planning and preparations for WRL events and programs. If you see Julia around Sheep Hill, please say hello.

Julia was assisted with her two weeks of children's summer programs by locals Gray Miller and Fanny Thomas. It was wonderful to hear joyful sounds echoing from the meadow again, especially after our 2020 children's programming was curtailed unexpectedly due to Covid recommendations. Her "Critters, Seeds & Me..." and "Surfing the (Spider) Web..." were well received by kids and parents alike.

In other news - Our director, David McGowan, is taking a leave of absence from his job for personal reasons. His leave started in July and continues through mid-October. David recently oversaw the release of WRL's new brand and revamped website, and he successfully stewarded a farmland protection project through town meeting. Former WRL board president and current Lands Committee chair Hank Art will serve as interim director in David's absence. We wish David luck during his leave and look forward to his return in the fall.



From Hank Art, WRL Interim Director

I am honored to be filling the role of Interim Director of an organization that has, for decades, enhanced the quality of life and the environment for all residents of the Town and, by extension, to the world beyond. Now nearly two months into the routine, I look forward to continuing into the fall to do my part in continuing the good works of WRL and enabling others to do the same. David McGowan's leave of absence presents challenges for all of us, but it also presents opportunities for each of us to become more engaged in the missions of conserving the land that sustains us so that it will continue to do so for future generations, of supporting sustainable working landscapes, and of providing both physical and intellectual access to these landscapes through educational programs and recreational opportunities.

I have always thought of Rural Lands as a community-wide, team effort that draws upon the incredible diversity of talents that we are so fortunate to have amongst us. In the coming months WRL will be even more dependent on these collective resources, and it is my hope and expectation that everyone will respond to the challenges with generosity to the best of their abilities. I'm looking forward to continuing to work closely with the WRL leadership, WRL staff, and all the "Rurallanders" in keeping up our momentum and together even exploring further.

Henry "Hank" Art

Trail season!

After last year's hiatus, the Trail Crew returned to the woods this summer! Williamstown Rural Lands continued its partnership with the Williams Outing Club and brought on two interns to work with Lands & Trails Coordinator Dan Gura for eight weeks. The interns, Nima Darafshi and Henry McGrew, spent the summer maintaining and improving our local trails.

Nima is a Williamstown local who spent time on the trails as a cross-country runner and skier at Mt. Greylock Regional School before heading over the Taconics to Union College. He is a rising second-year student and plans to major in Environmental Policy.



Henry came to Williamstown from Lake Placid, NY, to attend Williams College. He is a rising senior, majoring in Computer Science. He's also a member of the Williams Nordic Ski Team and spends each fall and spring training on the local trails with his buddies.

The trail crew had a busy season. Their first major project involved building a bridge across Hopper Brook, deep in the heart of Mt. Greylock. Other highlights included the installation of stepping stones through a persistently wet section of the Stone Hill Road Trail, as well as the continuation of the 2019's cribwork at Pine Cobble. Keep an eye out, too, for new rock staircases on the RRR Brooks Trail! To break up the time on these larger projects, the crew clipped and cleared many of Williamstown's classic trails like Broad Brook and the Class of '33 Trail.

Though the work is tough, both interns focused on the broader rewards that this summer provided: Nima appreciated that his efforts will "help local residents and tourists embrace the nature of Williamstown," and Henry is "looking forward to running the local trails with [his] teammates, and enjoying the work we've done."