The Newsletter of the Francestown Land Trust, Inc.

Fall 2026



Don't Break the Connection!

ALL LIVING THINGS require food, shelter, and water. Access to these is necessary, both for individual survival, as well as for the health of entire populations. "Habitat connectivity" helps ensure access, making large and connected tracts an important element of highly ranked wildlife habitat.

According to the United States Geological Survey, ecological resilience is the capacity of an ecosystem to absorb disturbances, reorganize, and adapt while maintaining its core structures, identity, and functions. Ecological connectivity can be defined as the unimpeded movement of species and the continuous flow of natural processes that sustain life across land, freshwater, and marine environments.

That's why one of the criteria the Francestown Land Trust considers when protecting land that has come up for sale or is offered to us as a donation, is the ways in which it connects to or expands other protected land.

Recently, the FLT has started using The Nature Conservancy's *Resilient and Connected Landscapes* maps as part of our project selection guidelines when evaluating whether a property meets our criteria for protecting it—either by acquiring it via fee ownership or securing a conservation easement on it. These maps help us mitigate the degradation of wildlife habitat through fragmentation by identifying resilient landscapes and seasonal and climate-related species migrations. They show 'climate corridors' that connect sites, often along riparian corridors or ridge lines. The maps also identify 'climate flow zones,' such as large, connected, forested tracts, which support less concentrated movement of species between landscapes. Resilient landscapes have high microclimate diversity, landscape diversity, and local connectedness.

Fragmentation happens

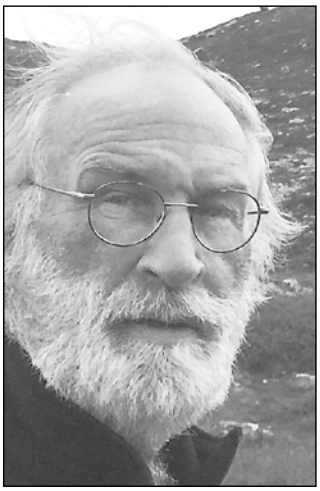
Habitat connectivity is compromised by fragmentation, which can be caused by roads, commercial and residential development, energy infrastructure, fencing, dams, and other disturbances that disrupt wildlife movement.

Climate change may also drive the movement of both plant and animal species into new geographic areas. But climate change is not the only reason species may need to migrate; food resources, reproduction, seasonal migration, and dispersal to new territory also drive movement. When these movements cross roads and highways, carnage ensues. In New Hampshire, there are more than 1,500 Wildlife Vehicle Collisions (WVCs) a year. At greatest risk are slow-moving species (reptiles and amphibians), species that depend upon high adult survivorship (Blanding's turtle), long-range dispersers (large cats, American martens), and species with scarce populations (timber rattler).

One way to increase connectivity is by protecting adjacent lands and creating continuous natural networks that that allow wildlife to move freely. This helps reduce isolation by creating larger protected areas and preventing further fragmentation. It

Don't Break the Connection! *Continued on page 4*

A Letter from the Chair



Fall 2026

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

One of the themes in this issue is "connectivity." Usually, as a land trust, we think of connectivity as the stitching together of tracts of land to create larger protected areas suitable for wildlife habitat and migration.

But while food, shelter, and water are the primary needs of all living beings, for humans I would add community to that list. In today's world, where things are increasingly connected, from the simplest appliances, to the largest networks *(Did you know that there are now toothbrushes that connect to the internet to rat you out for not brushing often or long enough?)*, the net effect seems to be less human-to-human connection.

We are fortunate to live in a town where community is valued and we are small enough that there is a sense of connection despite our differences. Whether it's sharing our resources with those less fortunate, supporting those that have lost loved ones, checking in on neighbors, patronizing local businesses, attending Town Meeting, or joining in the celebration of our town's heritage at the Annual Labor Day festivities, we feel that sense of working together towards a stronger community. We are a community defined not only by our geography, but by our connections.

The Francestown Land Trust (FLT) is committed to contributing to community and fostering connection. Along with *The Francestown News*, the Francestown Conservation Commission, and the George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library, we honor former librarian Joan Hanchett and celebrate our natural world twice a year with the *Joan Hanchett Nature Series*. We maintain trails on many of our properties. And through the *Exploring Our Trails* and *Lessons in the Woods* series, we offer educational and recreational activities for all ages and abilities.

