



**Annual  
Report  
2024**





Great horned owls have been interrupting my night's sleep recently. There is a hoot, but also what I can only describe as a "chuckle." I must remind the part of my brain that yearns for quiet to appreciate the disruption and be grateful to the generations of devoted people who have protected our North Quabbin forests and fields, allowing me to hear this rare species sing its late-night song.

I am excited to be sharing this annual report, which, in terms of acreage, contains some of our largest and our smallest

conservation projects. Mount Grace and the larger conservation community are strongest when we are responding to the needs of both wildlife and communities. When we protect connected blocks of open space we make it possible for wildlife, such as the great horned owl, to seek shade by cold water streams during abnormally hot days, like those we had this summer. Whether it is an owl, a bobcat, or a deer, connected landscape allows wildlife to bask in the warmth of sunny, south-facing slopes during the cold of the winter, or to shelter in protected hollows during increasingly virulent storms. By working with families, partner organizations, state agencies, and towns, we magnify our conservation impact. That means protecting more forests and fields, protecting more of our drinking water sources, and ensuring that wildlife like great horned owls have the capacity to adapt to changing weather conditions.

Warmly,

Emma G. Ellsworth  
Executive Director



Mount Grace enters 2025 with immense pride in our past accomplishments and a firm commitment to significantly ramp up our effort and impact in the coming years. There is no shortage of opportunities to conserve more landscapes, protect and grow our farming communities, enhance the economic and recreational resources we so value, and address the very real threat of climate change.

Our challenge is to rapidly increase the ability of Mount Grace to seize these opportunities and convert them to accomplishments.

Bluntly, we need to increase our pace. Thanks to some very generous donations and grants targeted at increased capacity, we have commenced this build.

Our members, supporters, friends, and donors have been the foundation upon which we have accomplished so much. We thank you for that past support and look forward to working with you in the challenging, but very exciting, years ahead.

Thank you,

David Spackman

## Meet the Newest Members of Our Team

As part of our three-year strategic plan, Mount Grace has added three new staff members to our team:



Max Feldman former Board President of Mount Grace, has joined our staff as Deputy Director to streamline operations and add resilience to the leadership structure.



Caitie Dwyer-Huppert, the new Community Outreach Associate at Mount Grace, will enhance our community outreach, development, and fundraising efforts by bringing her expertise in program development to our team.



Seth Kelley, our new Community Conservation Project Manager, will collaborate with towns and partners to identify conservation priorities within our communities and work toward protecting them.

To confront the growing challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and the sustainability of farming in our region, Mount Grace will continue to add new staff to our team to strengthen the capability and impact of our conservation work, further embrace land justice in conservation, and better connect people to each other and the land.

