

Dear Aspetuck Land Trust Member,

 2019° was a great year for Aspetuck Land Trust and 2020, despite the challenges, looks to be another great one as well. Let's summarize:

Gilbertie's Farm: We entered into a contract to preserve this special piece of property. We fundraised and planned extensively for it and closed the transaction in April 2020. This is an enormous accomplishment that was led by Board Member Ross Ogden and our Executive Director David Brant and supported by several other members. We are extremely pleased to be able to preserve this important piece of property which abuts our Randall's Farm Preserve.

Green Corridor: This is our continuing effort to preserve more properties in the 40,000-acre corridor and to better connect them and those we already preserve by encouraging homeowners within the corridor to manage their properties more sustainably. Our intent is to help safeguard our community's land, wildlife, and water resources for future generations by linking all these parcels together, as best we can, to build the Green Corridor. To that end, we sponsored many events and demonstration projects including the very interesting and successful Haskins Lecture by Professor Doug Tallamy on "Restoring the Little Things that Run the World" last November 7th. The turnout was large and the reception was very warm. We were pleased to have this opportunity to connect Doug with our members and friends.

Financial Support: Our fundraising effort in 2019 was exceptional. We had donations of \$1,098,396 which exceeded our 2018 total by 75%. This reflected the incredible generosity of you, our members, a lot of institutional support, and the receipt of grants from the State of Connecticut which our staff worked very hard to get. This support helped us in our land acquisition efforts and to create opportunities to expand our Green Corridor programs. Very exciting!

Our Preserves: We continued to provide access to our preserves through the efforts of our Land Management Committee and the trail stewards whom we can't thank enough. We also provided habitat for wildlife and fauna for all our benefit, which is our reason for being in existence. Very rewarding!

As we enter 2020, I want to acknowledge the service of two of our Board Members who will be completing their service this year, Lissy Newman and Aili diBonaventura. Their caring, warmth and generosity has served us well as an organization. We deeply appreciate them and their work. We look forward to their friendship and their continued support and counsel as members.

I also want to acknowledge the long service and support of Bruce LePage, who died in May 2020, and our condolences to his family. Bruce served Aspetuck Land Trust for over 30 years as a member, Board member and Executive Director. His leadership, particularly in helping to organize the effort to acquire Trout Brook Valley was exceptional. Our Board is committed to naming a trail in his honor and memory at Trout Brook Valley



Aspetuck Land Trust President Bill Kraekel.

and will establish an annual internship fund to keep his legacy alive. Few members have had as large and long-lasting impact as Bruce, and we are forever grateful.

Finally, I want to acknowledge our staff, David Brant, Alice Cooney, Lou Bacchiocchi, Mary Ellen Lemay and Jim Wood, for all of their efforts and support which sustains Aspetuck Land Trust and improves our quality of life.

2020 is turning out to be a challenging year for us due to Covid-19 and the related economic consequences. Interestingly, it is creating greater opportunities for Aspetuck Land Trust to serve you, our members and the community. We welcome the opportunity to do so and look forward to your continued kindness and generous support.

Sincerely,

Bill Kraekel

President, Aspetuck Land Trust



About the Cover

Painting of Gilbertie's Farm in Easton by artist John Forgione.

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Aspetuck Land Trust P.O. Box 444 Westport, CT 06881

Established 1966

aspetucklandtrust.org 203-331-1906

Aspetuck Land Trust Annual Meeting

June 30, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Zoom Meeting



Featured Speaker

Doug Tallamy,

Native plant expert

Learn about how you can create more biodiversity in your yard.

You are invited to Aspetuck Land Trust's 54th annual meeting of the members. This year we'll discuss the substantial progress made on the Green Corridor Initiative. Specifically, the two pillars of the program that will also fight the climate crisis: What we've done to engage homeowners to create more biodiversity in their yards. Plus, our progress in protecting larger tracts of land within the Green Corridor.