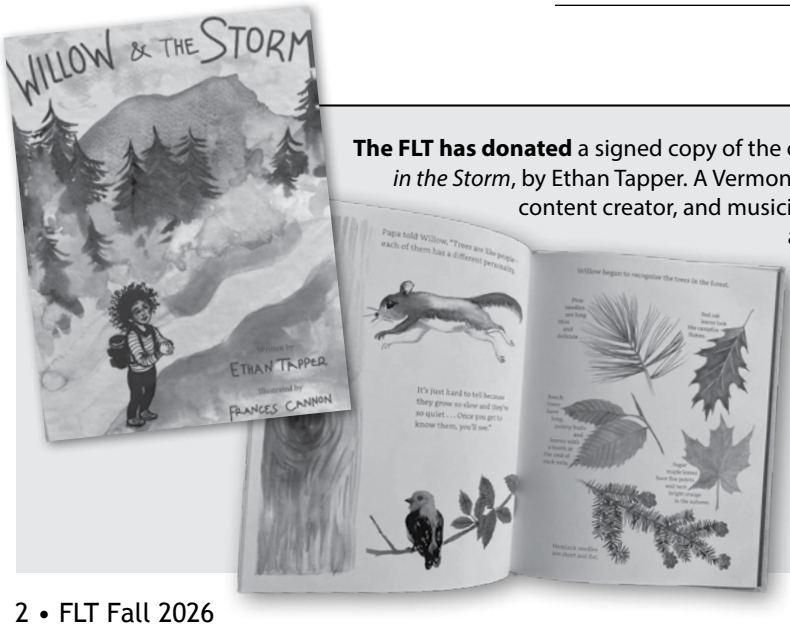
This year we are making a special effort to connect with our past. The FLT is celebrating its 40th birthday *(You'll find Part 2 of a brief retelling of our history in this issue)*. In addition to connecting with and remembering past directors, we entered a float in the Labor Day Parade, and are hosting a special appreciation dinner for our supporters.

Our primary mission, protecting land for future generations, ensures that our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy clean water, open space for hunting and recreation, and locally grown produce and farm-raised meat.

Like stopping to help a turtle across the road to lay her eggs *(Why is she always on the other side of the road?)*, it takes intention and effort to improve our connections in community and with our natural environment.

So, thank you for staying connected with the FLT! Your commitment and generous support makes what we do—together—possible.

Larry Ames, Chair
Francestown Land Trust



The FLT has donated a signed copy of the children's book, *Willow in the Storm*, by Ethan Tapper. A Vermont-based forester, author, content creator, and musician, Ethan also wrote the adult-based book, *How to Love a Forest*. In *Willow in the Storm*, Ethan uses the metaphor of a forest recovering from a windstorm to teach about ecology, resilience, regeneration, and the dynamic nature of life.

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Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation
Part 2: 2006–2016

In 2026, the FLT marks 40 years of helping to conserve special places for generations to come. From the vision of a small group of Francestown residents, the FLT has grown to protect 3,288 acres in and around our town.

Part 1, which appeared in the Spring newsletter, covered the period from the founding of the land trust in 1986 to 2006. In this issue, we cover 2006 to 2016.

20 Years and Counting

By 2006, two major FLT initiatives were well underway:

- The "2010 by 2010 Campaign" to conserve 2,010 acres by 2010, in partnership with the Francestown Conservation Commission (FCC), and the Piscataquog Watershed Association, now Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC)
- The "Headwaters Project" to protect three tributaries of the South Branch of the Piscataquog River, the Rand, Brennan, and Cold Brooks, in partnership with the FCC and conservation groups and private landowners from the towns of Greenfield and Lyndeborough

In 2007, Alice Benedict endowed a stewardship fund for $20,000 in honor of her parents, Ruth and Herb Benedict, who had been two of the signatories of the original FLC Articles of Agreement in 1986. This generous act helped put the FLT on the road to fiscal stability.

That same year, Joan Hanchett, the long-serving and much-beloved Francestown librarian died. In honor of her memory, the FLT joined with the G. H. Bixby Memorial Library, the FCC, and *The Francestown News* to sponsor a bi-annual series of nature talks, known affectionately as the Joan Hanchett Nature Series (JHNS). Recently, the JHNS has been expanded to include programs designed exclusively for children.

The goal of protecting headwaters led directly to a conservation easement (CE) for the 53-acre Rand Brook-South Branch Confluence Project completed in 2010. By 2010, FLT had acquired CEs on five other town properties, including Dinsmore Brook.

In its Fall 2010 issue, the FLT newsletter reported that the 2010 by 2010 goal had been achieved. The article broke down the accomplishment in this way:

> "… of the total acreage protected, 44% is in the Shattuck Pond to Dinsmore Brook Conservation Area; 25% in the Rand Brook Conservation Area; 16% abuts the Crotched Mountain Town Forest; 13% is in the Whiting Brook-Piscataquog River Corridor; and 2% lies elsewhere in town, mostly along the Piscataquog River. The campaign created three critical areas of habitat greater than 1,000 acres and a fourth nearing 1,000 acres.... (and new) conservation corridors between unfragmented blocks of open space within Francestown and in neighboring towns."