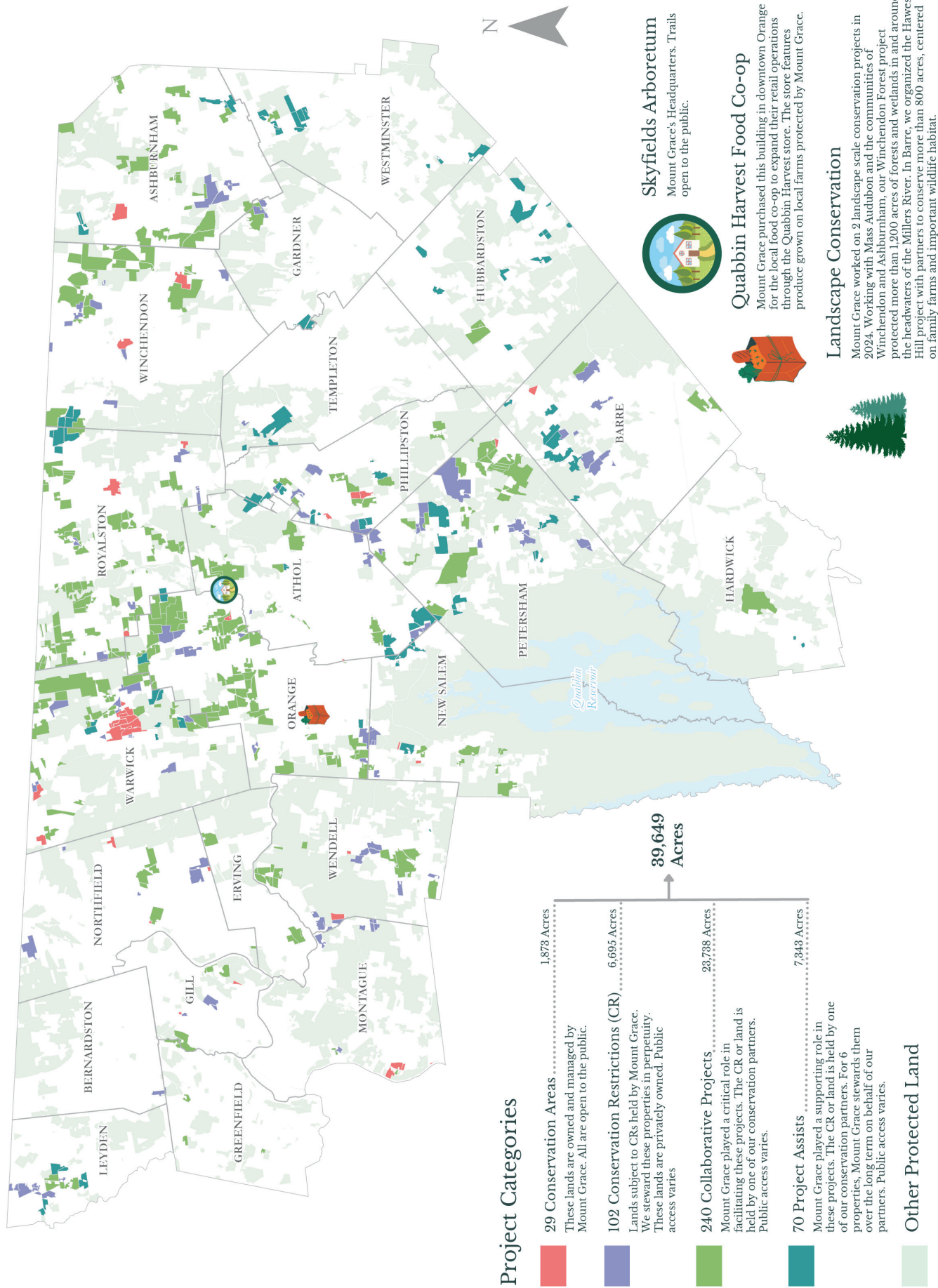
This is our largest expansion since 2007 and will ensure Mount Grace can continue to take a leading role in the land conservation movement's efforts to adapt to global change.

Cover photo credit: Karen Bulbuk  
Visit [heartcreations.net](https://heartcreations.net) to view her photo gallery

PHOTO: DJ Glisson



# Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust Conservation Projects 1986 - 2024





# Conservation Report

September 2023 – August 2024

## **Monomonac Hill Conservation Project (Phase II), 179 acres purchased for conservation by North County Land Trust, Winchendon**

This second phase of a multi-year project builds upon our partnership with North County Land Trust and the MA Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to protect land around the southern shores of Lake Monomonac. Last year, DFG and NCLT purchased a combined 70 acres. This year, we supported North County's successful efforts to purchase an additional 179 acres by offering a low-cost, short-term loan through our Leigh Youngblood Conservation Opportunity Fund.

## **King, 23 acres, Phillipston**

Bill King donated his woodland on Ward Hill to Mount Grace in loving memory of his wife Sheila, a dedicated conservationist and supporter of Mount Grace who passed away in 2020. Sheila tended flower and herb gardens and loved observing the local wildlife. We are honored that Bill has entrusted Mount Grace with the permanent stewardship of their beloved land. Our new Sheila King Conservation Area will eventually feature trails that overlook nearby Secret Lake.

## **Winchendon Forest, LLC,**

### **1,247 acres purchased for conservation by Mass Audubon, Winchendon and Ashburnham**

Mount Grace helped spearhead a local campaign with community members in Winchendon and Ashburnham to thwart the development of a commercial solar array on one of the largest contiguous and most ecologically compelling properties in our region. The successful community effort, culminating in standing-room-only Town Hall forums and unanimous approvals from both Selectboards, enabled Mass Audubon to purchase the entire property and ensure a permanent conservation outcome.

