

Green Mountain Conservancy, Inc.  
2023 Annual Report



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Board of Directors, 2023

Mary Ellen Copeland, President

Sam Farwell, Jennifer Ramstetter, Vice-Presidents

Ed Anthes, Treasurer

Jenifer Ambler, Secretary

Dan Dubie, Roger Haydock, Patti Smith, Alex Wilson, Hale Morrell

### Mission

The mission of the Green Mountain Conservancy is to acquire and protect forest lands in southern Vermont:

1. To insure their natural character and continued biodiversity;
2. To conserve wildlife corridors and watershed systems;
3. To promote carbon sequestration;
4. To undertake related initiatives that educate people in the continuing understanding, appreciation and stewardship of these lands;
5. To protect their aesthetic and inspirational values; and
6. To improve the quality of life for residents and visitors to southern Vermont.

### **2023 Achievements**

GMC purchased a 30 acre forested parcel contiguous to Deer Run Nature Preserve (Deer Run Nature Preserve Phase III) in November of 2023. This small parcel is a very special place with many nooks and crannies that are each spectacular in their own right. The many shagbark hickory trees and the forest floor covered with sedges make this parcel seem parklike. It is an important part of the east west wildlife corridor from the Green Mountains to the Connecticut River.

Received the donation of the 115 acre Knight farm in north east Dummerston, donated by descendants of the Knight family, the original settlers of this old farmstead. Special features include massive ancient white oak trees, a rushing brook on its way to the nearby CT River and many natural communities. A stewardship committee for this

parcel has been organized and work will begin in the spring of 2024 to make the land accessible to the public.

Earth Day Hike led by Dan Dubie attended by 20 people.

Trail opening for the North Trail attended by 20 people. Half of the attendees hiked the 7 mile loop with Roger Haydock and half did an exploring hike with Dan Dubie. The loop trail accesses many natural communities and beauty spots in the Preserve. Special features include the large flood plain fields that host Bob-O-Links, Savannah Sparrows and a multitude of pollinators.

Maintained the 2 mile low gradient trail to the “Monument” and the ½ mile Shoulder Trail. These trails saw enthusiastic use all year.

Improved the parking area by adding several loads of small stone, new signage and a map at the trail head.

Continued to improve GMC’s capacity to acquire and conserve land by developing more efficient and effective organizational systems.

Received a Capacity Grant from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to work with consultant Don Owen to study GMC organizational systems to insure that they meet the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices in anticipation of eventual accreditation by the Alliance.

Formed a collaborative with three other area land trusts, Putney Mountain Association, Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association and Bull Creek Common Lands, known as Southern Vermont Conservation Collaborative, that will increase our capacity to acquire and conserve more lands quickly to work toward the state’s goal of 30% of land in Vermont conserved by 2030. The Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board are supporting us in this work.

Worked with Global Giving to enhance GMC social media presence and open new funding options.

Enhanced our outreach to the community through an e-newsletter, articles in local papers, our website [GreenMountainConservancy.org](https://www.GreenMountainConservancy.org), a Facebook group and Instagram.

Coordinated our work with other organizations such as the Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center, Vermont Land Trust, the Windham Regional Commission, and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

### **Financial Information**

In 2023, Green Mountain Conservancy had total income of .

The balance of expenses covers costs of future acquisitions, property taxes and maintenance of Deer Run Nature Preserve.

Our detailed financial review is available upon request at [info@GreenMountainConservancy.org](mailto:info@GreenMountainConservancy.org).

## Deer Run Nature Preserve



In 2019, with donations from many community members and support from the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, GMC purchased a 287 acre parcel and created the Deer Run Nature Preserve. In 2021, the Conservancy purchased an additional 626 acres at the southern end of the Putney Mt. ridge, a highest priority forest block in the towns of Newfane and Brookline. An additional 30 acre piece, brings the number of acres in the preserve up to 943 acres. It includes a great diversity of terrain, natural communities, flora and fauna, streams and wetlands, and the now much-less-common early successional habitat, as well as 51 acres of pristine fields along the West River. The Preserve provides a key linkage between the conserved Putney Mountain ridgeline and large wild areas to the west, part of a wildlife corridor across southern Vermont and into New Hampshire. It has 2 ½ miles of frontage on the West River, a State Priority Aquatic Feature.

This forested land on the east side of the Putney Mt. ridge is also in the West River Watershed and forms a bowl with several streams.

The Preserve has 228 acres of deer wintering yards, at least three active vernal pools, and several state-significant wetland areas. Neighbors have enjoyed hiking and hunting here for generations, activities still available on the Preserve. Much of the sloping hillside provides the view seen driving north on Rt 30 from the Dummerston Covered Bridge and to the right as you travel into Newfane (behind the elementary school).

