



WILLIAMSTOWN  
**Rural Lands**

Forests, fields, and farms — for you, forever.

# 2023 Annual Report



**AUGUST 2024**



### From the President—Greg Islan



For Rural Lands, 2023 has been a year of excitement and growth. Executive Director Robin Sears jumped into the job, getting to know many of you in the community and moving WRL ahead in many ways. The other staff, Cathy Talarico, Daniel Gura and Dana Williams, continued to do what they do best. Cathy worked diligently as the year

drew to a close in preparing the office and all involved with the eventuality of her retirement in early 2024. Daniel, with interns and volunteers who orbit around him, conducted several major and countless minor actions to keep our trails safe and habitats functioning well. Dana energized and expanded our programs and brought a new look to our publicity.

We are grateful to all supported our purchase of farmland on Oblong Road in 2023. We are especially grateful to our peers at The Trustees of Reservations who purchased a Conservation Restriction on it, ensuring that this land is conserved in perpetuity. Its' protection ensures the provision of valuable family resources, ecological services in the watershed, and a fabulous viewshed.

Children in programs at Sheep Hill regaled their parents and caregivers with tales of defending the Nature Kingdom from intruders and the adventures of frogs caught, or almost caught, at Josiah's Pond. Our trails were improved by the many volunteers

**Cover photo:** April vacation Nature Explorers determine the age of a Norway spruce recently removed from Sheep Hill (97 years).

clearing fallen debris. And the trails were used by many more volunteers who led walks and hikes around town and the firefly and owl evenings at our special Sheep Hill.

When we look back at 2023, we will note that it was a year of growth and vision for our staff and board. Our members and supporters helped us realize an important land conservation project, demonstrating that in the right situation, land conservation is important to many residents in town. You supported our educational programming and pitched in to keep walking trails safe and beautiful. Through it all, the WRL staff, volunteers, and our supporters near and far have made it another outstanding year for Williamstown Rural Lands.

Thank you all.



**Land Acknowledgement:** With gratitude and humility we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, hiking and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, the Indigenous people of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all. We invite you to learn more about the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans at the tribal website: [www.mohican.com](http://www.mohican.com).

### From the Executive Director—Robin Sears



Did you know that outdoor recreation contributes more than \$1 trillion to the U.S. economy every year? And if you add the value of the health benefits of being in nature, the livelihood security related to preserving farmland, and the educational gains from counting tadpoles, I venture that Rural Lands makes a significant impact

on the local economy and social fabric.

It is an exciting time to be a member of WRL. Whether you are a butterfly aficionado, parent of a nature-curious child, hiker, or landowner with a goal of good stewardship, we welcome you to engage with us and enjoy the resources we offer—land, trails, and programs. The current team of staff and board has now completed several land conservation projects, and we have new ones in line. Our programs enjoyed record attendance levels. And we are working through outreach and facilities improvements to welcome and motivate a broader section of our community to enjoy the outdoors.

Partnerships and collaboration reinforce the social fabric in our community, and we appreciate opportunities in 2023 to participate. We honored the original inhabitants of this region, the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans, through the installation of informational panels at our Cold Spring site and hosting a luncheon organized by Williams College students on Indigenous Peoples' Day. We partnered with the international Tupelo Press on an arts and literature review journal, *Northern Berkshire Landscapes: A Celebration*, with additional collaboration from the Clark Institute of Art and Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.



Informational panels about the Cold Spring site history.

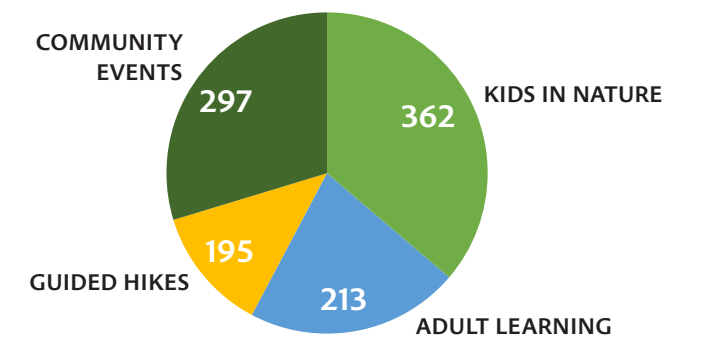
WRL stayed connected to regional peer and professional networks, with Programs Director Dana Williams and I attending the annual summit of the Association for Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) in Maine. WRL Stewardship Director Daniel Gura and board member Brian Cole became Keyston Cooperators through the Mass Woods training program in forest ecology and management, wildlife management and land conservation. Our active participation with peer organizations through two Regional Conservation Partnership programs informs our decisions on habitat management and priority conservation areas.

