

SPRING 2026

OutsideIN

NEWS & NOTES FROM UPPER VALLEY LAND TRUST

GOOD DEEDS

CONSERVATION TRANSACTIONS
COMPLETED JULY 2025-MARCH 2026

- **Conklin Farm**
173 acres, Haverhill, NH
- **Geer Farm**
190 acres, West Fairlee, VT
- **Maltbie Property**
83 acres, Newbury, VT
- **Rutter Property**
23 acres, Lebanon, NH
- **Schad Property**
69 acres, Cornish, NH
- **Taplin Properties**
705 acres, Strafford and Thetford, VT



UPPER VALLEY
LAND TRUST

Students Discover “Beauty Within” at My Walden

Today’s educators compete against powerful forms of electronic entertainment, but the timeless appeal of nature still comes out on top. Sharon (VT) Elementary School is showing the way via fun and memorable field trips at UVLT’s My Walden property.

My Walden features 236 acres in Sharon of hardwood forest, grassland, streams, and wetland, and was donated to UVLT in 2024. Neighbors and friends contributed to a campaign that endowed stewardship of the roads, trails, woods, and fields as owners Steve and Shiela Swett had done with such love and generosity for decades.

CONTINUE READING INSIDE...

Students Discover “BEAUTY WITHIN” at MY WALDEN

Continued from the cover...

Steve emphasizes that neither he nor Shiela, who passed in 2022, believed that the land truly belonged to them. “It belongs to everyone,” he said recently. “Everyone should have access to everywhere on the property.”

“For students at Sharon Elementary, having access to My Walden is critical as open natural spaces are more difficult to access and families are not as likely to venture outside,” says first grade teacher Debra Walton-Strong. “The technology in homes and life now also seems to take up a lot of the free time that we have. While in My Walden, I am able to craft meaningful and educational experiences. Due to the vast terrain options that are available, I can find a spot for any science content that I need.”

She adds, “As for the community, we are so lucky to have access to a place that is safe and inviting.”

“We need to allow kids to use their creativity, but in this day and age, there’s so much TV and screen time that it doesn’t happen,” says third grade teacher Alex Brands. “Then when they’re in the woods, they forget all that stuff.”

Brands combines mathematics and botany by having students measure 30 x 30 perimeter grids and then counting and classifying the trees contained within. Students get especially excited by his My Walden lessons on tracking and plant identification.

“It’s like finding gold,” says Brands. “We live in such an amazing part of the world that it’s really cool for them to identify and know what is around.”

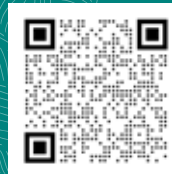
“Sit spot” activities have students returning to the same My Walden location in different seasons, allowing them to catalog nature’s subtle changes. Focusing on change over time and the flow of nature produces many benefits, notes Principal Keenan Haley.

“It allows our students to experience a level of peace and calm that we can’t often provide here in our building,” says Haley.

Haley prioritizes transportation funding in his annual budget for “beyond the classroom” student experiences like these. “We take their knowledge that they’re learning in school and then we want them to apply out of the classroom, and then also to learn things out of the classroom that they can bring back.”

Perhaps this comment from a young visitor captures it best: “I am nine years old now and there is still so much that I can learn but what I do know is there is beauty within.”

My Walden is a place to find quietness, solace, and space to rejuvenate the soul. Plan your visit today and you just might encounter today’s students becoming tomorrow’s land stewards.



EXPLORE MY WALDEN
uvlt.org/conservation-areas/my-walden



“For young people, left to their imaginations, the property offers no end of adventures, discoveries, and, we can imagine, memories.

For the most part, we have let the land speak for itself, which is to say, visitors are encouraged to enter into their own dialogue with the trees, trails, ponds, streams, plants, views, evidence of four-legged visitors, etc.

There are exceptions, among them the winged sculpture that honors our granddaughter, Rachel, and a favorite with youngsters—the swing just above the cabin.

The swing symbolizes the freedom we want everyone to feel when they visit the property.”

