



NEWSLETTER

Sheep Hill | 671 Cold Spring Road | Williamstown, MA 01267 | rurallands.org | (413) 458-2494

HIKES & WALKS

Petersburg Road to Buxton Ravine Loop

June 18 — 10:30 a.m.

4 miles. Moderately strenuous hike through forest, fields, and historic woods roads. Meet at Buxton Ravine trailhead.

Bird Walk: Caretaker Farm

June 23 — 7:30-9:00 a.m.

Join Tommy Richey for a bird walk through fields and forest edge, and along the banks of the Green River's West Branch.

Firefly Hike

July 1 — 7:30 p.m.

Sheep Hill will be the backdrop for the glittering jewels of the meadow! Before the hike, we'll swap stories around the campfire and make s'mores.

Birch Hill Loop

July 9 — 9:00 a.m.

4 miles. Moderately rolling loop through woods and meadow. Meet at Taconic Trail State Park pullout on Route 2.

Phelps-Mills Hollow Loop

July 23 — 9:00 a.m.

3.5 miles. Moderately strenuous loop up to the Taconic Crest and back down. Meet at Phelps trailhead.

All of this, right in our backyard

It's possible that Sheep Hill welcomed more visitors in May than it did during the past couple of years. Though the pandemic continues, our home is still a place for our community to celebrate the landscape and our ongoing stewardship of it.

On May 7th, our Sheep to Shawl festival returned after a three-year hiatus. Later in the month, we held our annual meeting. The same folks who made Sheep to Shawl possible—volunteers, staff, and our members—gathered at Sheep Hill to elect three new board members, celebrate past WRL family, and hear from our new Executive Director, Robin Sears. The spirit was overwhelmingly one of gratitude for one another and optimism about Rural Lands' future.

Making up for lost time, we presented three years' worth of Lewis

Conservation Legacy Awards to individuals in recognition of their exemplary conservation leadership. Recipients

were Kathy Chesney for her extraordinary service as a children's educator, Kim Wells for his farming prowess and leadership in shepherding the Caretaker Farm project, and Hank Art for his long-standing support of WRL and conservation leadership in the region.



Speaking of our future: 19 curious kids participated in our Woodchuck Wednesdays program this spring. The kids exercised their lungs and legs, built forts in the woods, and witnessed the miraculous transformation of wood frog egg to tadpole in Josiah's Pond. May their curiosity grow.

- Malcolm Moutenot, WRL Board Member

WRL PROGRAMS

Working Lands

See the land and meet the people who work it.

This series was initiated to inspire a creative avenue towards strengthening our natural resource based economy. Our community is losing this aspect of our culture, and this effort hopes to redefine ways in which it can continue to be a part of our economy.

We kicked things off with a visit to Jennings Brook Farm to learn about their maple syrup operation. Soon after, we toured two farms in Williamstown. Wendling Farm featured local logging and forest management, and at Caretaker Farm, we walked the fields and heard the history of this long running CSA farm. Next up is a visit to Bigfoot Farm.

Nature Discovery Summer Program

For children aged 5-10

Discover the natural world at Sheep Hill! During a July week of games, crafts, and science, children explore nature, discover what excites them, and create nature-based art.

They'll develop a caring relationship with nature through activities at Sheep Hill, with its pond and streams, forest and meadow. It is the perfect place for your child to safely experience, explore and connect to the natural world. Register online.



From the Director

Greetings from Sheep Hill, where the pollywogs and birds are performing their life skills with exquisite style, and your local land trust is humming along. Our grounds and barn doors are open to the public for exploration, contemplation, and learning, so do drop in.

I am thrilled to have assumed leadership of Rural Lands in March, arriving on the very same day the wood frogs showed up to mate in Josiah's Pond. Like the life cycle of the frog, with transitions from egg to pollywog to frog, I am shifting from resident WRL member to WRL leader. It is an amazing experience because Rural Lands is so deeply embedded in the fabric of this community.

Our community thrives in part because of the extensive intact natural forest, array of fields and meadows, and diversity of local farms. Just as I have worked on issues related to rural farming and forestry in communities in the Amazon region of South America, the eastern Himalayas, and elsewhere, I will work for this community to sustain land-based local livelihoods through land conservation, public education, and environmental stewardship.

As I learn the interdependencies and dynamics that position WRL in the region, I am keen to hear from our diverse constituency. Please reach out to let us know what Williamstown Rural Lands means to you.

- Robin Sears, Executive Director



Groundwork

Spring is an important season for stewardship. As the ground thaws and the greenery returns, we head to the woods to check in on our conserved land and trails. Two of our committees — made up of Rural Lands members and staff — play a critical role in this work.

Our Trails Committee members meet throughout the year, and each individual adopts a local trail. In spring, we head out to do light maintenance and report back on the condition of each trail. If trees have blown over in winter storms, we clear them. If more serious work is needed, we add it to the work list for our trail interns: each summer, these college-aged students work for eight weeks straight, continuing a years' long tradition of trail work.

Similarly, our Lands Committee members take a read on our Conservation Restrictions each spring. Rural Lands holds nearly 300 acres of easements on private land, all with the goal of maintaining the conservation value of forests and fields. As a group, we walk the properties and take note of what we see. If anything is amiss, we document it to begin the process of returning the land to its conserved state.



Spring feels like a brief season, but the work done in these early months by WRL members, volunteers, staff, and landowners lays the groundwork for our community's shared enjoyment of Williamstown's wild and rural lands.
 - Dan Gura, Lands & Trails Coordinator

Community Engagement: a core value of WRL

Williamstown Annual Meeting

Mount Greylock Regional School — Tuesday, June 14 — 7:00-10:00 p.m.

Civic duty calls!

We encourage our fellow residents to prepare for and attend the Town Meeting. Some of the proposed amendments to the town's by-laws related to rural development may affect WRL's work and look and feel of our rural landscape. Many of our members and neighbors are busy studying the agenda and weighing the proposals, conducting the background research, and discussing matters with neighbors and the public. We encourage you to do the same. Some of the matters on the agenda surely will emerge again through the Williamstown Comprehensive Plan process, and we look forward to participating in that.

Children's Programs

We're hiring...spread the word!

Rural Lands is appreciated region-wide for our children's nature-based programs, and we are searching for someone to take leadership on this important pillar of our mission. Please spread the word.

KEEP IN TOUCH!



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What is WRL membership?

Williamstown Rural Lands is a private, non-profit, member-supported land conservation trust. We rely on our members — people like you! — to keep us going as we work to conserve and promote the forests, fields, and farms of Williamstown. A WRL membership keeps your finger on the pulse of local conservation and even gets you discounts on WRL programs. Through your membership support, you help to secure natural ecosystems and farmland in perpetuity, support local farms, and keep outdoor recreation accessible. Thank you!



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