To commemorate this achievement, on November 6, 2010, the FLT joined with the FCC and the PLC in a day-long series of hikes, capped off with a buffet supper at the Francestown Town Hall.

Over the next year, an additional fifteen CEs were put in place, including those from the families of: Howe, Allen, Mellowes, Bromberg, Arnold, Taylor, Neilley, and Brewster and Elizabeth Ames.

By 2011, the FLT added five new fee projects that further expanded the Rand Brook Forest to 513 acres: Seamans, Turner, Lorden, Greenfield, and Priest. It also placed major CEs on the Jones property which includes the site of the Carson homestead, the first settlement in Francestown, and the Sanderson property, near the Deering town line, now a favorite destination for hikers.

25 Years and Counting

In 2011, the FLT celebrated its 25th anniversary with a party at a house and land on Woodward Hill Road that had been recently donated to the FLT. The house was subsequently sold, and the protected land is now known as the Rand Brook Floodplain.

Dennis Calcutt, who was the FLT Chair at the time, took the opportunity to reflect on the FLT's future:

> "As we move forward into the next 25 years, we look to strengthen our relationships, deepen our ties to the community, and further connect our protected areas in order to enhance the value of the open space we are protecting for wildlife and people alike. Wonderful relationships take time to build and nurture: The Francestown Land Trust's relationship with our town and community will continue to grow, as will all of our relationships with the land itself."

In 2012, the FLT completed one of its largest projects, the Avery Brook Watershed Project. The project included a CE on a historic riverside farm that had been in the Avery family since the 1870s, purchased from Avery grandson Rick Miller and family. A CE on an additional 75 acres of adjacent forestland was donated by Thorvald (Skip) and Peggy Tenney, resulting in a combined property including forests, wetlands, fields, and nearly all of the Avery Brook catchment area.

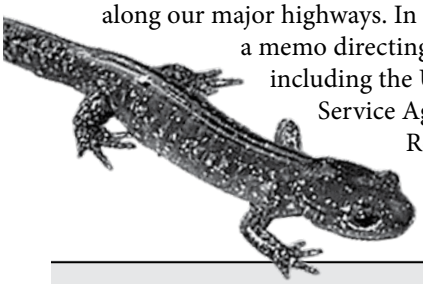
Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation *Continued on page 4*

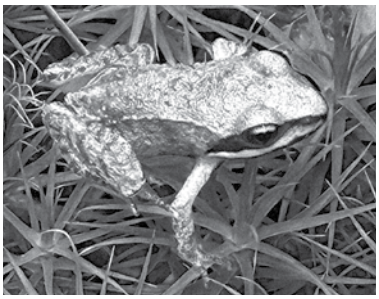
Don't Break the Connection! *Continued from page 1*

also aids in animal migration, which helps mediate the effects of climate change and boosts genetic health of wildlife populations by allowing free movement.

Ongoing effort

Some organizations have been addressing connectivity for decades, not only by piecing together wildlife corridors and creating large, protected tracts, but also in more specific ways. Locally, the FLT has improved access to turtle nesting sites for endangered turtle species. The State of NH bridge design specifications require a span that provides sufficient space for riparian corridors. Trout Unlimited has been funding dam removals on streams that support native trout populations. Modern technology has enabled tracing of tagged animals to better understand their migrations and aid in locating wildlife overpasses and tunnels along with funneling fences or walls along our major highways. In 2024, the USDA issued a memo directing government agencies, including the US Forest Service, Farm Service Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, to improve and conserve wildlife habitat connectivity. Where there isn't sufficient connectivity, local groups have organized. For example, human "crossing guards" usher Jefferson/Blue-Spotted salamanders and other amphibians safely across roads on the 'Big Night' of migration.





In July of this year, the NH State Legislature passed SB592, which requires municipal conservation commissions to include habitat strongholds and wildlife corridors in their official open space and natural resource inventories and research, and incorporates conservation considerations—specifically including habitat strongholds and wildlife corridors—into regional planning commission duties and coordinated land development plans.

According to The Nature Conservancy maps, most of Francestown and its surrounding towns is rated as "highly permeable," meaning there are few major barriers to animal movement.

The FLT is working hard to see that it stays that way.