- STEVE SWETT

Quick Thinking & An Eye to the Future

PRESERVES LEBANON PROPERTY

A significant ecological area and watershed just a few miles from some of the Upper Valley's most intensive development is now forever protected. This happy outcome might never have happened if not for timely action by Sally Rutter more than a quarter-century ago.

The property in northern Lebanon near the Hanover line had been part of a dairy farm for generations before Sally and Jerry Rutter purchased it in 1998. Sally was driving to work one day and noticed a "for sale by owner" sign. As a realtor she recognized its strong development potential, but rather than drawing up site plans the couple quickly decided to purchase and safeguard the land and its substantial natural assets.

"I freaked out a little bit because a big condo developer had been scouting around the area," recalls Sally. "The property owners were skeptical about selling to me, a real estate agent, because they were afraid I would develop it. I convinced them that it was not our intention at all!"

The Rutters' foresight has come to full fruition. The land is now publicly accessible and will be permanently protected by an Upper Valley Land Trust easement.



Left to Right: Erling Heistad and Kim Rheinlander, Signal Hill trail stewards; Sarah Riley, chair, Lebanon Conservation Commission; Sally and Jerry Rutter; Dr. Ernest Oidtmann, Lebanon Conservation Commission and UVLT trustee; Craig Privett, UVLT Conservation Project Manager

The nearly 23-acre property features more than 2,000 feet of frontage on Stevens Road, which is listed as "scenic" in the Lebanon Master Plan, and contributes to a 1,700-acre block of unfragmented land. Highlights include frontage along Blodgett Brook as well as an unnamed intermittent stream, and a major wildlife crossing is close by.

The property is adjacent to Signal Hill, a 220-acre Lebanon conservation property with 1.5 miles of trail. It is also protected by a UVLT easement.

"UVLT is incredibly grateful that the Rutter family generously made their

gift in the interest of enhancing the city of Lebanon's water quality and wildlife habitat while ensuring that a key piece of the scenic backdrop from Stevens Road will remain open," says Conservation Project Manager Craig Privett. "The enthusiastic support of the conservation commission and city underscore the importance of the land and resources that have been protected through the Rutters' donation."

The process spanned several years and included a fee-interest gift to the land trust, which will transfer it to the city of Lebanon, subject to a protective conservation easement. The Lebanon Conservation Commission supported the project through a contribution from the Lebanon Open Space Trust (LOST) fund. The commission recommended in October 2025 that the city council accept the land gift, which the council did by unanimous vote in December.

Jerry's years of service on the Lebanon Planning Board proved invaluable. "Being on that board educated me a lot about the city of Lebanon, public lands, and the importance of wildlife corridors," says Jerry. "We had acquired the property to prevent development from happening there, so it seemed appropriate in many ways for it to become public."

Dr. Ernst Oidtmann, a member of both the UVLT Board of Trustees and the Lebanon Conservation Commission, was involved throughout and played a key role early on. "He was familiar with the property and asked if we'd be willing to walk around it with the conservation commission and think about the possibility of donating it at some point," says Jerry. "We were all very enthusiastic about the property becoming public."

"The conservation of the Rutter land is significant for many reasons," says Lebanon Conservation Commission Chair Sarah Riley. "The parcel adds to the wildlife connectivity in the area, as it lies across the road from a block of already conserved open space on Signal Hill. It protects a portion of Blodgett Brook, an important tributary of the Mascoma River upstream of Lebanon's public drinking water source. The wetlands and riparian areas on properties like this provide flood protection services to the city.

"The Rutters have gifted local residents a beautiful spot to enjoy and explore year-round, whether by cross country skiing, snow shoeing, hunting, or playing in the brook's cool clear waters. The conservation commission is grateful for their forethought and generosity and to UVLT for being such an effective partner in conservation and stewardship."

Jerry Rutter is an emeritus professor of classics at Dartmouth with a specialty in Greek archaeology. He notes that the property's 19th century barn ruins could be explored through field work.

The joy that Sally experienced driving to work every morning will now be shared with all for all time. "I just wanted it to be beautiful forever and for everybody driving by that meadow to have the same reaction," she says. "It's just spectacular."