## **South Royalston Park, Royalston, 0.19 acres**

After the beloved Pete & Henry's restaurant along the Millers River in South Royalston burned down, the Town purchased the small lot after a successful Town Meeting vote authorized the use of Community Preservation Act funds. That funding source requires that the land be permanently protected with a Conservation Restriction (CR), and Mount Grace enthusiastically agreed to hold the CR as part of the Town's long-term riverfront revitalization and community park vision.

## **Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor Project, 814 acres, Barre**

Mount Grace was the lead organizer of this landscape-scale project and directly managed five of the eight projects. We supported the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Water Supply Protection and Mass Audubon in the permanent protection of the Engel property and two distinct portions of land held by the Insight Meditation Society (totaling 434 acres). All land protected in this initiative is staying in private hands, protected by a Conservation Restriction (held by a land trust) or a Watershed Preservation Restriction (held by the state).

## **Sister Stones LLC, 139 acres**

In 2019, this undeveloped parcel nestled between land managed by the Carter & Stevens Farm (including their extensive, previously protected farm fields to the north and their Stone Cow Brewery to the south) was listed for sale by its out-of-state owner. The Stevens family quickly stepped in, purchasing the land as a critical connector in their land portfolio. The family was motivated to conserve the land and as much of their neighborhood as possible, which helped catalyze the Hawes Hill initiative. The family has reclaimed the abandoned farm fields on the property, which now produce food that is sold at their nearby Stone Cow Brewery.

## **Carter & Stevens Farm LLC, 121 acres**

This property features three active hay fields that help feed the farm's 200 cows, about 80 of which are milkers. A large wetland spans roughly one-third of the property, which is across the single-lane dirt road from Mass Audubon's Rutland Brook Wildlife Sanctuary and the family's Sister Stones LLC property, which was also conserved in this initiative.

## **Stevens, 15 acres**

Carter & Stevens Farm maintains a roughly 12-acre hayfield along Sanderson Road. This backland parcel abuts that hayfield (already protected with a state-held Agricultural Preservation Restriction), and is primarily wooded with a small, vegetated wetland. This Conservation Restriction is co-held by the Barre Conservation Commission.

## **Petracone, 50 acres**

Margo Petracone is an avid horsewoman who maintains trails on her farm, named Westwind Farm, for riding. Her three-acre hay field along Route 122 was protected, preventing a house from being situated between her home and the popular Stone Cow Brewery next door. Having grown up here, Margo was deeply committed to making sure her farm and woodlands were protected. This Conservation Restriction is co-held by the East Quabbin Land Trust.

## **Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 55 acres**

BCBS is a non-profit educational organization that focuses on Buddhist inquiry and practice. They are closely affiliated with their neighboring non-profit, the Insight Meditation Society. These organizations draw thousands of visitors to their programming each year. This parcel abuts the Prince River Wildlife Management Area and protected farmland managed by Carter & Stevens Farm. A tributary of the Prince River, an important cold water fishery resource, runs through the property.



Mount Grace's **Landscape Conservation Program** is the guardian of a rich mosaic of natural lands. We act quickly and strategically to safeguard our rural heritage and bolster our region's legacy of land conservation. Working with partners, we save the landscapes that our natural and human communities need to thrive. Together, we stitch these ecologically significant and locally important places into one connected and resilient landscape.

In a span of 8 months, we worked with deed holders and partners to protect more than 800 acres across 8 projects in Barre through the Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor project. Working with Mass Audubon, the Division of Water Supply Protection of the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Town of Barre, and East Quabbin Land Trust, we finished this nearly \$3M initiative with support from the MA Landscape Partnership Program, the Bafflin Foundation, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts, and many other individual donors. This initiative enhances Barre's resilience to climate change, supports the local farm and local eco-tourism economy, and protects high-quality habitat for a range of species.

