

Views *from* Mount Grace



WINTER 2025
VOLUME 36, NO. 3

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Looking north across protected Marchmont forest toward New Hampshire

White Family Donates Historic Marchmont Forest – 400 Acres of Winchendon Woodlands

BY K O L Y A P A R T A N

WINCHENDON — Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust is honored to become the new steward of “Marchmont,” a nearly 400-acre forest west of Lake Monomonic. Once part of a family estate long protected through conservation, the land has now been donated by the White family to Mount Grace, ensuring its continued care and public enjoyment for generations to come.

An unfragmented expanse of mature woodland, Marchmont offers miles of recreational trails and a diverse mix of hardwood species that provide vital habitat for native wildlife.

This milestone marks the second chapter of a conservation journey that began in 2011, when the first conservation restriction (CR) was placed on Marchmont. “With this agreement, we fulfill that vision and expand it by securing the 11-acre site of the former Marchmont Castle, previously unprotected,” said Emma G. Ellsworth, Executive Director at Mount Grace. “Mount Grace is deeply grateful to the White family for their generosity and to the Town of Winchendon for their partnership. This achievement both honors Winchendon’s heritage and invests in its future.”

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Dear Friends,

This morning on my walk, I watched a family of beavers working furiously to cache a flotilla of branches and brush for their winter meals outside their den. Unfortunately, I recognized that much of their food storage included limbs from a beautiful, garish pink rhododendron that was probably as old as I am. I'll miss those stunning, dinner-plate-sized blossoms this coming spring.

The beavers are busy repairing their den and battening their hatches in preparation for the coming ice, cold, and long dark nights. So are we, putting mulch on gardens, stacking firewood, and pulling out our cozy sweaters, mittens and hats.

At Mount Grace, however, the opposite is happening. I feel like the gloves are coming off, as this new team finds its stride. I am thrilled by the creativity and energy buzzing in the office as ambitious conservation, stewardship and outreach programs gain steam. We are doing the work to ensure that the beavers have space to flourish, our region's drinking water stays clean, and that delicious, locally grown food continues to thrive on nearby farms.

This is a community effort, made possible by of our shared commitment to protecting and caring for our precious open spaces. Together, we dare to hope for a future that includes healthy forests, farms, and waterways. I am so grateful to be on this journey with all of you.

Warmly,

Emma

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

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Mount Grace Awarded Mass Trails Grant to Improve Accessibility at Alderbrook and Eagle Reserve

BY SETH KELLEY

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust has been awarded a 2025 MassTrails Grant to enhance accessibility on two of our most-visited trails: the Gunnery Sergeant Jeffrey S. Ames Accessible Nature Trail at Alderbrook Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary in Northfield and the David H. Small Community Trail at Eagle Reserve Conservation Area in Royalston.

In partnership with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Mount Grace will use the grant to bring both trails into alignment with the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG)—a nationally recognized standard that ensures natural-surface trails are safe and welcoming for all users, including people with mobility challenges, wheelchair users, seniors, and families with strollers.

“Together, the trails invite meaningful encounters with the forest and wetlands, offering visitors a chance to experience these landscapes up close,” said Alex Delucia, Director of Trails & Recreation Management at AMC.

Upgrades will include regrading steep sections, widening paths and bridges, resurfacing with firm gravel for stability, improving drainage, and expanding rest areas. These improvements will create consistent, durable, and inclusive trails while protecting the surrounding habitat.

Mount Grace will partner with the Appalachian Mountain Club’s professional trail crew, volunteers, and AMC’s Holyoke Teen Trail Crew to complete the work. The project is funded by a \$97,100 MassTrails Grant, with additional matching support provided through volunteer hours and youth crew contributions. Construction is scheduled to begin in Spring 2026.