Aspetuck Land Trust members will be asked to approve a slate of directors—Class of 2024—which consists of Tracy Pennoyer (Weston), Ellen Greenberg (Westport), Michelle Fracasso (At-Large Weston), Daken Vanderburg (Easton).

We will be thanking our retiring board members, Lissy Newman and Aili diBonaventura, for their years of dedicated service to the land trust and commitment to land preservation.

How to join a Zoom meeting: We will email you instructions for connecting to the Zoom annual meeting and vote for the slate of directors. Don't we all wish it were in person again with pizza from Skinny Pines and beer from Aspetuck Brew Lab? Next year!

We have Acquired and will Protect Forever Gilbertie's Farm in Easton

n April 30, 2020, we announced the acquisition of Gilbertie's Farm, a picturesque 34-acre working organic farm adjacent to the Aspetuck Land Trust's 34-acre Randall's Farm Preserve on Sport Hill Road in Easton. Gilbertie's Farm is another anchor for our larger vision of creating a multi-town Green Corridor: a 40,000-acre belt of land in Easton, Weston, Redding, Wilton, Westport, and Fairfield.

Gilbertie's Farm is the largest certified organic greenhouse operation in the Northeast and a staple in the Fairfield County food system for many decades. We intend to keep this property as a working farm in perpetuity and are exploring ways the farm can be more accessible to the community.

Closing on April 24, Aspetuck Land Trust acquired the farm for \$2 million from its owner, Dan Levinson of Westport, and his partners. In 2013, Levinson organized a group to purchase and preserve the farm when its bank threatened foreclosure and development.

Levinson has given the land trust a low-cost mortgage on the property and made a generous financial gift that reduced the purchase price significantly. In addition, thanks to donations

by land trust members, we contributed significant funds as a down payment to keep the mortgage to \$800,000.



Certified organic microgreens grown locally at Gilbertie's Farm. Inset: Farmer Sal Gilbertie.

"Our intent from the outset was to support Sal Gilbertie and save his farm from development, and we are thrilled now to put it in Aspetuck Land Trust's hands for the long term," Levinson said. "We strongly support the land trust's vision of the farm as a transformational open space centerpiece for their Green Corridor Initiative." Levinson added.

Sal Gilbertie, who will continue to farm the land and will lease the property from the land trust said: "We want to thank Dan Levinson for his help and Aspetuck Land Trust for purchasing the farm and preserving Gilbertie's Organics forever and allowing us to continue to grow and serve our communities with quality herbs, vegetables and microgreens."

Dina Brewster, executive director of the CT Northeast Organic Farming Association said, "I can think of no more valorous investment in the future of our children than the protection of their natural resources through the safekeeping of productive organic farms."

"We are pleased to be able to make this announcement in this very difficult economic and public health environment. That said, we continue to need funds to protect other parcels in the Green Corridor that are at clear risk for development," said land trust President Bill Kraekel. "For us to succeed in keeping Fairfield County's serene pockets of rural beauty which we know and love, we will need more people to step

forward as Dan has done to make this financially possible."

The land trust is in the process of raising additional funds to help with the acquisition, including submitting a grant application to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, and will keep you and the public informed as plans for enhancing the property unfold.

"There is still much to do," said our Executive Director David Brant. "Our mission is protecting open space and fighting the climate crisis. Land doesn't save itself. Saving a working farm today will have benefits for many generations to come."

Elaine Mintz, vice president of Fairfield County's Community Foundation said, "Saving this farm is a perfect example of impact philanthropy teaming up with strong non-profit partners to bring a challenging and complex project to fruition."

We want to thank recently retired land trust Board Member Ken Bernhard and Mark Kirsch, both lawyers at Cohen and Wolf, for providing pro bono legal services for the purchase of the farm.

Note: Gilbertie's Farm is a business and working farm and not open for hiking.



The recent aguisition of the 34-acre Gilbertie's Farm in Easton is adjacent to the Aspetuck Land Trust's Randall's Farm Preserve.