In the midst of implementing the Hawes Hill project, we dove into a fast-paced campaign with Mass Audubon and community members and groups in Winchendon and Ashburnham to prevent the large-scale conversion of hundreds of acres of intact forestland into commercial, ground-mounted solar. Had this solar project been brought to life, it would have been the largest commercial solar array in Massachusetts by a significant margin. Mount Grace supports the creation of appropriately located solar installations, but this project would have threatened local water quality, fragmented a corridor of some of the highest-quality and most biodiverse habitat in Massachusetts, and diminished recreational opportunities for hiking and hunting. Thankfully, close to 300 residents attended the public forums and the Winchendon and Ashburnham Select Boards each voted—unanimously—to support a conservation outcome for the Winchendon Forest LLC property. This pathway was only available because the land was enrolled in the Chapter 61 current use program, which affords municipalities a very brief opportunity to step in and buy land that's proposed to be taken out of agriculture, forestry, or open space and sold for development. Most of the time, municipalities in our region can't afford to act on this opportunity. In this case, Mass Audubon had access to a perfectly-timed grant, and the Winchendon and Ashburnham communities stood up—loudly, decisively, and together—and chose conservation. As a result, 1,247 acres were purchased by Mass Audubon instead of being developed.

Our **Farm Conservation Program** undertakes innovative projects that help sustain our local economy, increase community access to healthy local food, and build Massachusetts' food security by protecting farms for future generations.

While we continue to develop three farm conservation projects with farm families in Leyden, Orange, and Barre that are slated to close in the coming year, we are celebrating four farm projects embedded within the Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor Project. Margo Petracone, of Westwind Farm, protected her hayfield and network of equestrian trails. Her neighbors at Carter & Stevens Farm protected three distinct pieces of their fifth-generation farm: a small woodlot on Sanderson Road and two large properties on Washburn Road that feature hay fields and vegetable fields.

This past summer, we also celebrated our 10-year partnership with Quabbin Harvest – a community-owned food co-op that serves the North Quabbin region. By partnering with local farms – many of which Mount Grace has worked to protect – Quabbin Harvest has expanded and bolstered the market for selling locally grown food and enhanced farming viability in our region.

“Across the North Quabbin region, Mount Grace protects the working landscapes that sustain us all,” says Emma Ellsworth, Executive Director of Mount Grace. “We’ve helped over 40 local farms, but our farm conservation work wouldn’t be nearly as impactful if the farms

we were protecting were not able to market the food they raise. Our partnership with Quabbin Harvest strengthens our local food system to help keep our region's farmers on the land.”

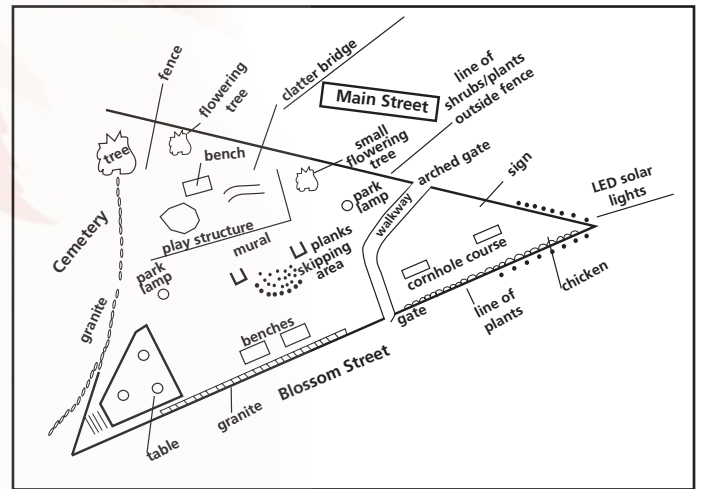




**The Community Conservation Program** partners with community members, organizations, and municipalities to prioritize and conserve lands that benefit the health and well-being of our region's people and their natural environment. We work to empower communities to enjoy and steward their natural resources and strengthen their connections to the natural world.

Mount Grace partnered with the Town of Royalston to complete our smallest project ever! In 2018, Pete & Henry's restaurant – located in the heart of South Royalston – tragically burned down in a fire. Two concrete pads atop a now vacant lot were all that remained of this beloved community gathering spot. The Town stepped in to acquire the land with Community Preservation Act funds, in the hopes of developing a new community park just across from the Millers River. The act requires that any lands purchased with CPA funds be protected with a Conservation Restriction (CR), and Mount Grace enthusiastically agreed to work with the town to hold the CR.

