



Photo: Tom Cameron

CHAPTER 7

The Role of Land Trusts in Integration of Land Protection Goals

Every municipality within the study area has an independent land trust organization established as 501(c)3 non-profit charity. The primary purpose of each land trust is to work on a voluntary basis with local landowners to protect the places people care about in their communities. Land trusts do prioritize kinds of properties they would like to preserve, and often base their decisions on the scenic, ecological or agricultural value of potential parcels. To date nearly 6,000 acres of land have been voluntarily conserved in perpetuity and are being held and managed by the local land trusts in eight of the 10-town study area towns. In Windsor and Hartland, the land trusts are start-up organizations. At the time of the Study Committee’s survey they did not own any property or conservation easements.



Land Trusts of the ten town study area

Land conservation is becoming more complex every day. Successful land trust efforts today require the ability to navigate complex real estate and financial transactions, raise adequate funds to conserve priority lands, manage and steward hundreds, if not thousands, of acres of land for perpetuity and ensure their organizations are running in a legally, technically and ethically sound manner.

As a part of the Wild and Scenic Study each land trust was requested to complete a survey in order to allow FSWS to better understand their organizational and conservation priorities as well as their needs and challenges. While it was clear land trusts are focused on preserving scenic beauty, recreational

and natural resources, they also expressed a need for greater overall organizational capacity especially around the issues of land stewardship and membership/volunteer recruitment. Most land trusts also expressed an interest in partnering with other land trusts, as well as local, state and federal governments. Some of the land trusts have been more successful at this than others. Partnerships range from substantial help with acquisitions by means of local, state and federal funds to smaller scale assistance to land trusts through their use of WHIP grants and FRCC dedicated Land Protection Program grants for stewardship projects. Additionally, all the land trusts need increased funding both for acquisition of land and for stewardship.

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In four of the five Outstanding Resource Values (Geology, Water Quality, Biological Diversity and Recreation) discussed in this Management Plan for the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook systems, open space conservation was mentioned as a possible tool for protecting the resources. Local land trusts can potentially play a key partnership role in facilitating land conservation efforts through their status as locally based organizations that can be effective working with landowners, local towns, state and federal governments and others who are interested in conserving land with important resource values. It is very common for local land trusts to partner with town commissions on identifying conservation priorities and cooperatively pursuing specific opportunities. Additionally, land trusts have been important partners with USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service in working to protect and steward important agricultural lands in the region.

To help ensure that the region has land trusts that are effective in participating in the protection of the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook's Outstanding Resource Values, and have the sustainable capacity to care in perpetuity for the lands and resources they protect, they should be considered key partners in implementing portions of this plan. Specific actions to undertake to support their partnership could include potentially a combination of providing training opportunities, funding and/or direct coaching/mentoring that will give land trusts the ability to expand their skills and abilities. Areas that are probably within the capability of FSWS that may be considered for support to advance land trusts abilities as partners in implementation of this plan include:

- **Working with Land Trusts on Strategic Land Protection:** Help land trusts to identify and pursue high quality voluntary land conservation projects that advance the protection of the region's Outstanding Resource Values including a potential land protection program to conserve land that furthers the goals of FSWS.

- **Working with Land Trusts on Land Stewardship:** Improve the land trusts' ability to steward and defend their conserved lands and related Outstanding Resource Values through hands-on assistance and through providing information on grants and other sources of stewardship funding.
- **Providing Assistance to Land Trusts in Their Community Outreach and Support Efforts:** To assure broad public support for the land trusts and their work and to increase involvement of the community in the programs and operations of the land trusts, work with local land trusts and FRWA to help publicize land trusts' projects, needs and the benefits land trusts bring to communities.
- **Fostering Land Trust Collaborations:** To enhance river protection by increasing the pace of land conservation, foster and support collaborative work of land trusts, other land conservation organizations and the lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic partners.

At this time there is no mechanism in place for the corridor town land trusts to appoint a land trust representative to the FSWS Committee, so there is not a position on the core committee that is solely for a land trust representative. However, it is very important to have land trust input and participation in implementing the Management Plan. The FSWS Committee will work with the land trust community to find the best way to communicate and collaborate on areas of common interest in land and water protection. The fact that land trusts are not represented on FSWS at this time is not intended to permanently exclude them: if an effective mechanism for having land trusts be part of the core committee is found, FSWS can change the make-up of the core committee.