Update on the Green Corridor

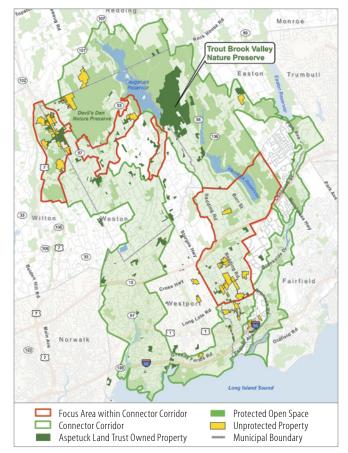
The 40,000-acre Green Corridor is Aspetuck Land Trust's vision to create a healthier community that better connects and engages our towns—including Easton, Weston, Redding, Wilton, Westport, and Fairfield—and safeguards our land, wildlife and water resources for generations to come. The best action we can take locally to combat the climate crisis.

The Green Corridor has two major components:

Land Protection: Preserving the last large undeveloped open spaces in our towns has been our core mission for 54 years and something we will always do. We have a proactive plan in the Green Corridor to save our remaining open spaces before they are developed and gone forever.

Through strategic conservation mapping, years ago we identified 42 properties totaling 805 acres to protect in the Green Corridor. After two years of negotiation, we acquired the second one: the 34-acre Gilbertie's Farm in Easton. Our first was the 38-acre addition to the Honey Hill Preserve in Weston in 2017.

Now our focus continues on negotiations to acquire the 85-acre Fromson Strassler property owned by the town of Weston. It will connect to our existing 119-acre Honey Hill Preserve. We have received three grants for the acquisition: \$625,000 from

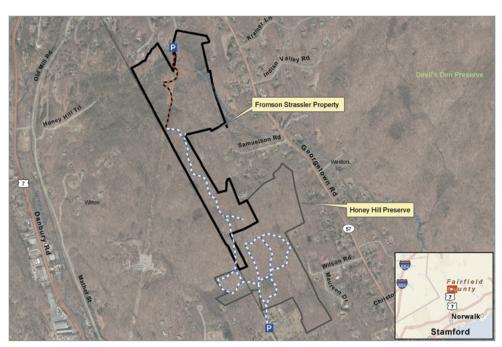


The Green Corridor is Aspetuck Land Trust's vision for a greener, more sustainable world.

the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, \$400,000 gift from the Daniel E. Offutt III Charitable Trust and

\$79,000 from the Connecticut Wetland In Lieu Fee Program. This property is a key parcel in the 705-acre Weston Wilton Forest Block the land trust is protecting along the border of those two towns.

Land Stewardship: A huge majority of land in our towns is owned by private homeowners. The Green Corridor includes a wide-reaching program to educate homeowners to create more biodiversity in their yards, providing stepping-stones for nature between our larger protected properties. Westport Lifestyle magazine recently featured our efforts on its cover (see page 7).



We have raised \$1.1 million for the 85-acre Fromson Strassler property. Make a donation today to help us reach our goal of \$1.3 million.

Green Corridor: Saving the Planet One Backyard at a Time

By David Brant, Executive Director, Aspetuck Land Trust

When the Aspetuck Land Trust was founded in 1966, climate change wasn't even part of our lexicon. And we certainly couldn't imagine the Earth plummeting into climate crisis in our lifetimes.

Turns out our conserving 150 properties of open space on more than 1,900 acres of land was just the right thing to do in the face of a changing climate.

We've now extended our mission to save more land by involving private homeowners in Westport, Weston, Wilton, Fairfield, Easton, and Redding. The initiative is all tied to fighting the climate crisis. It's called the Green Corridor.

The Green Corridor emerged out of Aspetuck Land Trust's involvement in a regional conservation partnership, "The Hudson to Housatonic Initiative," organized by Highstead in Redding, a local non-profit conservation group. Our Board of Directors took this larger regional perspective and applied it locally to the four towns we serve.

Maintaining the natural biodiversity of open land is now recognized as key to mitigating some of the worst effects of climate change: the wholesale death of pollinators that keep our food growing and our bird populations stable.