Thanks to the dedicated volunteers of the Town and the Royalston South Village Revitalization (RSVR) Committee, the vision of a pocket park is turning into reality. “We hope to build a community park for the families and children of the area, which showcases the natural beauty of the region and particularly the Millers River,” says Lynne Kellner of the Park Committee – a subcommittee of the RSVR. With that vision in mind, Mount Grace staff collaborated closely with them over the last two years to draft the CR with the flexibility needed to build the park and allow it to change over time. As the CR was finalized, the Park Committee worked to secure funding for the park, receiving a \$20,000 grant from the Bjurling Charitable Foundation.



With the CR complete and funding in place, construction is set to get underway this year. The park will be packed with features, including a “clatter bridge” children’s play structure, flowering trees, a pavilion with benches and tables, and panels with artistic, hand-painted scenes of Royalston. Thanks to the Town and many persistent volunteers, this site will continue to be a community gathering place for the village for generations to come.

**The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership**—a an informal network of landowners, land trusts, planning agencies, academic institutions, and public agencies—is our primary mechanism for implementing our vision for landscape-scale conservation. Collaboration is the most powerful tool for achieving our mission.

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We continued our partnership with UMass Amherst to implement conservation-based estate planning outreach programming across the Commonwealth. This work is funded by the Massachusetts Working Forest Initiative of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. This year, we administered two small grant programs that inspired seven successful projects. The impacts generated from these grant awards, which totaled just over \$10,000, far surpassed their modest investment.

**The Neighborhood Outreach Project Grant** was awarded to the Rehoboth Land Trust (RLT), North County Land Trust (NCLT), and the Wendell Open Space Committee. RLT created a beautiful 4-panel brochure featuring conservation options and local stories that was mailed to 176 deed holders in high-priority neighborhoods. NCLT partnered with two other local land trusts and an open space committee

to organize a landowner workshop for more than 20 deed holders in Princeton and Sterling. The Wendell Open Space Committee held a Town Hall dinner and gathering for 52 community members, followed by a set of three woods walks hosted by local deed holders who shared their experiences with conservation and land management choices.

**The Land Conservation Networking Mini-Grant** was awarded to the Barnstable Land Trust (BLT), Town of Franklin Conservation Department, Town of Brewster, and Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT). BLT hosted its first in-person gathering post-COVID, designed to build collaborative programming capacity among Cape Cod conservation groups. Franklin hosted a “Cosmic Pizza Party” on the Solar Eclipse as part of their efforts to create a conservation-friendly culture in Town as they implement their municipal Open Space and Recreation Plan. Brewster focused on the intersection of beauty and biodiversity and organized its inaugural Pollinator Pathway meeting in partnership with their local museum, land trust, and gardening club. SVT hosted the MetroWest Conservation Alliance (MCA) Land Protection Prioritization workshop, which is helping guide watershed protection efforts in their region.



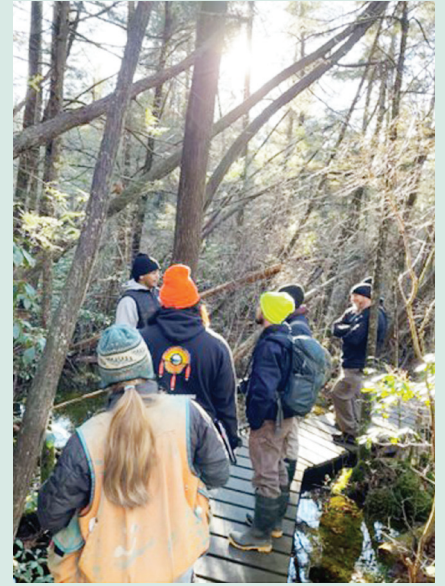
**The Climate and Land Justice Program** works to integrate climate and land justice into all aspects of Mount Grace's work: conservation, stewardship, and outreach.