Appalachian Mountain Club’s (AMC) professional trail crew constructing an accessible trail in Andover, Massachusetts. Photo Credit: AMC

Introducing the Rohunta Barrens Conservation Area

BY MATT DIBONA



The most recent addition to Mount Grace's conserved landscape is also one of our most exciting acquisitions to date! Located along the shores of Lake Rohunta in Orange and New Salem, the new Rohunta Barrens Conservation Area is a hidden gem that will provide opportunities for hiking, hunting, and other outdoor recreation. Remarkably, the land also has the potential to be restored to a globally rare ecosystem that supports many rare and threatened species.

Nearly 200 acres in size, this parcel was a generous gift to Mount Grace and included a significant financial contribution to support stewardship of the property. Earlier in the year, Mount Grace staff surveyed the land and were excited to find a mix of oak and lowbush blueberry growing amongst stands of white pine and eastern hemlock. The extremely poor, sandy soils contain lots of gravel – an indication of glacial outwash that was typical of the region following the melting and retreat of glaciers at the end of the last ice age, roughly 10,000 years ago. Connecting these clues, our environmental detective work suggests that the oak–pine–hemlock forest we see today once looked very different.

Historically, this landscape would have been dominated by pitch pine, scrub oak, white oak, blueberry, huckleberry, and warm-season grasses such as bluestem. These so-called barrens habitats looked more like open woodlands or savannah than

the closed-canopy forest currently present — and, most importantly, they were shaped by periodic fire. Over time, fire suppression and land conversion have gradually reshaped the forest and diminished the quality of habitat available to rare and threatened wildlife.

Much like finding a beautiful antique car tucked away in an old barn, this landscape can be restored to a barrens community. In doing so, we will provide important habitat for declining species such as eastern whip-poor-will and barrens buckmoth. Initial forestry work will focus on tree removal and reducing fuels loads in preparation for the eventual reintroduction of fire to the landscape through controlled burns.

While our restoration work will likely take a decade or more, our efforts to improve recreational access will be more immediate. Long managed as a working forest by W.D. Cows, the property already features a network of forest roads. These woods roads, combined with surprisingly flat topography, lend themselves to accessible, multi-use trails for people of all abilities. Additional design and planning work are still ahead, but the Rohunta Barrens Conservation Area has the potential to offer one of the longest accessible trails in the North Quabbin region.