Have you noticed fewer insects splattered on your car windshield at night? Do you hear as many bird songs as you once did? What has happened to all the fireflies?



Song Sparrow feeding young, thanks to biodiversity in the backyard.



The Green Corridor initiative was the cover story of Westport Lifestyle magazine's April 2020 issue.

More than 40% of insect species are declining and a third are endangered. The bird population has declined by 3 billion since the 1970s. These diminishing populations is directly linked to developed land having fewer native plants feeding fewer insects and pollinators, which feed fewer birds.

The problem is our perfect suburban yards. We all like grass, but our prized golf course yards are biological deserts that don't provide food or habitat for insects to thrive. Add chemical pesticides and herbicides to the mix and you have a perfect recipe for insect and bird decline and a collapsing ecosystem.

While the Aspetuck Land Trust still conserves open land, we're bringing some of that same Earth-saving biodiversity to the tens of thousands of smaller pieces of land—suburban yards—where every homeowner can make a difference!

Homeowners should think of themselves as landowners with an important role to play in repairing our world. Local actions create large scale impact and everything matters.

We want to change the way people think about and take care of their yards. Seems simple but it's a revolutionary concept in the suburbs!

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7



Mockingbird fledgling on Serviceberry bush

The land trust isn't calling for you to plow under all your neatly mowed grass. Just do simple things like plant more native plants and shrubs and trees, reduce pesticide use and transition to organic lawn care.

We hired Mary Ellen Lemay, a refugee from Big Pharma with a new master's in environmental management from Yale, as director of landowner engagement to educate and inspire people about the Green Corridor. On our website aspetucklandtrust.org she has gathered all the resources you need to start transforming parts of your yards today:

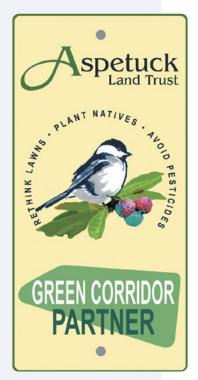
- · How to rethink your lawn
- · Where to buy natives
- · How to plant them
- · How to replace your current pesticides and herbicides
- Carefully selected and committed landscapers who will do it all for you

We ask homeowners to take the Green Corridor Pledge and offer an attractive metal plaque to put on their mail-boxes to tell their neighbors. Our goal is to have 500 homeowners take the pledge in 2020 and snowball to large-scale participation from there.

Join us to save the planet one backyard at a time!

Visit aspetucklandtrust. org/homeowners to take the Green Corridor Pledge and we will send you this attractive metal mailbox sign to tell your neighbors you care about protecting the planet. And maybe they will join you!

Help us reach our goal of 500 Green Corridor homeowner partners by the end of 2020.



A TBV Love Story

By Sherri Daley

Logan and Stratton met in Boston and fell in love. They visited Trout Brook Valley and fell in love, again. To hear more about their move to Fairfield to a house with enough yard to accommodate gardens that attract bees, butterflies, and other pollinators visit aspetucklandtrust.org/TBVLoveStory.

Their goal: "We want to be part of the Green Corridor and help get more people our age involved in conserving and protecting open space.



Corona Virus A Challenge and an Opportunity

uring this crisis, we made the decision to stick to ALT's mission to keep our preserves open for the benefit of the public. We scrambled to hire part-timers and engage volunteers to deal with the crush of visitors and their cars after most towns closed their beaches and parks. We kept our 44 hiking preserves open every day, right up to today.

Subsequent scientific research, reported in *The New York Times* on May 16, revealed that we had done exactly the right thing: Being outdoors is now considered the safest place to avoid Covid-19. People all around us knew that before the official word. We received dozens of phone calls and emails from people saying how happy they were that we worked so hard to keep our open spaces open. Here's a small sample.

"With so few open spaces to hike during these times, I cherish ALT's preserves. A special thanks to Ranger Jim Wood and others at ALT who have been working hard to monitor and control the crowds."