This marks the fourth year of Mount Grace's Climate and Land Justice program which continues to evolve as we learn how to best help our community adapt to climate change and learn from our BIPOC partners.

We are developing co-management plans that center our Indigenous partners' cultural revitalization and traditional ecological knowledge along with western science to build climate resilience. In our partnership with the Nipmuc-led nonprofit No Loose Braids, we continue to address the restoration of the Atlantic white cedar (AWC) swamps. We received funding from the Northeast Climate Adaptation Science Center in partnership with UMass Ecohydrologist, Dr. Christine Hatch, to study climate impacts on AWC swamps that will inform restoration. We are also collaborating with Mass Audubon, municipal, and state partners, to create restoration pathways for municipal stewarded AWC swamps in Nipmuc Territory. No Loose Braids also informed the climate-smart management completed at our conservation areas, Guiney and Song.

Outreach and education remain important components of our program. We produced a paper for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy to share the steps that we have taken to be better equipped to address challenges associated with climate change and to serve as a guide to help other land trusts assess their readiness to address the impacts of climate change and take action to build climate resilience. Additionally, in collaboration with No Loose Braids, we trained a cohort of land trusts to prepare them to work with Indigenous partners in respectful and reciprocal ways, funded by the Catalyst Fund.

Climate and land justice were central themes throughout our 3-year strategic planning process completed this year. This integration throughout the organization indicates the commitment of Mount Grace to continue to address climate change and land justice. We are excited for what the next three years will bring.



**Andre StrongBearHeart Gaines, Jr., creative director of No Loose Braids, leads a land walk with partners from Mass Audubon, MA Fish and Wildlife, and MA DCR to highlight the importance of cultural revitalization and restoration to bring health back to the Atlantic white cedar swamps in Nipmuc Territory.**

**The Stewardship Program** manages Mount Grace properties and monitors our conservation restrictions. With the help of an array of partners, including environmental contractors, Nipmuc tribal members, and volunteers, we steward a mosaic of wildlife habitats and cultivated lands from mountain sides to farms, from wetlands to working forests. We encourage science-based, sustainable land management as well as outdoor recreation. A quick look at the map on page 3 will show that the Stewardship Program is now responsible for almost 10,000 acres of land. This includes conservation areas and more than 100 conservation restrictions held by Mount Grace or partner organizations which we monitor and manage annually.

In addition to completing annual monitoring and conservation area maintenance, the stewardship program is tackling the issue of ecological resiliency with two innovative forestry projects. The first is in Warwick at Song Memorial Forest, where forester Mike Mauri and logger Seth Ellwood built a seven-acre enclosure – measuring 8 ft high and 20ft wide at its base – made from logs and branches after a tree harvest. The “slash wall” was constructed to create a physical barrier that protects the recently logged area from deer browsing. Deer can decimate tree seedlings, preventing their regeneration into a species-rich forest. The wall will give the seedlings five years to grow without being eaten. It is one of only a few in Massachusetts.

The second project, at Guiney Memorial Forest in Royalston, used a variety of forestry techniques intended to diversify forest habitat. From clearing three-acres to create early successional habitat, to tree thinning and selective tree girdling, we've worked to create a more dynamic forest – one that isn't dominated by uniformly aged trees, but instead offers a variety of vegetation.

Creating habitat diversity can increase the number of species an area can support which buffers the ecosystem from environmental impacts caused by climate change. This project was funded by Cornell University's Ornithology Department and the Ruffed Grouse Society. It also had the support of our Nipmuc partners at No Loose Braids. We are excited to observe how both forests change over time and with the help of wildlife cameras and volunteer birders, we'll continue to monitor both projects.

Our TerraCorps member, Jessie Fagan, has been busy assessing the condition of the trail infrastructure (signs, bridges, benches, etc.) on ten of our conservation areas. She developed an inventory tool using both ESRI and Landscape Conservation software that we will use moving forward to track trail conditions and prioritize improvements. She also drafted new conservation area kiosk maps and explored how we can use vegetation photosynthesis data from the National Agricultural Imagery Program to study long term ecological changes in our service area. We are thrilled that Jessie will be returning to Mount Grace for a second service year!





