

## Our Latest ACQUISITION

Earlier this year, the Narrow River Land Trust acquired a Conservation Easement on the 5.3 acre property in North Kingstown in one of our highest priority areas in the watershed – the land surrounding Carr or Pausacaco Pond and the Wellhead Recharge area of the North Kingstown Town drinking water wells. The Town bought the property with assistance from the State and the Narrow River Land Trust. The NRLT co-holds the Easement with the State, but the Town donated funds to the Land Trust to support the ongoing monitoring of the parcel. Because it is part of the wellhead area, there is no public access to this site.

The Land Trust has protected over 325 acres in this part of the watershed. Other organizations such as the State, the Town of North Kingstown and Gilbert Stuart Birthplace have protected another 230 acres of land. Almost all the frontage on Carr Pond has now been preserved – protecting not only our water resources, but also the aquatic habitat of one of the most important herring runs and spawning ponds in Rhode Island and the eastern seaboard.

It is a delight to visit this area at any time of the year. There are birds and wildlife in abundance as we hope there will be for many, many years to come because these properties are now preserved into perpetuity. The Land Trust has been able to do this work because of the support of our donors. Help us to keep up this good work by supporting the land trust today.

## Penny Jackim's 1985 Map of the Narrow River Watershed

**Shady Lea Mill:** Formerly known as the Springdale Factory. Operated as a textile mill 1820's - 1950's. Made woolen blankets for Union Army during Civil War.

**Old St. Paul's Church:** Formerly Old Narragansett Church. Built in 1707. Moved to Wickford in 1800.

**Gilbert Stuart Birthplace.** Built in 1751, birthplace of America's foremost portraitist.

**Buckeytown:** Every spring, thousands of river herring (buckeys) swim up the Pettaquamscutt River, climb the fish ladder at Gilbert Stuart Birthplace, and spawn in Carr Pond.

**Casey Farm:** A 300 acre working farm, with 10 miles of stone walls, extending from Pettaquamscutt River to Narragansett Bay. Owned by Casey family 1702 - 1955.

**Hannah Robinson House:** Built in 1710. Guests included Marquis de Lafayette during Revolutionary War.

**The Glebe:** Construction began in late 1600's. Served as home to Rectors of St. Paul's Church in Narragansett during 1700's.

**Lacey House:** Home of Bill Lacey, the "hermit", until 1970's.

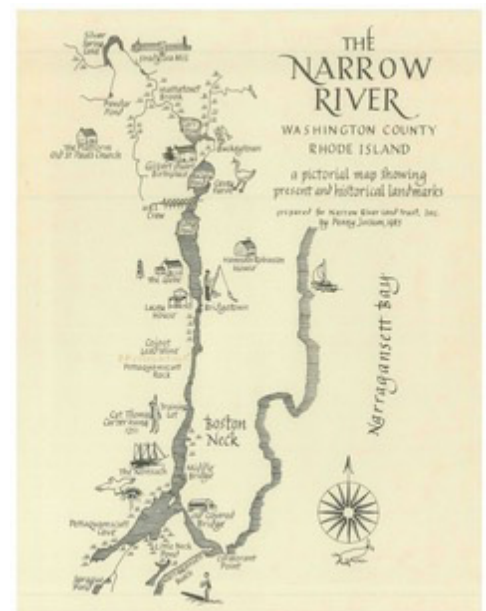
**Cajoot Lead Mine:** Operated during 1800's. A narrow gauge railroad carried mined lead (graphite) to the Pettaquamscutt River for shipping.

**Training Lot:** At base of Torrey Road, used for training of militia during Revolutionary War.

**Capt. Thomas Carter Hanging:** A "murder memorial" opposite Stedman Gov't Ctr marks the spot where Capt. Thomas Carter of Newport allegedly killed his travelling companion, Wm Jackson of Virginia, in 1751. Carter was "hung from chains" until his death at the base of Torrey Road.

**The Nunsuch:** One of approximately 20 sailing ships built on the Pettaquamscutt River by the Saunders family during the 1800's.

**Covered Bridge:** Spanned the Pettaquamscutt River 1868 - 1921 until replaced by the Sprague Bridge.





# The Dilemmas OF CONSERVATION

Once a land trust takes ownership of a property, you'd think we could just lock it up, throw away the key and let nature take its course. More often than not, land trusts are challenged to do that. Should a land trust - intervene to protect a saltmarsh, try to control an invasive species or restore a threatened habitat? As conservation owners, land trusts are faced with many decisions where the right or best way forward is not always clear. Who would think that managing Open Space could pose such dilemmas?

Letting nature take its course is often the plan of choice for forest and wetlands, but fields are a different matter. Fields - old fields, new fields, meadows and hay fields, are valuable wildlife habitats that warrant protection. Their native plants, grasses and wildflowers offer plentiful resources for pollinators, nesting birds, herbivores and predators. Many animals prefer the edges between field and forest for nesting and foraging. Unfortunately in southern Rhode Island, the natural succession of plant communities does not favor the long-term persistence of a field. Once cleared by a fire, hurricane or human disturbance such as timber harvest and mowing, grasslands in our area will not usually persist. A succession of shrubby plants, then softwood trees and eventually hardwood trees will change the grassland into the forested climax community one sees throughout southern Rhode Island. Regular mowing to discourage the growth of shrubs and trees is required to allow the grasses to persist. In the 1990's, the Narrow River Land Trust (NRLT) took ownership of two hayfields, and the dilemma of how to manage them was resolved in different ways.