Our mission guides all that we do to serve the local community through land conservation, nature education, and outdoor recreation. Please join me in thanking our members—you, your peers and neighbors—and encouraging others to join in our efforts to advance this worthy mission.

### Land Conservation and Stewardship

In 2023, two land conservation projects came to fruition. We were fortunate to acquire ten acres of farmland on Oblong Road at Mailbox Hill and secure its preservation with a conservation restriction held by The Trustees of Reservations. We also assisted the Hart family of South Williamstown with the conservation by MassWildlife of 100 acres of prime forestland.

Stewardship Director Daniel Gura and Williams College student Ana Sofia Roldan conducted a complete monitoring of our property boundaries to map the incidence of invasive plants in the first half of 2023. This inventory will help guide habitat restoration efforts in the years ahead. Daniel also led his summer trail interns Al Lake and Ellie Davis, also from Williams College, and two groups of volunteers on an arduous trail infrastructure repair at Pine Cobble. They installed timber steps to stabilize the soil and prevent further damage to the trail and its surrounding habitat. We hope you'll enjoy the hike!



Number of participants in WRL programs and events in 2023

### Programs

We held 62 nature-based programs and events in 2023, engaging 1001 participants, including toddlers and their parents through the Family Center of Northern Berkshire County and neighbors learning about land stewardship through our Knowing Your Landscape series. Through our programs for children we endeavor to motivate local and regional families to get their kids outdoors to bathe in nature, experience the elements, and discover their passions through play outdoors. Adults and teens deepened their acquaintance with nature on our bird watching outings, butterfly walks, and plant identification strolls. Others sought a physical challenge, gorgeous views, and nature interpretation by volunteer leaders on our series of 14 guided hikes.

We especially enjoy casually bringing community together at Sheep Hill to enjoy conversation, music, and food at community events, and, yes, sometimes a bit of work at our bi-annual site clean-ups. Your participation in all that we do motivates our creativity and efforts.

Thank you.

**GIFTS  
IN MEMORIAM**

**In Memory of  
Anita Barker**

Tad and Trudy Ames  
Francis B. Barker  
Arthur Evans and  
Leslie Reed-Evans  
Peter Boudreau and  
Cathy Talarico  
Penny Barker Weeks

**In Memory of  
Jim Galusha**

Wayne and Clare Morrison

**In Memory of  
John Craig**

Claudia and Van Ellet  
Daphne McGill  
Arthur Evans and  
Leslie Reed-Evans

**In Memory of  
John H. Foehl**

Pooh and Charlie Lockwood

**In Memory of Jude Sabot**

Arthur Evans and  
Leslie Reed-Evans

**In Memory of  
Kelly Ryan**

Arthur Evans and  
Leslie Reed-Evans

**In Memory of  
Otto Wied**

John T. and Jane B. Allen  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert N. Janes  
Elizabeth and Bruce Kieffer

**In Memory of  
Virginia Ford Fletcher**

Anonymous (2)  
West Oil Company, Inc.  
Reinhard A. Wobus  
  
Anonymous  
Lisa and Brad Bates  
Diane deCordova  
Frank Goicoechea and  
Andrea Krog Goicoechea  
Roberta Heisterkamp  
Rhonda Henry  
Catherine Isaacs  
Gail LeBlanc  
Christine and George Plews  
Williamstown League of  
Women Voters Board  
of Directors  
Mark Stevens



**Honoring Past Leadership**

Three emeritus leaders of our organization passed away in 2023. John Craig served for nine years as board member and President, notably establishing our Craig Land Stewardship Fund. Anita Barker served for 17 years as a founding member of the board and Secretary, taking an active role in the early decisions. Virginia Ford Fletcher, known as Ginny, served on the board and volunteered for many years, generously directing a bequest to us. We appreciate the leadership and dedication to the success of this organization from John, Anita, and Ginny.



**VOLUNTEERS MAKE THINGS HAPPEN!**

Yumi Farwell  
Williamstown Theater Festival  
Production Crew  
Van and Claudia Ellet  
Trevor Murphy  
Tommy Richey  
Tim Carr  
Tamar Schragar  
Shawnette Smalls  
Scott Lewis  
Sarah Houghteling  
Robin Sher  
Robert Wiesenberger  
Phil McKnight  
Peter Farwell  
Overland Summers  
Nicholas Carr  
Miles Primmer  
Miles Greene  
Mike Daly  
Micah Manary

Marsha Recknagel  
Marisa Wesker  
Lucy Gerold  
Linda Conway  
Libby Poppick  
Laurie Pike  
Lauren Stevens  
Laura Bentz  
Kelsey Gura  
Julia Morgan  
Julia Keosaian  
John Case  
Jo from Boston  
Jerry O'Neil  
Jennifer Swoap  
Jefferson Strait  
Jeff Levine  
Jason McDowell-Green  
Jane Culnane  
Heleny Cook