**The Community Engagement Program** *strives to connect the people of our region and beyond with our work and with the land. Through events, media, and youth education programs, we engage and expand our community in learning about, caring for, and protecting the land.*

Mount Grace was able to expand our event reach this year thanks to a new partnership with Adventure East. This allowed us to host a dozen new expert-run events, including canoe paddles, archery, forest bathing, full moon hikes, and more

at our conservation areas. We are also continuing our collaborations with traditional partners, working with Nipmuc Cultural Preservation, Inc. and No Loose Braids to co-sponsor this year's Nipmuc Cultural Celebration in Petersham. Mount Grace also explored the great indoors, with educational partnerships with both libraries and local breweries, including partnering with the Athol Public Library on workshops for all ages. Our Pub Science at 4-Star Brewery was packed with whip-poor-will fans there to learn about bird habitat with J. T. Larkin, a migratory bird expert working with DFG.

Volunteers and staff tabled at the Garlic & Arts Festival and the Winchendon Fall Festival—as part of our efforts to encourage Winchendon residents to support the protection of 1,247 acres of land in the Millers River headwaters. Mount Grace was one of ten conservation groups around North America to host a poet on our land as part of the Writing the Land: Streamlines project. The resulting book of collected poems includes works by poet bg Thurston, whose verse reflects on the Richardson Overlook. The publication was celebrated with a public event at the Dickinson Memorial Library in Northfield.

2024 also saw Jess Bryant depart from leading our community engagement work. As a result, we are adding two new staff: Kolya Partan as the Communications & Engagement Associate and Caitie Dwyer-Huppert as the Community Outreach Associate. By splitting what was formerly a single position into two jobs, we expect to be able to provide more support for the community and our members and a better work-life balance for the staff.

## Ways of Giving to Mount Grace

*Thanks to all our supporters for partnering with Mount Grace to protect our farms, forests, water, and wildlife. Without your support, the conservation of our community resources would not be possible! Some creative ways that you can support our conservation and stewardship work include:*

- **Monthly Giving** – Set up a monthly gift in any amount on your credit or debit card.
- **Real Estate Gifts for Resale** – Contact our staff about donating any type of real estate property located anywhere, especially non-conservation properties, to Mount Grace for resale to benefit conservation.
- **Website Donations** – Visit [mountgrace.org](http://mountgrace.org) anytime you like to make a gift to support our work.
- **Business Giving** – Mount Grace offers businesses a wide range of sponsorship opportunities and partnerships. Contact us to learn about sponsorship benefits.
- **Workplace Giving** – If your employer offers matching gifts, simply include your company's matching gift form with your contribution. If your employer is a partner with Earthshare, a federation of environmental charities, you may designate an automatic deduction from each paycheck to Mount Grace.
- **IRA Charitable Rollovers** – If you are 70½ or older, you can use the IRA charitable rollover to donate up to \$100,000 per year to Mount Grace and avoid paying income taxes on the gift.
- **Planned Gifts and Bequests** – Please contact us if you are interested in learning about estate planning efforts that can benefit both your family and conservation. If you have put us in your will at any level, we truly appreciate it. Please let us know so we may thank you in your lifetime!

*We welcome your participation in the Mount Grace*

*Margaret Power Biggs Society.*



*The Margaret Power Biggs Society recognizes individuals, businesses, organizations, and foundations contributing at least \$1,000 annually to Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust.*

*To learn more about how you can become part of the Margaret Power Biggs Society, contact Major Gifts and Grants Manager David Kotker at 978-541-1767 or [kotker@mountgrace.org](mailto:kotker@mountgrace.org).*



# Grateful Thanks to Supporters of Mount Grace

Every contribution is special to us. Donors contributing to Mount Grace during the fiscal year (June 1, 2022 – May 31, 2023) are listed on these pages. We regret any unintentional omissions. Thank you to each and all.

The Margaret Power Biggs Society recognizes individuals, businesses, organizations, and foundations contributing at least \$1,000 annually to

Margaret Power-Biggs Society



Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust. The generosity of Society members gives Mount Grace the resources to conserve the local landscape in a sustained manner that supports the rural character of the region.