The first hayfield was given to us in 1990. It was purported to be the oldest, continuously hayed field in Rhode Island. The donor had precious memories of her childhood spent rummaging through the grasses where the discovery of cranberries and creatures forged a love for nature. When the land trust acquired the field, we were asked to make sure it was cut at least once a year. The cutting started out well, but as mowers came and went and a season was missed here and there, native grasses and wildflowers began to find their way into the field - slowly changing it into a richer and more diverse wildlife habitat. The land trust approached the donor and asked if we could cut just half of the field each year, thereby keeping the softwoods at bay while allowing the native plants to take hold. As the owner wished to provide the best habitat for wildlife, she was happy to support the change from hayfield to berry-laden shrubs, wildflowers and native grasses. Today that field is recognized for its exemplary diversity and productivity. With permission, from the NRLT, the New England Wildflower Society and Rhody Native, at the RI Natural History Survey, collect seeds from this field to use in the propagation and restoration of native plants.

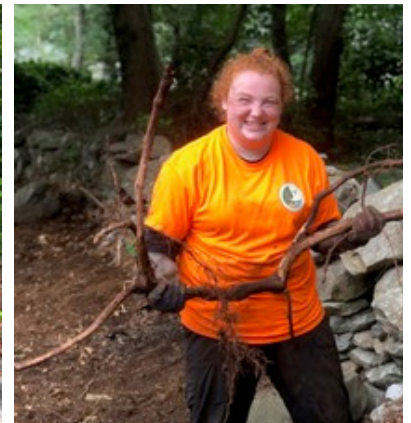
Our second hayfield has a similar history of being hayed for well over a century. Its rolling hills are a pleasant and familiar sight to passersby. When the NRLT took ownership, the longstanding farmer continued to cut and manage the field for hay. However, when he passed away, the land trust was suddenly presented with a dilemma. We could continue to cut the field as usual for hay, or we could take the opportunity to transition the field to a meadow of native grasses and wildflowers.

We spoke with many people in the land trust and farming communities, and we consulted with wetland and wildlife biologists at URI and the USDA Conservation Services. We knew we had precious wetlands to protect. We knew entire species of field nesting birds were disappearing from RI, and populations of pollinators were threatened everywhere due to the loss of habitat. We also knew the hayfield was an iconic landscape in the town representing our agricultural history and heritage, not to mention the possible livelihood of a local farmer. Our Board had many discussions about what our responsibility to conservation was and what would be most important to our town and our community? A dilemma.

One proposal we received was from a local, organic farmer who wanted to graze his cattle in the field. His method of rotational grazing was considered both sustainable and environmentally friendly. The cattle would eat the weeds, and their hooves and manure would not only fertilize the field but also attract more insects, birds and animals. The farmer's grass-fed cattle would also fill a demand in the community for local organic and sustainably-raised beef. This was certainly in line with the mission of the land trust. Unfortunately, on-site challenges made this proposal untenable, but it did make us more sensitive to the needs of the community.

We learned that if we stopped haying the field, in the short term a farmer could get some good cuts of hay out of it, but in the long term it would quickly become useless to a farmer. We also realized that we would have to pay somebody to cut the field every year, and if we ever changed our minds, it would be extremely costly to convert it back to hay. So, we decided to thread the needle. We found a farmer who was willing to work with us to create a transitional area along the edge of the field that would add to the wetland buffer and would provide more resources to wildlife. While this transitional area would be cut once a year, the bulk of the field could continue to be managed for hay, and with a regime of delayed mowing to protect nesting birds and foraging animals, it could be cut twice a year, early in the spring and late in the fall. We feel we have found a plan that will serve most of our goals. Dilemma resolved - at least for now.

# SIX YEARS OF WORK WITH THE YCL



The Youth Conservation League or YCL is a summer work program for RI high school students. The students are paid an hourly wage to work with the staff and volunteers of different land trusts across the state. For a fee, land trusts can get a day with the crew to help them clear trails, remove invasive species, or build bog bridges. Those are the jobs the YCL has performed for the Narrow River Land Trust every summer for the last six years. What a boon they have been for our stewardship programs!

The crews are enthusiastic even on the hottest days and amongst the thickest of briars. Their eagerness to learn about land conservation and the work we do is inspiring. They are supervised by experienced leaders who make sure they have the tools and supplies they need in the field and that they know how to use and take care of them properly. The students are quick to ask about a bird, a plant or most exciting, a snake. As they crisscross the state working for the DEM, the Audubon Society or a small land trust like ours, they learn about different habitats and wildlife and the many ways different organizations manage them. Most of all, the YCL crews gain skills and hands-on experience in the outdoors and most importantly, the satisfaction of making a difference.

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## The Narrow River Land Trust is growing.

We are growing our Board and our committees. We are also growing our number of volunteer workdays. If you are interested in engaging with the Land Trust in any of these ways, please write to us at [office@narrowriverlandtrust.org](mailto:office@narrowriverlandtrust.org) and tell us what your interests are.



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