Over 70 species of birds have been sighted in the Preserve. The early successional habitat attracts birds that have been identified as being “in greatest need of conservation in Vermont”, including the brown thrasher, wood thrush, field sparrow, prairie warbler, mourning warbler, red shouldered hawk, American woodcock and bald eagle. Bob-O-Links and the Savannah Sparrow nest in the riverside fields. The Preserve is also providing habitat for the Jefferson salamander, DeKay's brown snake and the smooth green snake. Bobcat and bear sign are plentiful. *Three-bird orchid* (Vermont Rank S1), *Perplexed Tick-trefoil* (S2) and *Broad Beech-fern* (S2S3) are also found on this land.

This parcel contains state-significant terrestrial and wetland natural communities, and forests of all ages and many species, providing a complex habitat that is resilient to climate change and extreme weather events. As a drainage basin, it supports water storage capacity, water quality, and habitat for a wide range of species, including those associated with vernal pools, wetland areas and both year-round and seasonal streams. It includes unfragmented interior forest blocks, which provide important habitat and will be able to accommodate species range shifts in a changing climate; connectivity blocks, which provide critical pathways for species movement between core habitat areas, such as riparian forests; wetlands, featuring a variety of microhabitats; and climatic gradients, which provide refuge for plants and animals.

The significant features of the Preserve include: 2.5 miles of undeveloped frontage on the West River; glorious views from the route 30 corridor and from the highest elevations; topographic benches left by glaciation and flooding events; cliffs created by uplift and continental collisions eons ago; a dramatic and active landslide area; numerous rich forest sites, including a cove with incredibly tall trees containing shagbark hickories (the crevices formed by shagbark hickory's thick, peeling bark provide summer shelter for the endangered Northern Long-eared bat); 228 acres of deer wintering yard; 51 acres of pristine agricultural fields; and corridors for wildlife and species movement, adaptability and resiliency.

A series of narrow bands of remnant Sugar Maple Floodplain Forest, a rare community type in Vermont, occurs intermittently along portions of the eastern and western field edges.

The Deer Run Nature Preserve has documented habitat for Tubercled Orchid (S2), Broad Beech-fern (S2S3), Canada burnet (S2), Hitchcock's sedge (S3), and Sharp-fruited rush (S1). In the West River nearby, three species of rare freshwater mussels have been documented: Brook Floater (*Alismadonta varicosa*), Triangle Floater (*Alismadonta undulata*), and Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*).

Conservation of the Preserve provides approximately 1,600 tons of carbon sequestration annually. It is projected that, as ocean levels rise, more and more people from coastal cities will be moving to this specific area. This project will preserve agricultural and forest land and encourage the development of denser housing in areas that are closer to jobs and services.

The protection of this property will improve the quality of the West River, a Highest Priority Riparian Corridor, by managing the fields and forest lands that have frontage on the river to ensure that the water is kept free of pollutants, to prevent erosion, to reduce the effects of flooding, to protect wildlife, aquatic and botanical species that are native to this riverine area, and to inhibit invasive species that threaten riverbanks and the quality of the water. To do this, the Conservancy will follow the management guidelines described in the Vermont Conservation Design, and take action as directed by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont Land Trust.

The Green Mountain Conservancy is continuing to design and build a series of public, low gradient footpaths that connect the outstanding features, natural communities and "beauty spots" of the parcel.

Community members have invested thousands of hours of volunteer time in the Preserve and are committed to providing on-going stewardship. One volunteer has worked for over 1,500 hours designing and building footpaths that introduce hikers to

the richness of this forest land that lies where southern and northern forest communities meet.

In August and September of 2022, the Conservancy worked with Adam Gilbert of Tahawus Trails to construct a bridge across a stream that had been widened and deepened in a flooding event in July of 2021. This bridge has increased trail accessibility for more people including children, seniors and people with mobility issues.

The Conservancy encourages and supports the use of the Preserve for environmental education programs, for non-motorized and low impact recreation, and for hunting (with permission). Vermont, and particularly this area, is dependent on the vitality of the tourist industry. People come to this area to enjoy the natural beauty and recreational opportunities that will only continue to be available by preserving large contiguous areas of forest land and ridges like this one.

As GMC works to assure that there is a wildlife corridor across Southern Vermont, into the Green and White Mountains, it has identified other large parcels in need of conservation that support this focus and is working to bring those projects to fruition.



## Canoe Brook Nature Preserve



The Green Mountain Conservancy has established a new Preserve in Dummerston, Vermont. The Canoe Brook Nature Preserve, a 115-acre property located near the northeast corner of Dummerston, will remain undeveloped in perpetuity. This is the second Preserve of the Conservancy.

The Canoe Brook Nature Preserve was donated to GMC in October, 2023 by heirs of the Knight Family. The property has been owned by the Knight family since they first settled there in the late-1700s. This family features heavily in both the 1884 and 1990 published histories of Dummerston, going back to Jonathan Knight, who moved to the town in 1774 and was the Town Clerk from 1775-1780. Joel Knight, one of Jonathan Knight's sons, bought the land that is now the Canoe Brook Nature Preserve, likely in the 1780s, and the family farmed it for generations. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, this was land of the Abenaki Nation..