BROOKVALE FARM:

A Heritage Connecting Generations

In an era when the number of small family farms has plummeted, the recently reestablished Brookvale Farm in Strafford, VT, stands out in many ways. It's a hopeful sign and an authentic team effort made possible by family, friends, neighbors, and individuals across the region, united in their support of local agriculture.

In 2017, UVLT worked with members of the Manning family, who for generations owned the property. In the face of development pressure arrangements were made to protect their farm property through a conservation easement. This made the farm's selling price affordable for neighboring Rockbottom Farm, the home of Strafford Organic Creamery, allowing Rockbottom to pasture cows on the land and grow their business.

To pay for the conservation easement, UVLT pledged monies it had raised through a region-wide capital campaign to support transformative land conservation projects. Additional funding was raised via a matching challenge and contributions from more than 60 households in the area.

Keeping the land in productive agriculture was a success story on its own, but an even more remarkable outcome was in store. After a spell in the Northeast Kingdom, Asa Manning and Kim Lakin returned to their home roots. Asa worked full-time at Rockbottom and reconnected to the land that had been in his family for so many years, and Kim worked part-time as well.

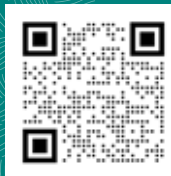
Rockbottom's owners, Amy Huyffer and Earl Ransom, are true friends and supporters and, last fall, sold the former Manning farm to Asa and Kim. The property was rechristened "Brookvale Farm" – its name from Asa's grandparents' day.

"The land holds deep meaning for us," says Kim. "Asa's roots run through these hills as the third generation, and now our children will become the fourth generation."



"With the Upper Valley Land Trust being involved, it helped Rockbottom be able to purchase it at a price that a farmer can afford," she continues. "And then, Amy and Earl, they could have sold it to us for more than they bought it for, but we only bought it back for what they put into it. It made it affordable enough for us to be able to work and create a business around it."

"UVLT is thrilled that this farm has found its way back to the Manning family and that we could play a role in that journey," says Vice President for Stewardship Jason Berard. "We're actively promoting more positive outcomes like this through the AFT Navigator program, which helps to connect the next generation of farmers with farmland."



Visit uvlt.org/new-posts to learn more about this inspiring story.



Land for Farmers & Farmers for Land

Do you know a farm that needs farmers, or a farmer needing land? Keeping our best farmland intact, healthy, and productive in years to come requires both!

Over 300 million acres of agricultural land are slated to change hands across the nation in coming decades, which is why it's so important to encourage succession planning among farm families. **If you are:**

1. a farmer looking for resources to assist with succession planning,
2. a landowner with open land that you'd like to see back in active production, or
3. a new farmer seeking access to land,

you're encouraged to contact Jason Berard at jason.berard@uvlt.org to find out how UVLT can help.

An Appreciation: DAVID TAPLIN

In 1990, when Dave “Red” Taplin bought and conserved 320 acres in Strafford and Thetford, VT, he was thinking about his community, his neighbors, and the values he lived by.

Just a few miles away as the crow flies, Huntington Farm, a landmark equestrian center, was struggling. Its miles of scenic fields along a main road were at risk of sale and development. UVLT, founded in 1985, was in the early years of our conservation mission. We teamed up with local residents. A grant application being prepared would be more competitive if matched with promises to conserve additional land, and as we discussed this with community members, we were introduced to Dave.

Dave felt most close to nature while working in the woods on this land a mile or so up a class four road from his original house site. The conservation easement he quietly donated was the largest we had received to date. It became a conservation anchor in the ecologically rich forest block he cared deeply for and was key to the successful campaign protecting Huntington Farm.

Over the next 35 years, Dave acquired more land and tended it with care. When facing his terminal illness, he and his loved ones took steps to conserve his exceptional piece of the Upper Valley landscape for coming generations. He passed away on April 1 after protecting over 700 acres.

“From UVLT’s earliest days, Dave Taplin was always a trusted partner and steward of the landscape we all love,” says President Jeanie McIntyre. “Without fanfare or fuss, his gentle, generous, neighborly way contributed so much for nature and people here.”

Dave’s partner, Courtney Dobyns, and her children, Rye and Travis Keller, were family to Taplin. The well-being of the environment and its inhabitants has always been central to their shared interests and they are pleased the land has been conserved forever.