Larry Ames

Celebrating Two Birthdays at Once

THIS YEAR'S Francestown's Labor Day Weekend Parade was the perfect place to celebrate two birthdays: The 40th anniversary of the FLT—and our Country's 250th birthday!

The FLT float delivered in style, with a three-tiered birthday cake decked out in two layers—a red, white, and blue layer for the USA, topped with a green and white layer for the FLT. As we rolled along the parade route, past and present FLT board members handed out brightly decorated cupcakes to people along the way.

Top it all off with a bluebird sky, and it was a parade to remember. The FLT float design team is already dreaming up next year's idea.

See you then!



Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation *Continued from page 3*

Other large easement projects included the Arnold Family CE in 2012 that expanded the footprint of protected land surrounding Shattuck Pond, and the Carey CE in 2013 that helps preserve the iconic view of the fields and the beautiful old dairy barn that marks the entrance to Francestown from New Boston.

On July 20, 2014, the FLT acquired 37.4 acres on Old County Road North. The Miller family, which had owned the land on Old County Road North for 129 years, sold the land to the FLT at well-below the fair market value to honor Dorothy and Herman (Bing) Miller. The Miller land includes 1,320 feet of Collins Brook and features vernal pools, floodplains, and wetlands. It is almost entirely surrounded by some 1,300 acres of protected land and is part of a 2,000+-acre, biologically diverse area recognized by the state for its excellent habitat.

Also in 2014, the FLT purchased 150 acres from the Schott family. Known as the Schott Brennan Falls Reserve, this biologically diverse property includes the headwaters of Brennan Brook and provides public access to the frequently visited waterfall.

Also in 2014, the FLT placed a CE on the 10-acre town property known as Journey's End Black Gum Swamp.

In 2016, a major fee project, the 68-acre Moulton Memorial Forest Project was completed. The property, including a house, was donated by Ted Moulton, the last surviving relative of Royal "Spike" Cleaves, a well-loved member of the community. Ted had enjoyed playing there with his cousin Spike as a child and felt that the donation was a way to give back to the community. The house was sold and the land is now permanent open space, accessible to the public.

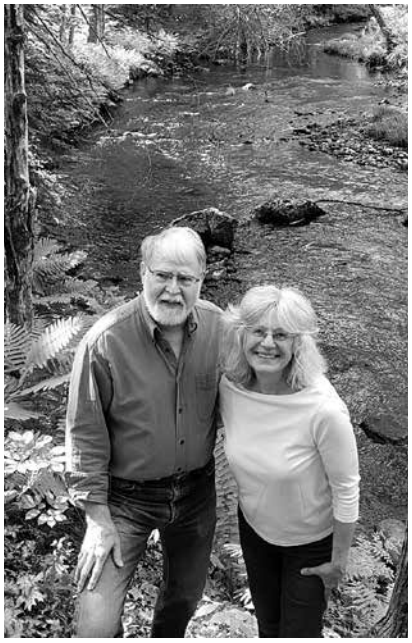
To be continued…

PART 3: 2017–PRESENT

will be covered in the Spring FLT Newsletter.

Ted Graham

Pitman Easement Donation Protects Watersheds



WHEN MARK AND SHIRLEY PITMAN heard that the FLT was fundraising for the purchase of a property in their neighborhood, they knew they wanted to help. By pledging to one day conserve their own property, they helped the FLT to obtain the grant funds needed to purchase an 8-acre property on the South Branch of the Piscataquog River.

Now, Mark and Shirley have fulfilled their commitment with the donation of conservation easements on each of their two lots along Woodward Hill Road.

The two easements permanently protect 33.8 acres of forestland that includes 670 feet of shoreline along the South Branch and 750 feet of shoreline along Brennan Brook. While the land is permanently conserved, the Pitmans retain ownership of the property, along with the ability to continue to do landscaping and forestry, and even the right to someday put a house on a specified part of the property away from the river and brook.

In their words, "We know we are lucky to own such a special property. Knowing that the land will stay that way is very satisfying."

Successes like this owe a great deal to generous donor organizations. Transaction funding for this project was provided by the Merrimack Conservation Partnership, a public/private effort for land conservation in the Merrimack River Watershed. To learn more, visit merrimackconservationpartnership.org

Thank you, Mark and Shirley!

Thank You, Anna Dingman!



ON THE RAINY evening of Thursday September 17th, Francestown Land Trust board members gathered informally at the Toll Booth Tavern to celebrate Anna Dingman, recipient of FLT's *Robin Haubrich Volunteer Award*. Anna brought her family, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed hanging out over drinks and "sticky fingers."

Initiated in 2024, the award recognizes outstanding FLT volunteers. As a thank you, the board presented Anna with a handsome cherry burl bowl, gifted by Francestown wood craftsman Jeff Tarr.