All of the buildings on the Canoe Brook Nature Preserve are long gone, but cellar holes and stone walls remain visible in many places.

Roughly a half-mile of the Canoe Brook crosses through the Preserve. This pristine brook rises on the shoulder of Putney Mountain about three miles northwest of the Preserve and flows into the Connecticut River about a mile to the southeast.

The woodland is dominated by white pine, hemlock, sugar maple, red oak, white oak, white ash, and black birch. Some of these woodlands offer an inviting, open understory,

while other areas are seeing significant growth of saplings. Past forest management has helped to control invasive buckthorn, but re-growth is now occurring, requiring follow-up control.

Of particular note in the Preserve are a dozen or more massive, ancient white oak trees, which date from the 1700s or early-1800s. Daniel Dubie, a forest ecologist and board member of GMC, explained that these trees, including Vermont's second-largest white oak specimen, "grew in the open initially, when most of the land in Dummerston was cleared for farming or pasturing sheep." Many of the huge sweeping limbs of these trees have fallen, and the trees are now surrounded by woodland.

The Canoe Brook Nature Preserve has been managed for timber and ecosystem health since at least the 1940s, with periodic timber harvests. The intent moving forward will be to maintain healthy biodiversity, provide for low-impact recreation, and support the transition to old-growth forest characteristics—in keeping with the mission of the Green Mountain Conservancy.

GMC has established a Stewardship Committee to assist in ongoing management of the Canoe Brook Nature Preserve. The Stewardship Committee will be advising the board on a wide range of policies relating to management of the preserve, as well as helping us identify parking areas, hiking trail options, and the proper balance between recreational uses of the land and ecosystem protection.

### **Old Oaks Headwaters Preserve**

GMC has a Purchase and Sale Agreement on the 200 acres Old Oaks Headwaters Preserve. It will be conserved with an easement from the Vermont River Conservancy. The sale is expected to be completed in the fall of 2024. It is a key piece of the forested headwaters of the Green River with waters flowing into Harrisville Brook and Pond Brook and then into the Green River. It includes a diversity of landscapes and community types with fine examples of northern hardwood forest, wetlands, and

talus. The goals of the project are to conserve the biodiversity within this area, provide for carbon sequestration and storage and climate resilience, and offer existing trails for recreational opportunities and the landscape for educational opportunities.

Old Oaks Headwaters Preserve is centrally located in this unfragmented forest block. Vermont Conservation Design designates the forest block as Highest Priority for its habitat connectivity and surface waters. Important wildlife corridors are used by bear, moose, and bobcat among other species. The Nature Conservancy Resilient Design tool ranks the acreage above the regional average for climate resilience and carbon storage in the face of climate change.

This land is in close proximity to lands protected from development through Vermont Land Trust easements in Marlboro. Conserved lands of the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area, Ames Hill-Marlboro Community Center (forested land around South Pond), Whittemore-Paton Trust (also forested land around South Pond), and several individual landowners form a ring of conserved lands around the proposed Old Oaks Headwaters Preserve. Conservation of this land will inspire further conservation efforts within the forest block.

Establishment of Old Oaks Headwaters Reserve will contribute positively to the well-being of community members and visitors; recreational opportunities for hikers and cross-country skiers including participants of the Marlboro Music Festival and on the Potash Hill campus. Conservation of this forest will contribute to local and state conservation and climate goals and support the economy.

## **History**

The Green Mountain Conservancy was founded in 2008 to protect and conserve large forest blocks in southeastern Vermont. Until 2018, GMC purchased and conserved properties and then sold them to buyers who continued to protect them. The

Conservancy also studied wildlife corridors and road crossings and implemented a program to protect large bodies of water from invasive species.

In 2018, GMC reorganized to begin to work aggressively to purchase and conserve a 287-acre forested parcel in the northwest corner of Dummerston that includes 49 acres in Brookline, a parcel that was threatened with intensive commercial logging. To assess community interest in this project, the Conservancy held several neighborhood meetings, and a public informational meeting that was attended by over 60 people. Support for the project, known as the Deer Run Nature Preserve, was overwhelmingly positive. Before the end of 2018, the Conservancy had a Purchase and Sale agreement with the current owners at a price that was ten percent less than the appraised value. By the end of 2019, the Conservancy raised the funds and purchased the parcel (Phase 1). It was also during that year that the Conservancy decided to expand the Preserve and signed a Purchase and Sale Agreement with land owners for the purchase of a contiguous 626 acre parcel (Phase 2). The Conservancy completed this purchase in June, 2021.

The purchase of this second parcel (Phase 2) increased the size of the Deer Run Nature Preserve to 913 acres, including the west side of the southern end of the Putney Mt. Ridge. The new Ravine Trail goes down the side of the ridge, along a deep, picturesque ravine, and out into the floodplain fields along the West River.