“Conservation was of great importance to David,” says Dobyns. “It was a concept larger than just his own appreciation of the land. He gained his love of nature from his mother, stepmother, and father and carried on this legacy into his own life. His father put over 250 acres in Windham County into conservation and was the honorary chairman of the Environmental Defense Fund’s 21st Century Campaign. Dave learned the value of philanthropy and environmental conservation and became an early adopter of the concepts.”

“Dave valued the land for its habitat values and carefully stewarded its resources,” says Vice President for Conservation Peg Merrens. “Together with his passion for historic preservation, he made the Upper Valley a better place.”

Taplin’s civic-mindedness and generosity of spirit were recognized with the Strafford Lions 2024 Citizen of the Year award. He was a longtime trustee of both Vermont PBS and the Preservation Trust of Vermont and delighted in advancing his community as a volunteer, planner, and participant.

We are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Dave Taplin and his family through so many years, and The David Taplin Conservation Fund has been established so their example and leadership will live on and inspire others.



David Taplin and his family

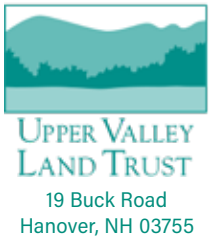
VITAL STATISTICS

- Over 700 acres ranked as a priority interior forest block by the state of Vermont
- Protects forestland with intact wildlife connectivity and abundant natural biodiversity
- Designated as highest conservation priority by the state of Vermont
- Includes multiple tributaries of the West Branch of the Ompompanoosuc River and has significant frontage on Abbott Brook tributaries
- Within four miles of Baker Sugarbush and Bradley UVLT-held easements and the Podunk Wildlife Management Area
- Provides access to a locally significant trail
- In an area prioritized by Strafford and Thetford conservation commissions
- Conservation easements donated in 1990 and 2026



David Taplin Conservation Fund

To honor Dave’s legacy of land conservation, a fund has been set up in Dave’s name to support and encourage the permanent protection of outstanding land and water resources in the towns of Strafford and Thetford. Donations to the David Taplin Conservation Fund may be directed to the Upper Valley Land Trust at 19 Buck Road, Hanover, NH 03755.

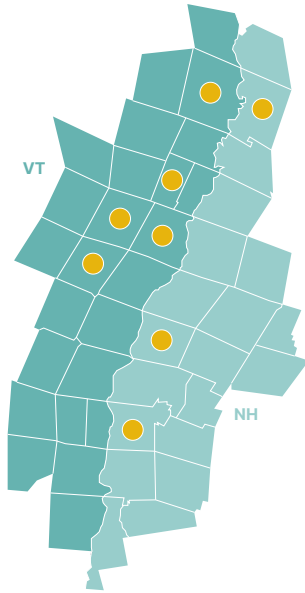


40
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UVLT serves 45 cities and towns including these mentioned in this issue.

- Cornish, NH
- Haverhill, NH
- Lebanon, NH
- Newbury, VT
- Sharon, VT
- Strafford, VT
- Thetford, VT
- West Fairlee, VT



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Upcoming EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE! 40 YEARS STRONG. ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

All are invited as we mark UVLT's four decades of service. We'll gather at the Ely Mountain Conservation Area in Thetford, VT, to dedicate a beautiful new pavilion, document local biodiversity, and enjoy family-friendly naturalist tours. Saturday, June 27 (rain date: Sunday, June 28). Visit uvlt.org for details.

VERMONT MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM

Upper Valley residents or workers (or New Hampshire or Vermont residents without a VMN chapter) are welcome to apply and join a close-knit team digging into our unique local natural and cultural history across the earth, life, and social sciences. You'll gain the skills to read our landscape like never before. The program features monthly field explorations from September 2026 through June 2027. Visit uvlt.org/vermont-master-naturalist-program for more information.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE THIS SUMMER ASSISTING CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Join like-minded volunteers with trail work, helping our food pantry gardens, Connecticut River campsites, and more! Email cassie.bernyk@uvlt.org to find the perfect fit for your interests and availability.



DON'T MISS OUT ON UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit our website for
more information and to
register today!