Hank Art  
Guntlow &  
Associates  
Greg Islan  
Frederick Williams  
Finn McCafferty  
Famely Caba  
Eric White  
Emily Hennessey  
Elizabeth Whitney  
Elena Traister  
Elayne Murphy  
Eileen Russell  
Dustin Griffin  
Doug Lister  
Dick Schlesinger  
Dedee Durham  
David Skalski  
David Low  
Dan Gura  
Cosmo Catalano

Chuck Johnson  
Christopher Densmore  
Christian Sullivan  
Chelsea Colby  
Carty Bledsoe  
Carrie Jones  
Brian Cole  
Brian Carpenter  
Bob Hatton  
Bill Maddix  
Bill Levy  
Betsy Kolbert  
Barbara Carr  
Avery Gura  
Averill Cook  
Ava Simunovic  
Anne Jaskot  
Andrew Jones  
Allen Pope  
Alice Bradley

**GIFTS TO OUR  
ENDOWMENT  
FUNDS**

**Broadbent Endowment Fund  
for the 21st Century**

The passion that the Broadbents have shown for land conservation is inspiring, and we appreciate their generosity and that of all donors. Gifts to the endowment fund will be a lasting legacy for all who appreciate Williamstown's fields, forests, and purple mountains.

Gifts were received from  
Joseph and Françoise Connors  
Pete and Yumi Farwell  
Peter Boudreau and  
Cathy Talarico

**Endowment of the  
Mathias J. Bartels  
Environmental Award Fund**

This fund supports an annual award to a graduating senior at Mt. Greylock Regional High School who has demonstrated environmental leadership. It is named in memory of Mathias Bartels, who set an example of leadership at Mt. Greylock.

Gifts were received from  
Elizabeth and Thomas Bartels  
James R. and Donna Heekin  
Timothy and Sunnie Heekin

**COMPARATIVE FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, Inc.

**Condensed Comparative Statement of Financial Position (\$)**

December 31, 2023 and 2022

Assets	unaudited	
	2023	2022
Cash and Other Receivables	283,921	287,450
Conservation Land, at cost	3,890,030	3,355,550
Property and Equipment	317,111	331,685
Investments and Endowment at Market Value	1,391,312	1,290,950
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>5,882,374</b>	<b>5,265,635</b>
Total Liabilities	98,495	139,795
Total Net Assets	5,783,879	5,125,840
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>5,882,374</b>	<b>5,265,635</b>

**Condensed Comparative Statement Of Activities (\$)**

For the Years Ended December 31, 2023 and 2022

	unaudited	
	2023	2022
Membership	172,034	172,813
Donations, Fundraising, Grants and Other	714,308	363,735
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>886,342</b>	<b>536,548</b>
Investment Income	59,886	37,082
Net Unrealized Gain/(Loss) on Investments	114,178	(229,417)
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>1,060,406</b>	<b>344,213</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>402,367</b>	<b>394,040</b>
Increase in Net Assets	658,039	(49,827)
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	5,125,840	5,175,667
<b>Net Assets at End of Year</b>	<b>5,783,879</b>	<b>5,125,840</b>

**DIRECTORS EMERITI**

Marion C. Alton †	Mary Lou Galusha †	Stephen N.
Henry W. Art	James C. Gibbons †	Pagnotta, Esq.
Anita Barker †	Susan Gold	Charles Schlesinger
Elizabeth Bartels	Dustin Griffin	Malcolm Smith
Linda Becker	Bruce D. Grinnell	John L. Sprague †
Roger Bolton	Sherwood Guernsey	Richard C. Steege †
Jock Brooks	Amy Herring	Win Stuebner
John C. Craig †	David A. Horton	John Umlauf
Anne Crider	Tom Jorling	Pam Weatherbee
David P. Dethier	Libby Kieffer	Kim Wells
Maureen Dietze	Chester K. Lasell †	Samuel Westcott, Jr.
Sam Edson †	Penny Low	John Winant †
Karen Falk	Don H. McLucas, Jr.	Reinhard A. Wobus
Virginia Fletcher †	Nancy Nysten	Elizabeth Wright †
Juliet Flynt	Claire-Ann Oakley	
Henry Flynt, Jr. †		† deceased

**2023 BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS**

**Greg Islan**  
*President*

**Barbara Carr**  
*Vice President*

**Phil McKnight**  
*Vice President*

**Geraldine Shen**  
*Vice President*

**Robert Kraus**  
*Secretary*

**Janette Kessler**  
*Treasurer*

**Cosmo Catalano, Jr.**  
**Brian Cole**  
**Averill Cook**  
**Aly Corey**  
**Jane Culnane**  
**Ron Ernest-Jones**  
**Betsy Kolbert**  
**Tom Leamon**  
**Malcolm Moutenot**  
**Allen Pope**  
**Jeff Sher**  
**Wendy Sklavem**  
**Tamanika Terry Steward**  
**Stephen N. Pagnotta, Esq.,**  
*Counsel*



**GRANTS**

In 2023, we won seven of nine grant bids for a total of \$58,105. We gratefully acknowledge those grantors for their confidence in us to advance our mission.