"Thank you. Also discovered Poindexter Preserve plus a boulder to read on near the parking at Randall's Farm. Who knew it would take shelter in place to push the envelope beyond Trout Brook Valley? I've been enjoying ALT for over 16 years; it's a gem. You've all done an amazing job managing it."

"In a time of uncertainty, ALT has courageously continued to offer a haven for calm reflection amid bubbling streams, rustling leaves and singing birds." "Thank you for keeping the ALT preserves open. We can only imagine how hard you have been working to control the parking situation and dog walkers."

"I had such a nice time birdwatching at Newman-Poses today. I can tell it has seen more use this spring, and everyone I encountered was appreciative of both the day and the space! We stepped off the path for each other and kept our distance but in a friendly way. Thank you. I will donate."

"Want to THANK you and the Aspetuck Board for keeping the preserves open during this unprecedented health crisis. I don't need to tell you how important getting outside, particularly in the wonderful atmosphere of nature, is to me. We're delighted Aspetuck preserves are open at a time when getting into nature for good health, both physical and mental, is more important than ever."





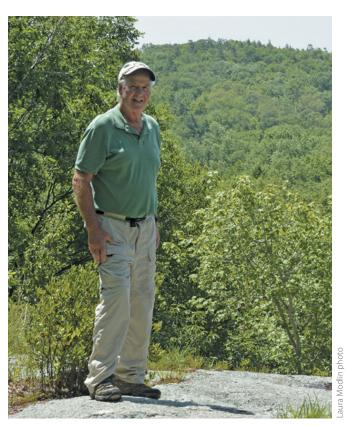
u Bacchiocchi photos

In Memoriam Bruce LePage

By David Brant, Executive Director

ormer Aspetuck Land Trust board member and Executive Director Bruce LePage died on May 14, 2020 with his family by his side. Bruce was a key leader in the growth and success of Aspetuck Land Trust over the years.

He was working as a sales executive with IBM in 1983 when he was asked to join the land trust board of directors. Ten years later in 1993, he became executive director. He said it was the best retirement job anyone could ever have. He retired from



Bruce LePage in Trout Brook Valley, Easton.

the land trust in 2008. He remained a Trail Steward at the Randall's Farm Preserve in Easton, a property he helped protect. Bruce brought his business experience from IBM to improve the land trust's operations, and he loved working outdoors, surveying properties and blazing trails.

Bruce was instrumental in guiding the land trust through its largest acquisition in 1999, the 730-acre Trout Brook Valley Preserve, part of the 1,009-acre Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton and Weston. Bruce said saving Trout Brook Valley was the best thing he ever did in his life. We will soon be naming a trail in the jewel in our crown to honor Bruce LePage, one of the people most responsible for creating it.

When he left the land trust, Bruce said, "I always loved the outdoors. I was a Boy Scout. I lived in the woods when I was a kid. I'd run out my back door and run through the woods to get some kids over on the other side and we'd play in the woods all day long. My wife used to play in the field where Bill Clinton's house is today, and we saw it get developed and disappear. That's one of the reasons I love the Aspetuck Land Trust. That can happen here."

I remember the sandwiches he used to get slathered with butter at the old Greiser's market in Easton. His dislike of "unscrupulous developers." In my first week on the job, he drove me to all 140 properties the land trust owned. It was a dizzying week and I got car sick from all the stopping and starting. I had big shoes to fill in Bruce...and I am still trying to fill them.

All the people who hike in Trout Brook Valley and many of Aspetuck Land Trust's other preserves owe Bruce a debt of gratitude. His legacy will live on in the lands he protected that give joy and solace to people every day.

Please join us in honoring Bruce LePage

- **1. The Bruce LePage Conservation Fund** will be used to support an annual Aspetuck Land Trust intern interested in land preservation and conservation, Bruce's passion.
- **2. The Gilbertie's Farm Fund** will be used to support Gilbertie's Farm in Easton, a 34-acre working organic farm recently protected by Aspetuck Land Trust. Bruce loved Easton's farms.