Introducing the New Indigenous Land Justice Fellowship

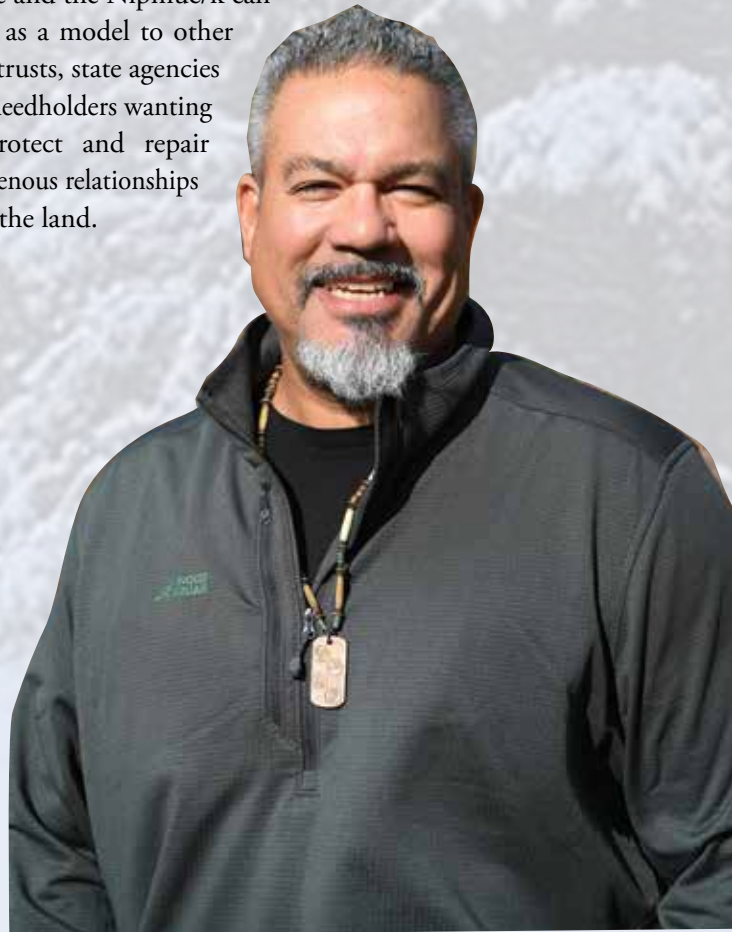
BY JOSE “ITE” SANTANA

I am the inaugural Indigenous Land Justice Fellow at Mount Grace. I am also a citizen and councilmember of the Chaubunagungamaug Band of Nipmuck Indians (CBNI). I hold additional roles in the Nipmuck community as founder and director of Nipmuck Cultural Hunt and Fish (NCHF) and as a sitting board member of the newly formed Nipmuck Community Land Project (NCLP). The NCLP is the first unified Nipmuck/k led land trust to hold and steward land within our traditional homelands for the benefit of the entire Nipmuck/k community regardless of Tribal political affiliation. Both organizations strive to restore our community relationships, strengthen our food sovereignty programs, teach others Indigenous cultural stewardship, and reconnect Indigenous people with the land we have lived on for thousands of years.

My relationship with Mount Grace started during a CBNI reservation clean-up in the spring of 2024. Further conversations and collaborations followed which eventually led to the formation of this current fellowship position. This fellowship provides me with the framework to begin understanding land trust operations in detail, including conservation work, stewardship knowledge, grant writing skills and fundraising abilities, while helping to navigate the broader land trust network to support the development of NCLP. This position also supports NCHF in strengthening Nipmuck/k relationships with forestland and farmlands to advance our food sovereignty and cultural revitalization efforts. This position has also opened doors to broader networks and relationships with like-minded organizations to benefit the Nipmuck/k community.

By bringing an Indigenous perspective to Mount Grace, I hope my presence will help raise awareness of Nipmuck/k efforts regarding land back and food sovereignty. I hope to enhance Nipmuck/k voices and shine a light on the long-standing structural biases we have endured while trying to rebuild our presence on these lands we once called home. Working with Mount Grace, I hope to offer land trusts, state agencies, landowners and everyday people a “fresh perspective” of our efforts, one rooted in recognizing and considering Indigenous people in their work.

This fellowship marks an important step toward building that capacity within our community to lead conservation initiatives that reflect Indigenous values and priorities. By integrating traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary land stewardship practices, we aim to create models of restoration and sustainability that honor our ancestral connections to the land. The support from Mount Grace has been instrumental in fostering these collaborations, empowering us to advocate for policies and projects that benefit both the environment and our people. The relationship between Mount Grace and the Nipmuck/k can serve as a model to other land trusts, state agencies and deedholders wanting to protect and repair Indigenous relationships with the land.



Margaret Power Biggs Society

Profile: Jim Levitt

Jim Levitt's first job out of college inspired his lifelong passion for conservation. "I was a small cog in a big machine that protected 100 million acres in Alaska for national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges," says Jim. "I was the guy in the basement making maps and sorting slides." At the time, Jim worked for the National Park Service (NPS) in D.C., supporting the Carter Administration's massive landscape conservation proposal. The effort was successful, being signed into law in 1980 as the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

After working for NPS, Jim returned to school for a master's degree in public and private management at Yale. His focus since then has been across boundaries, collaborating with volunteers and professionals in the public, private, academic, and non-profit sectors, as well as Indigenous communities. Most recently, he led the International Land Conservation Network (ILCN) at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in Cambridge. The ILCN team works with non-governmental organizations and private landowners and has created a network to protect land in more than 100 nations, spanning all seven continents.

