



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



It has been six years since I started at Mount Grace. Looking out my office window at the blooming pollinator garden and hearing the buzz of conversations filtering up the stairs, it feels both like yesterday and like home. In that time, I can't recall a year as transformative as this one. Not only have we undergone our largest organizational expansion, but we are also witnessing profound change in our region's landscapes.

We are in the midst of a generational land transfer. Each week brings calls about farms, forests, fields, and streams needing urgent protection – lands tied

to families who have lovingly stewarded them for generations. Families who welcomed swallows in spring, savored summer tomatoes, and stacked wood on crisp fall days, proud of the warmth they provided

"Generational land transfer" doesn't begin to capture the intimacy of these moments, or the loss many of us feel saying our goodbyes to parents and grandparents. Having recently lost my father and father-in-law, I know how deeply these places are connected to memory and legacy.

Yet this moment is also about capturing the dreams of the next generation—ensuring these traditions endure for our children and grandchildren. To meet it, Mount Grace has grown our team of conservationists, land stewards, and outreach specialists—so this moment, rich with both opportunity and loss, is not missed.

Warmly,

Emma G. Ellsworth

Emma G. Ellsworth
Executive Director



Mount Grace exists to protect our wildlife, connected forests, and working farms—and to ensure that the lands we conserve are cared for and lovingly stewarded. Conservation does not end with protecting a property; it continues through the relationships we build, the communities we strengthen, and the generations we inspire to cherish the fragile beauty of our natural world.

This year, we've expanded our team to meet the scale of today's challenges. With your support, Mount Grace is not only protecting land across our region but also contributing to Massachusetts's bold 30x30

goal: conserving 30% of the Commonwealth's land by 2030.

Your generosity and commitment make this possible. Together, we can rise to this occasion, safeguard irreplaceable open spaces, and ensure that our forests, farms, and waters continue to thrive for generations to come.

Thank you,

David Spackman

David Spackman

Meet the Moment with New Capacity

At a time when many organizations are consolidating or retrenching, Mount Grace is doing the opposite: we are expanding our team. The number of new project intakes has never been higher, and the need for conservation has never been more urgent. To meet the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and accelerating development, we are adding new staff to strengthen our capacity, broaden our impact, and deepen our commitment to land justice.