Visit aspetucklandtrust.org/BruceLePage to make a memorial gift.



Trout Brook Valley orchard, Easton.

Leave a Legacy

Protect the places you love by making a gift to the Aspetuck Land Trust in your estate plan. By naming Aspetuck Land Trust as a beneficiary of your will, living trust, or retirement account, your gift keeps on giving to generations yet to come. To recognize our special legacy supporters and their planned gifts, we created the Aspetuck Land Trust Open Space Legacy Society.

Let us know when you have set up a planned gift, so we can make you a member of the Society. As a member, we will plant a blueberry bush in your name, and you will be invited to periodic Open Space Legacy Society activities. Upon receipt of your bequest, we will recognize you by including your name on a permanent "Legacy of Open Space" memorial in the orchard of the 1,009-acre Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area overlooking Long Island Sound.

For more information contact David Brant

203-331-1906 or dbrant@aspetucklandtrust.org or visit aspetucklandtrust.org/SaveLand/PlannedGiving



Fresh blueberries from Aspetuck Land Trust's blueberry patch are available for picking by Aspetuck Land Trust members. Become a member to enjoy.

2019 At a Glance

- Preserved 34-acre Gilbertie's Farm in Easton for \$2 million.
- Protected a 2.3-acre property on Woods End Lane in Weston, donated by Kevin Bartlett.
- In final stages of preserving 85-acre Fromson Strassler property in Weston. This property is the largest parcel in the 705-acre Weston Wilton Forest Block we are protecting.
- Partnered with Earthplace in Westport to build a model native landscape with 2,000 native plants, grasses, and shrubs with support from a \$10,000 grant from the Westport Woman's Club. The model native landscape will showcase native plant options for homeowners.



 Designed model native landscape with Aris Land Studio at Aspetuck Land Trust's Wildflower Preserve in Southport. Planting scheduled for Fall 2020. Shown below are Wildflower Preserve benefactors Raphael and Robbie Hodgson of Southport.



 We are developing a model native landscape at the Caryl and Edna Haskins Preserve in Westport. Planting is scheduled for Fall 2020 Hosted Haskins Lecture in November for 300 people featuring Doug Tallamy, the guru of backyard biodiversity and author of *Bringing Nature Home* and *Nature's Best Hope*.



• Organized 24 Green Corridor educational programs.



 Created the Green Corridor Landscape Partner Program to engage leading landscape companies already promoting practices that create backyard biodiversity. We want to thank these local professional landscaping companies for their leadership.



Launched a partnership with growers of native plants—including the Northeast Organic Farming Association and Planters Choice—to increase the supply of them for homeowners to plant in the Green Corridor.



fra Alexandra pho

2019 Financial Highlights

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

Ending Balance	\$1,739,945	\$1,524,219	\$145,422	\$252,126
Land Purchase: Gilberties				-100,000
Reallocation	-300,000			300,000
Investment Income	325,040	265,360	25,642	2,126
Donations and Grants	1,029			\$50,000
Beginning Balance	\$1,713,876	\$1,258,859	\$119,780	
2019 ENDOWMENT FUNDS	Main Account	Restricted Account	Land Stewardship Fund	Land Acquisition Fund
Total Expenses		\$451,265	\$499,756	
Program and Administrative Expenses		196,320	221,506	
Professional Fees		404.000	224.524	
Operational Expenses and		53,936	92,750	
Promotions		20,825	25,500	
Stewardship of Properties		144,420	150,000	
Property Acquisition Expenses		\$35,764	\$10,000	
EXPENSES		2019 Actual	2020 Operations Budget	
Total Income: Including Land Acquisition Grants, Belknap Preserve		\$1,124,830	\$577,550	
Patagonia Action Works Grant		178,539		
Unrestricted Grants and Other Income		77,023	50,400	
Restricted Grants: Including delayed land acquisition grant from CT DEEP		247,934	62,000	
Legacy Gifts		210,000	10,000	
Membership Income		\$411,334	\$455,150	
REVENUE		2019 Actual	2020 Operations Budget	
Total			\$785,649	
Restricted Income: Belknap, Gilberties, Green Corridor			-\$312,747	
ratagoriia Action Works Grant		'	\$1,098,396	
Foundations and Grants Patagonia Action Works Grant		12 1	298,523 178,539	
Legacy Gifts		2	210,000	
Individual Members		1,010	411,334	
Stewards \$1,000 +		80	280,935	
Trailblazers \$500-999		82	43,414	
Naturalists \$100-499		470	69,439	
Individual and Family \$50-99		305	15,719	
Friends \$0-49		73	1,827	