## CONSERVATORS

(\$10,000 and above)

Anonymous (3)  
Eleanor Alden and Tom Manning  
American Farmland Trust  
Kim Ansin  
Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts  
Cornell Ornithology Labs  
Anne Covert  
Crawley Family Foundation  
Don and Chris Eaton  
Ben and Susie Feldman  
Tim Fredette and Sarah Vitelli  
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The Network For Landscape Conservation  
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(\$1,000–\$2,499)

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Ruffed Grouse Society  
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Eric Ward and Sarah Rainwater Ward  
Patricia D. White and James Nickel  
William Whitney  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
Allen Young and Dave Malin  
Richard and Lillian Young

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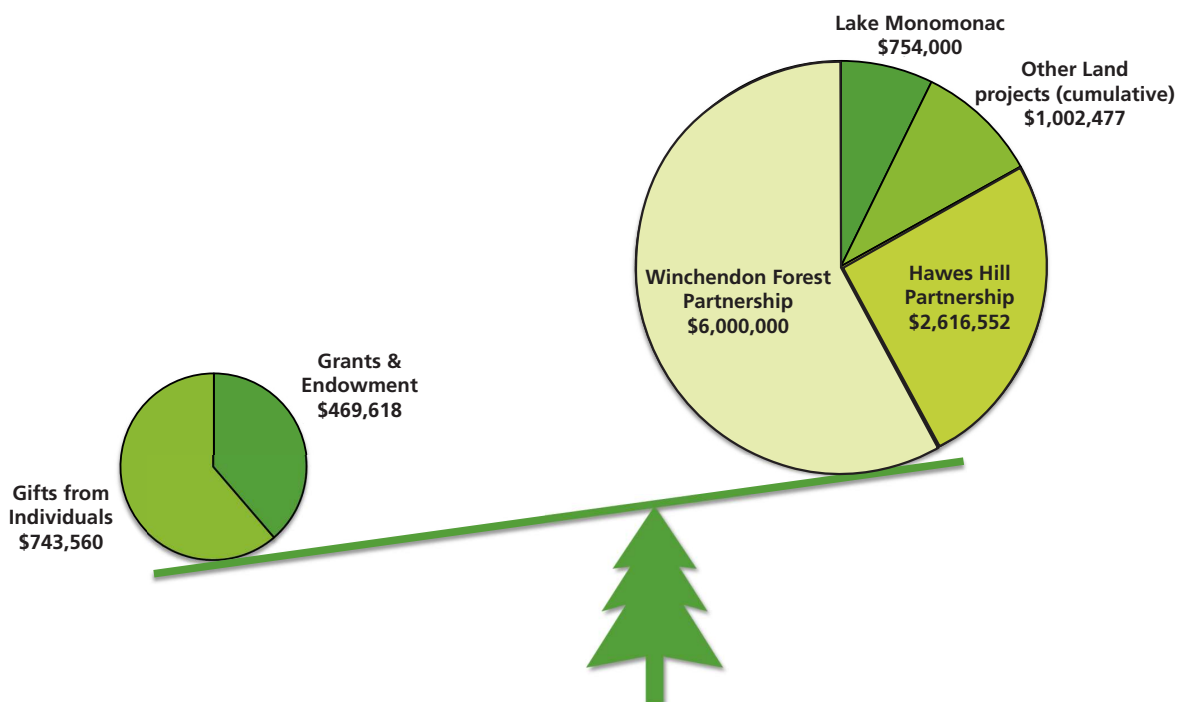




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Every dollar raised for Mount Grace has a positive impact on the protected landscapes of our region. This is especially true of gifts donated annually by members and supporters to keep Mount Grace operating!

This year, \$743,560 in individual and family operating support was leveraged by more than \$10 million of project-focused funding, meaning each dollar given by our ongoing supporters helped generate an additional \$15 in new funding to protect the land!



## 39,000 Acres Protected Since 1986

### Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

Our Mission: To benefit the environment, the economy, and future generations by protecting significant land and encouraging land stewardship.

We welcome your articles, photographs, comments, and suggestions. For information about becoming a member or to request a change of address, please contact our office at:

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