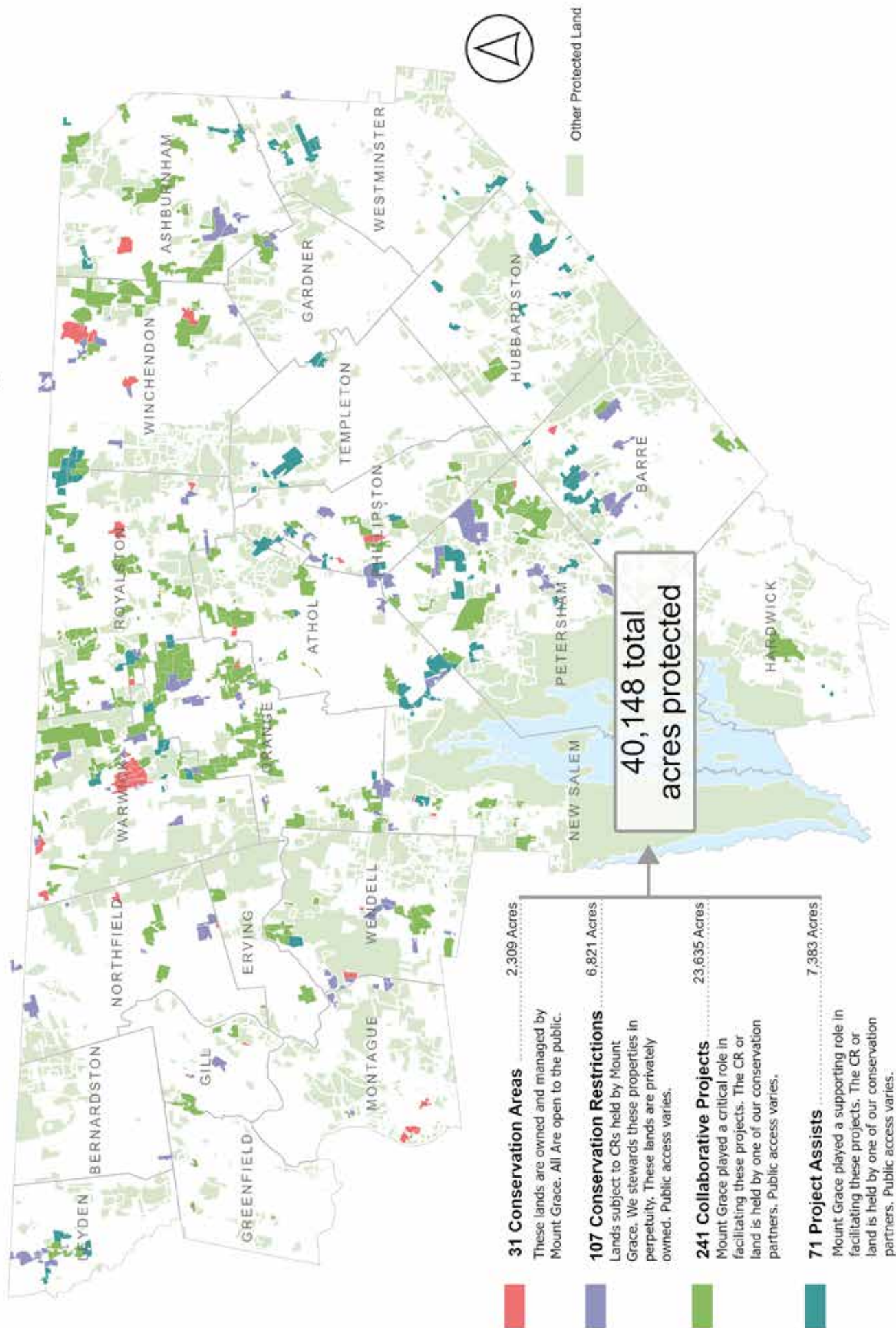
This expansion, the largest since 2007, will ensure that Mount Grace can continue to connect communities with the land that sustains us and lead the way in conserving the landscapes of our region.



About the Cover: A male eastern towhee at Guiney Memorial Forest in Royalston — one of seven Species of Greatest Conservation Need identified here in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan. Its presence is especially meaningful because of the bird habitat management we've done at Guiney, creating the young forest conditions towhees rely on.

Credit: Jeff Blanchard

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust - Conservation Projects 1986-2025



Conservation Report

September 2024 – August 2025

White Property, Winchendon, 384 acres

With nearly 400 acres of forest, farmland, and rare wetland habitat, the White property in Winchendon represents one of the largest private conservation donations in Mount Grace's recent history. Donated by the White family and Marchmont Realty Trust, the land includes critical wildlife corridors, certified vernal pools, and over 90% BioMap Core Habitat. The property also includes the historic 11-acre Marchmont Castle parcel and will be permanently protected with a conservation restriction held by the Town of Winchendon. Once complete, public access will be granted, ensuring that the White family's legacy of stewardship lives on for future generations.

Hains/Fox Hill Farm, Orange, 72 Acres

Four Corners, Montague, 47 acres

Bennett Road, Ashby, 39.5 acres

The Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game had an opportunity to purchase a missing link between two sections of the Ashby Wildlife Management Area but wasn't sure state funding would be available on time to satisfy the seller. Mount Grace stepped in to complete due diligence and pre-acquire the property, which was resold to Fish and Game this summer, resulting in permanent protection of some stunning views of Mt. Watatic.

Facey/Bree-Z-Knoll Farm, Leyden, 28 Acres

After decades of championing land conservation in Leyden, Massachusetts — and helping to protect more than 700 acres of farms and forests around town— Warren Facey, in partnership with Mount Grace, has successfully protected an additional 28-acres of woodland just north of his farm. It's the latest piece of a landscape-scale puzzle that will help complete a continuous corridor of protected land stretching all the way to the Vermont border.