Note: Revenue and expenses are unaudited and rounded to the nearest dollar.

AIT Members

Friends, Individual and Family Membership \$0-99

Rita Adams

Ralph & Lorraine Adams

Marliese Aguele

Janet Aley

Janine Alianiello**

Lorraine Anagnost

Robert Anderson

David Anderson & Coleen

O'Shea

Howard & Helene Andrews

Eric & Kathleen Appellof

Elaine Appellof & Jerry

Saunders

Heidi Armster & Dean

Sanderson

Harborview Road Neighbor

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John Barry

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Caronia

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Ron & Diane Brunelle*

Milan Bull

Tom Buttke & Judith Waters

Cynthia Cage

Sharon & Steven Canale

Meaghan Carey

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Thomas Dailey

Wendy Daly

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Rima Demarias

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Dale Demner

Kevin DeSanty

Nina J. DiFrancesco

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Sheila Duffy

Cynthia Dunn

Martha Durham*

Severn Parker Duvall Jr.

Patty Eilenberg

Mark Eisenberg

Sarah Evans

Jeanne Evans*

Jane Eyes **Bret Factora**

Robyn Fairclough & Marty

** Patagonia Action Works Matching Grant

Levine

Harry & Pattie Falber

Alice Falkowitz**

Dorothy Felske

John Field

Ellen Flynn Jonna Fonda

Robert Ford

John & Cara Forgione

Walter Fowski*

Carl & Holly Franquet

Michelle Friedman

Edward Fusco

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Howard & Joyce Greene

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Michael Liebow Mary Randolph & Paul

Lindoerfer

Kenneth Lisk

Ted Lockwood* Helga Lose

Renata Lose

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Christopher Macklem Kathy & Dan Magner

Thomas & Valerie Smith Malin

Judy Malin

Katherine Maloney

Wiliam Maloney

Robert Marotti

Christine Marsh-Rijssenbeek

Carola Marte Edwin Martin

Suzan Maxey

Brian May

Anthony McDowell

Brian McGovern

John McNamee

Robert McWilliams Barbara Meder

Lori Meinke

Diane Melish & Alex McNab

Bryan & Christina Mellick Lydia Menendez

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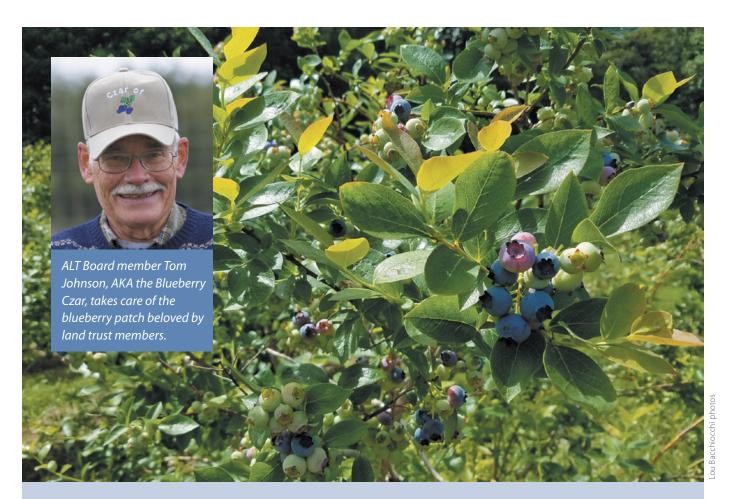
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