Jim first learned about Mount Grace 25 years ago when he wrote a case study about the Tully Initiative – a landscape-scale project that protected 9,000 acres around Tully Mountain – while director of Harvard Forest's Program on Conservation Innovation. After retiring from the Lincoln Institute this July, Jim joined the Mount Grace Board. He considers Mount Grace to be "pound for pound one of the best land conservation organizations that I have ever encountered."



On a lake in Maine where Jim spends time in the summer with his family. Photo Credit: Dan Levitt

Carol Hillman of New Salem Preserves – the aunt of Jim's wife Jane – has for more 40 years inspired Jim's deep affection for the North Quabbin region. Since first visiting Carol's farm overlooking the Quabbin, he has been impressed by the region's landscape and the work to conserve it. Jim reflects, "Carol is a long-term donor and supporter of Mount Grace, and my wife and I have been proud to be donors and supporters alongside her."

If you would like information about joining the Margaret Power Biggs Society, please contact David Kotker at 978-541-1767 or kotker@mountgrace.org.

Winter 2025 Upcoming Events - Join Us!

Christmas Bird Count Walk & Solstice

Skyfields Arboretum

1461 Old Keene Road, Athol

Saturday, December 20th 8:00 - 9:30AM

*For all ages, no birding experience necessary!

Visit mountgrace.org/events to learn more about these and other events.

Thank You To Our Supporters

Grants Received

Anonymous Foundation.....	\$2,000,000
Purpose: Revolving Loan Fund	
Anonymous Foundation.....	\$500,000
Purpose: Rohunta Barrens Conservation Area	
Mass Trails Grants Program.....	\$97,100
Purpose: Accessible Trails Improvement	
Crawley Family Foundation	\$35,000
Purpose: Stewardship & Youth Outreach	
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Gifts were Received *In Honor of:*

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Special Thanks *from* Mount Grace to:

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Ken Levine
Ernie LeBlanc
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Cathy Szal
Jeffrey Thompson
Katrina Walton

White Family Donates Marchmont Land > continued from page 1

“I’m so glad Mount Grace will be caring for this land,” said June Girouard, a Winchendon resident whose family runs the neighboring Murdock Farm. “It’s beautiful here in a way you don’t fully appreciate until you walk the trails.”

With nearly 400 acres now transferred to Mount Grace, we will hold the land as a public resource, while the Town of Winchendon holds a CR to ensure permanent protection. The project really began back in 2011, when the White family and the Town of Winchendon partnered with Mount Grace to protect the first portion of the property. At that time, roughly 11 acres around the historic Marchmont Castle—destroyed by fire in 1955—were excluded from protection. This new transfer secures those remaining acres, which Mount Grace will manage for community events and recreation.

The property lies within the Millers River Watershed and features mature stands of white pine, red oak, hemlock, and red pine. A long-established network of multi-use trails weaves through the

forest, enjoyed for decades by local snowmobilers and other visitors. Open to the public since 2012, the land will be managed to improve trail access. The newly protected 11-acre parcel includes open fields with exciting potential for community use, such as disc golf, archery, and other outdoor gatherings.

Marchmont Forest was a key piece of the 2012 Southern Monadnock Plateau project and forms a link in the larger Quabbin-to-Cardigan Initiative. The land enhances both regional conservation connectivity and public recreational opportunities.

“Our family’s ties to this land stretch back to 1847, when our great-great-grandfather established his textile mill in Spring Village,” says Eric White, a Trustee of the Marchmont Trust. “Generations of our family grew up exploring these woods, and in honoring our father’s wishes, we are proud to see this forest remain undeveloped under Mount Grace’s care.” This project was supported by a grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts.



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WATER CONTROL GATES

A photograph of a winter forest scene. A small stream flows through a snowy landscape, with a simple wooden bridge crossing it in the background. Tall, thin trees line the banks, and the ground is covered in a thick layer of snow.

Your gift goes twice as far this season.

Support Mount Grace's Annual Appeal—your gift will be doubled up to \$100,000!