Ames Property, Northfield, 17 acres

The Town of Northfield unanimously voted to accept a donation from Nancy Ames of nearly 17 acres, including a popular trail to a waterfall on Roaring Brook. The donation expands upon an earlier conservation restriction granted to Mount Grace in 2007 and will now include two adjacent parcels, with a new CR to be held by Mount Grace. The land features upland forest, riparian habitat, and scenic recreational value, with plans underway to improve trail connectivity to the New England Trail. This collaborative project builds on years of community engagement and aligns closely with Northfield's Open Space Plan.

Cadwell-Frost, 10 Acres, Warwick

Jack Cadwell and Karro Frost generously donated this conservation restriction in Warwick to Mount Grace, furthering the vision of a protected Hastings Pond Neighborhood. Abutting Arthur Iversen Conservation Area, Jack and Karro's ten forested acres are now part of a contiguous block of protected land in Warwick that extends north to New Hampshire, east to Royalston, and south to Orange. Small in size but rich in habitat, the property's steep terrain, mature forest, and rocky outcroppings are home to moose, bobcat, deer, opossum, flying squirrel, coyote, and fox.

Tall Turtle, New Salem, 7 acres

Channel Z Seismometry, Project Assist, 162 Acres, Royalston

Mann Lumber Property, Project Assist, 113 Acres, Wendell

Mount Grace assisted in the protection of 113-acre Mann Lumber Property in Wendell, acquired by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Home to a 19th century granite quarry with stellar views of the Miller's River Valley, the property will become part of Wendell State Forest, adding to the public recreation opportunities of this 7,500 + acre preserve.

Mount Grace's **Landscape Conservation Program** safeguards the mosaic of natural lands that define our rural heritage. By working with partners, we protect the landscapes vital to both people and wildlife, weaving them into a connected, resilient whole.

This year brought many changes to the Mount Grace conservation staff. The moving of three dedicated staff to new career opportunities with our partner organizations opened the door for new staff to take the reins in several ongoing conservation projects.

Amidst this change a variety of projects have moved forward including assists with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) in protecting 113-acres in Wendell with the T.S. Mann Lumber company. The property includes an 18th century stone Quarry. DCR also added 162-acres to the Royalston State Forest with Channel Z Seismometry, protecting a variety of upland and wetland habitats.

The new conservation team continues to follow through on the existing catalog of projects while developing several new projects across the 23-town Mount Grace region. Potential Landscape Partnership Projects are in the early stages in Ashburnham/Westminster, Royalston, and Bernardston. These multi-deedholder projects need a minimum of a 500-acre core area and may involve a variety of state, federal, and private funding to complete.

The power of the Mount Grace approach to land protection revolves around the act of listening. Our staff first listen to the deedholders' hopes and ideas for their parcels. What is it that they love about their piece of the planet? How do they feel about the stewardship of the land? What level of public access is comfortable? Are hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, foraging, and trail connections important, or are privacy concerns a limiting factor? The act of listening allows our program managers to seek funding partners that meet the deedholders' hopes for conserving their property. This listening process is followed by the work of our appraisers, surveyors, and title examiners as the conservation team works to build the budget and develop the appropriate funding sources and partners for the project. This is an exciting and fulfilling process with many moving parts.

Mount Grace's **Farm 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. 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.

It has been an exciting year for the Farm Conservation Program, with successful closings on farm projects in Orange, Leyden, and Montague; the ongoing development of a landscape-scale project in Ashburnham centered around 452 acres of working farm and forestland; and new farm protection projects in Petersham, Barre, and Westminster that are slated to close in the next year.