Anonymous

Cultural Council of Northern  
Berkshire, an agency of  
the Mass Cultural Council

Mass Cultural Council,  
Cultural Sector  
Recovery Program

Mountain One Bank,  
Community Dividend

USDA Natural Resources  
Conservation Service,  
Conservation Stewardship  
Program

USDA Natural Resources  
Conservation Service,  
Environmental Quality  
Improvement Program



**Thanks to these  
Partners & Business  
Supporters**

Cozy Corner Motel

DEI Outdoors

Lickety Split of Mass MoCA

MA Department of  
Conservation and Recreation

Northern Berkshire  
Community Coalition

MassWildlife

South Williamstown  
Community Association

The Clark Institute of Art

The Trustees of Reservations

The Spring Street Market  
and Café

Tupelo Press

**2023 STAFF**

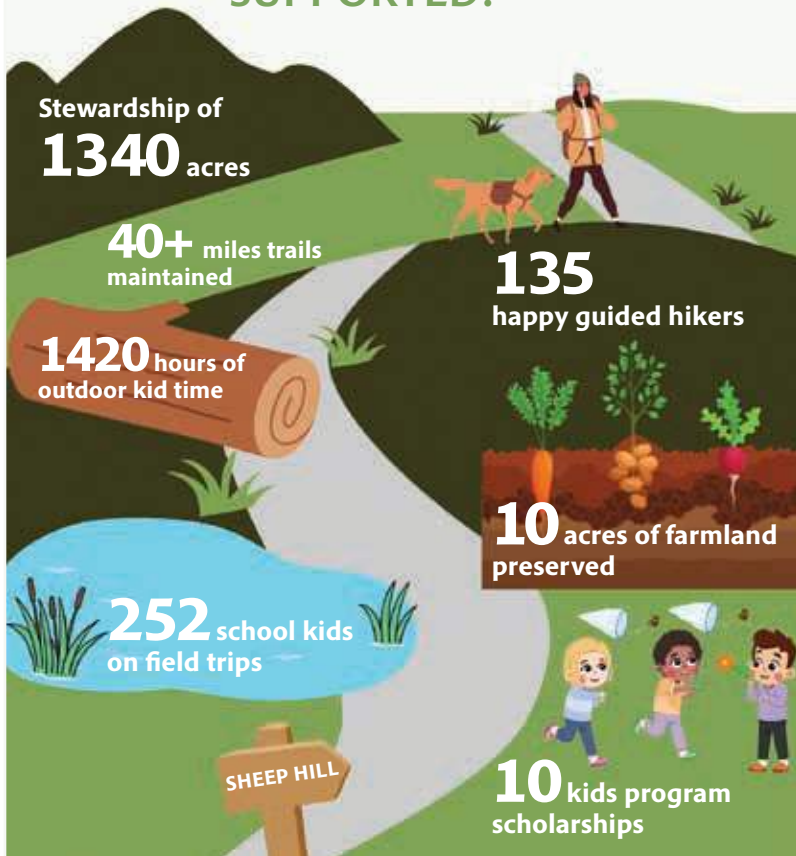
**Robin R. Sears, PhD**  
*Executive Director*

**Cathy Talarico**  
*Assistant Director*

**Dan Gura**  
*Stewardship Director*

**Dana Williams, PhD**  
*Programs Director*

## YOUR 2023 MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTED:



*Your donations help to keep our forests, fields, and farms thriving and supports our community outreach and public programs. Thank you!*

## WAYS TO GIVE

*The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation and gratefully accepts contributions.*

Visit us online at <https://rurallands.org/donate> to:

- **Become a Member** or Donate
- Give a **Gift Membership**
- Honor or remember someone with a **Tribute Donation**
- Make a **Gift of Appreciated Securities**
- Utilize your **Employer Matching Gift Program**
- Contribute through a **Donor-Advised Fund (DAF)**
- Ask us about **Planned Giving Options**
- We welcome additional **restricted gifts** in support of the Broadbent Endowment Fund, the Land Conservation Fund, and the Education and Interpretive Center Fund



**QUESTIONS?**

**Call 413-458-2494**

**KEEP IN TOUCH!**

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Williamstown, MA 01267**

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**www.rurallands.org**

**@WilliamstownRuralLands**