The ongoing stewardship of our working lands is critical to the long-term health of our communities and ecosystems. In collaboration with Mount Grace's Stewardship team, our new Farm Conservation Program Manager Tyson Neukirch is taking the lead on the annual monitoring of Mount Grace's agricultural CRs. These visits provide an opportunity to support deedholders in their specific stewardship and farm viability needs, including soil health evaluations; information on NRCS cost-share programs; connections with third-party service providers such as American Farmland Trust and Land for Good; and connecting non-farming deedholders with producers looking to expand their operations through equitable lease opportunities.

Creativity is key when it comes to farmland conservation, especially because traditional conservation tools can be a challenging fit for working farms. That is why, with guidance from national, regional, and local conservation partners, and in conversation with Mount Grace staff, Board of Directors, and Land Committee, we are developing a private agricultural preservation restriction (APR) template. Private APRs are conservation easements focused on working agricultural lands which are gaining ground as a useful conservation tool in Massachusetts, bridging the gap between State (MDAR) APRs and traditional EEA conservation restrictions. One of the key differences is that private APRs are more flexible with respect to the future development of farm infrastructure and farm worker/owner housing, which are crucial components to long term farm viability.

*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.*

The Community Conservation Program is built on the belief that by connecting with local communities, Mount Grace can ignite transformation – helping to ensure that the communities we serve can truly thrive. Through dynamic partnerships with municipalities, organizations, and individuals, we empower communities to take charge of their natural resources, ensuring these lands endure while deeply enriching the lives of those who call this region home.

A signature achievement this past year was our role in facilitating the donation of 17 acres of pristine land from Nancy Ames to the Town of Northfield. This land is now poised to be permanently conserved, offering the community a valuable sanctuary of open space for recreation, preservation, and connection to the natural landscape.

In another exciting development, we partnered with LifePath to secure a transformative grant for dementia-friendly improvements at Alderbrook Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary in Northfield. These enhancements will make this cherished space more accessible and welcoming to individuals and families impacted by dementia, ensuring it remains a vital, inclusive gathering place for years to come.

One of the most thrilling milestones of the year was the donation of the White property in Winchendon to Mount Grace, a breathtaking 384-acre parcel that is now our newest conservation area. Once the site of the historic Marchmont Castle, this land is now safeguarded for the

enjoyment of future generations and serves as a permanent reminder of nature's beauty.

We also deepened our impact through a continuing partnership with Athol High School, where we brought students to Eagle Reserve for trail maintenance and improvements. This collaboration is about much more than just physical labor—it's an opportunity for young people to connect with the land, instilling in them a lifelong sense of stewardship and pride.

Together, these efforts have set the stage for a thriving future—one where communities are deeply connected to the natural spaces that sustain them, ensuring a legacy that will endure for generations.



*The **North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership**—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.*

This year's partnership work focused on the continuation of our joint collaborations with No Loose Braids on designing conservation and stewardship projects that address Indigenous land priorities.

Four new collaborations between participating trusts and Indigenous partners moved forward, including the conservation of culturally significant land and the creation of co-management plans on protected land. These collaborations were reported at the fall meeting of the partnership in 2024, as well as to RCPP network meetings and at LTA Rally.

Partners also presented at the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition Conference in 2025. Based in part on this work, MLTC has now convened an Indigenous Allyship Committee that will work to educate all Massachusetts land trusts on Indigenous collaborations.

The Partnership also disseminated information from the Northeast Bird Habitat Conservation Initiative and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Bird Conservation Initiative detailing new resources, including mapping tools, apps, and grant programs, that can be used to survey and improve bird habitat.



*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.*

Our program continues to work closely with the stewardship team to integrate climate adaptation into our land stewardship. We continue to co-create long-term stewardship plans, special projects, and educational opportunities that center climate change and Indigenous ecological knowledge through our partnerships with Nipmuc-led NGOs: No Loose Braids, Chagwas Cultural Consulting, and Nipmuc Cultural Hunt and Fish. We received funding to support this work from the LTA Land and Climate grant program.

We had the honor of being invited by Native Land Conservancy to participate in a land return project, called Tall Turtle, to protect a culturally significant parcel of land in New Salem. We are already planning more collaborative projects with Native Land Conservancy and are thankful for their leadership and partnership in this work.

We developed a relationship with the Tribal government of the Chaubunagungamaug Band of Nipmuck Indians. We are working with them on several projects. We supported their application to the Commonwealth's Tribal Land Acquisition Grant, which was successfully funded. We are also working with the Tribal Council to develop cultural respect easements which recognize and supports their inherent Aboriginal rights and extends those rights on Mount Grace conservation areas.

Our Board of Directors and our entire staff have been participating in continued education on how we can integrate land justice into all we do. We were invited to participate in the third cohort of the First Light Learning Journey to learn from conservation professionals and members of the Wabanaki Tribal Nations. Our entire staff now meets monthly to discuss land justice topics so that we can all effectively integrate land justice into all of our programs. We continue to share what we learn with the land trust community at the local, state, and national level.

*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.*

Over the last year our Stewardship program has made significant progress in building capacity, managing our amazing portfolio of conserved lands, and expanding services to our diverse community of woodlot owners, farmers, and outdoor recreationists. We expanded our staff to include Matt DiBona, our new Director of Land Stewardship. Matt's background in wildlife and habitat management complements our existing staff roles and expertise and positions us to have a bigger impact on our land management work and the support we can offer our deedholders.

Supporting biodiversity remains a priority for Mount Grace. Following the completion of the bird-friendly forestry project at Guiney Memorial Forest in 2024, our staff worked with volunteer birdwatchers to create an eBird hotspot and document bird species. In 2024 and 2025, 56 species have been observed in the forest, including seven Species of Greatest Conservation Need. A follow-up native tree planting event was hosted in May, focusing on fruit and nut producing species that can support wildlife and are desirable for Indigenous foraging.

One of the most exciting habitat projects we completed was the design and installation of a native pollinator garden next to our office at Skyfields Arboretum, made possible with the help of local volunteers. Comprised of 35 species and ~ 250 plants, the garden not only provides critical foraging habitat for butterflies, bees, and moths, it will also function as an educational space to highlight the importance of planting native species.

Improving accessibility to our Conservation Areas has also been a core focus for Mount Grace. From pursuing additional grant funding to improve our trails at Alderbrook Meadows and Eagle Reserve, to partnering with Yale School of the Environment students to guide our approach to accessibility, we are working to create more opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors.

We also forged new partnerships to promote soil health across the communities we serve. Through a grant from American Farmland Trust, our TerraCorps service member Jessie Witt hosted a free, soil health resource fair to connect Massachusetts' agricultural community with programs and services provided by non-profit agricultural stakeholders and government partners. And we collaborated with Seeds of Solidarity to sponsor scholarships for new and underserved farmers to receive training on no-till practices.

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.

This year, Mount Grace brought the communities we serve together with the landscapes that support and inspire us. From trudging through the snow at our winter wildlife tracking event to cooling off in Tully Brook during August's family stream exploration, we shared the wonders of our natural landscapes with people of all ages. We also equipped our community with the tools to take part in conservation through citizen science, from eBird monitoring at Guiney Memorial Forest to our iNaturalist campaign during April's City Nature Challenge.

This summer, we celebrated the donation of the 384-acre Marchmont property in Winchendon with a walk exploring the land's natural and cultural history. As we look toward future engagement at places like Marchmont, we reflect on how to continue fostering strong connections between people and place long after a conservation project is complete.

Our summer celebrations continued at the third annual Fields and Forest Forever Music Festival—an outdoor Mount Grace benefit concert set against lands we've helped protect. The festival highlighted our local partners, including Carter & Stevens Farm and the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, while also celebrating the completion of the Hawes Hill Project, a landscape-scale initiative that conserved 800 acres in Barre.

In Petersham, the Triple Oak Tree at Cutthroat Brook Tree Farm became an international celebrity after appearing on the TV series *The Americas*. Visitors traveled from near and far to meet “the tree” and picnic in its shade. These shared moments also honored the Feldman family's dedication to maintaining their land and sharing a trail network in wonderfully accessible, creative ways.

With Dave Small on staff, we've developed our partnership with the Athol Bird and Nature Club (ABNC) and co-led outdoor explorations with members of ABNC. We look forward to expanding our collaborative capacity with local organizations to reach and engage with our communities.



Our Community In Action: From summer concerts to outdoor adventures, this past year had it all.

Grateful Thanks to Supporters of Mount Grace

Every contribution is special to us. Donors contributing to Mount Grace during the fiscal year (June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025) 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 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.

Margaret Power-Biggs Society



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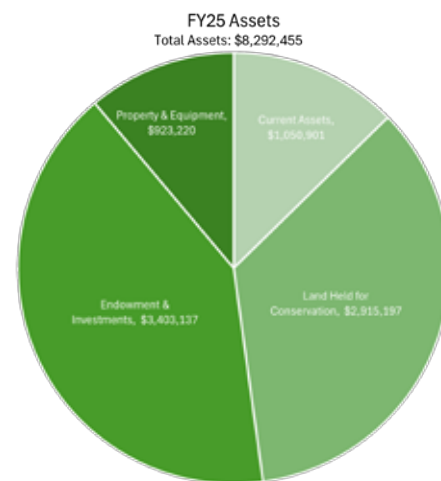
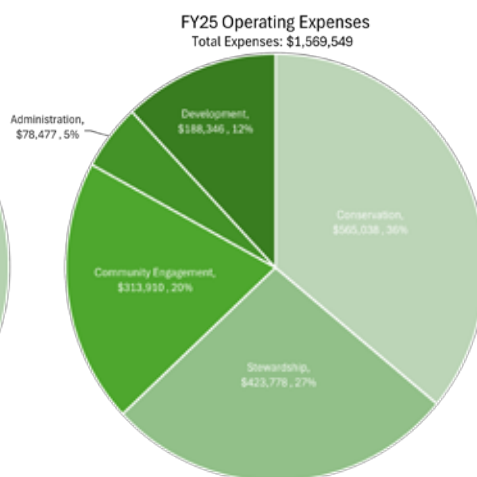
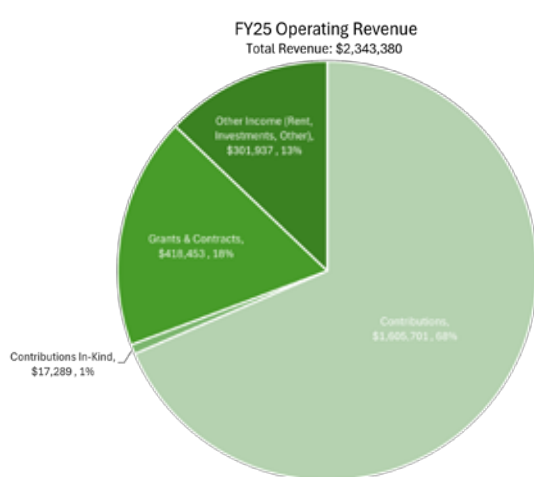


MOUNT GRACE ANNUAL REPORT

2025

In FY25, generous donors supported Mount Grace's long-term plan to build staff capacity. A portion of these transformative gifts is being carried forward to support staff expansion over the next several years. This growth allows us to respond to urgent opportunities for conservation while also building the long-term capacity needed to steward these lands for generations to come.

Beyond our operating budget, we also raised and leveraged further funding for multiple major projects, including \$885,000 for the Four Corners property in Montague, more than \$2,600,000 for the Hawes Hill project in Barre, and \$325,000 to purchase and resell a parcel in Ashby to the Department of Fish and Game. None of this would be possible without the continued trust and support of our donors. Note: Figures are preliminary and will be finalized through our annual audit.



40,000 Acres Protected Since 1986

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

Our Mission: Mount Grace conserves and cares for our forests, farms, and waterways to promote healthy communities in climate-resilient, biodiverse landscapes.

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