Anna is a talented graphic designer who has donated her time and brought her own sense of fun and creativity to FLT publications. (Remember the Thru-Hike "trail" running over pages of the Fall 2025 Newsletter?)

Anna picked up the reins from graphic designer Robin Haubrich three years ago. She does design, layout, and print production coordination for the FLT newsletter and Annual Fund Letter. She creates the posters for *Joan Hanchett Nature Series* events and the FLT Annual Meeting. She also graciously donates her time and magic to deliver eye-catching flyers that promote the *Exploring our Trails* and *Lessons in the Forest* programs that the FLT and Francestown Conservation Commission bring to our community. Anna's willingness to volunteer her time, talent, and expertise are greatly appreciated.

Thank you Anna!

Knight and Jordan Protect Rare Peatland

THE FRANCESTOWN LAND TRUST is grateful to Paul Knight and Kerry Jordan for their generosity in offering a bargain sale of a 17-acre portion of a 34-acre "Fen/Bog" peatland and its upland, located between the Candlewood and Kingsbury hills in the eastern section of Francestown. This land abuts more than 266 acres of protected land and includes more than 10 acres of Fen/Bog peatland.

Because of their love of wildlife and wild places, Paul and Kerry turned down a full-price offer from a developer who wanted to purchase their land.



Fen/Bog peatlands are rare in New Hampshire—and especially in southern New Hampshire. They are formed when plant growth exceeds the rate of decomposition over thousands of years, allowing layers of peat to accumulate. Bogs and fens are especially sensitive habitats that are home to rare plants and animals. They are extremely vulnerable to fragmentation, degradation, and displacement, as well as even minor changes in hydrology and water quality. Fertilizer and lime runoff, for example, dramatically change nutrient and pH levels in the peatland, making it less suitable for the distinct community of plants adapted to this acidic, low-nutrient habitat.

Upland buffers are important in protecting these wetland ecosystems from runoff from logging, agriculture, and residential development. Thanks to Paul and Kerry, this peatland and its adjacent upland are now protected from impacts like these that would compromise this sensitive habitat.

Thank you, Paul and Kerry!





New Kiosk Welcomes Hikers

AS THEY SAY, "It takes a village!" And, in the case of the design, shopping for materials, construction, and installation of the new kiosk at the Collins Brook Headwaters property, it took a "Team of Four!"

Collins Brook Headwaters is a 100-acre, FLT-owned property adjacent to Francestown's Dinsmore Brook Conservation Area, the FLT Miller Family Forest, and other conserved properties. It protects critical habitat and the headwaters of Collins Brook, which flows into the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River. The Collins Brook Headwaters trail is accessible for multi-season recreation via a woods road off of Wilson Hill Road. A short walk brings you to an active beaver pond, where a bench provides for comfortable viewing.

Following the example set by the teams erecting the kiosks at the FLT Rand Brook Forest and Miller Family Forest trailheads, four volunteers pooled their skillsets and built and installed the new kiosk at the Collins Brook Headwaters trailhead this past Spring.

David Gleason brought kiosk design and carpentry skills, as well as the use of his workshop to the project. Tim Coffin helped with building the kiosk and installation. Hannah Proctor provided kiosk board graphics and layout. Completing the team, "one-man band" Paul Knight brought his truck, trailer, tractor, post-hole digger, as well as the kiosk itself to the site, along with lots of installation know-how on the day it all came together. The entire project was one of shared enthusiasm, learning new skills, and a sense of satisfaction.

Check out the new kiosk, enjoy a short walk to the bench by the beaver pond … and sit a moment!

Learn more about the Collins Brook Headwaters property at francestownlandtrust.org/cbh-page

Please Join Us!

Enjoying Special Places Together

CONSERVING AND ENJOYING Special Places is an ongoing program sponsored by the Francestown Land Trust and Francestown Conservation Commission. Our goal is to encourage people of all ages and abilities to get outside and appreciate our community's rural character and quality of life.

With Fall well underway and Winter fast-approaching, we're already planning a Pop-Up Snowshoe Hike—and hope you'll join us!

Over this past year, we offered seven different ***Exploring our Trails*** hikes and ***Slow & Steady*** walks (designed for folks who prefer a less strenuous outing). Excursions included: visiting the waterfall in the FLT Schott Brennan Falls Reserve; a "Thru-hike" from the Shattuck Pond Town Forest to the Crotched Mountain Town Forest; treks to the Two Brooks trail in Lyndeborough, the FLT Collins Brook Headwaters, and Deering's High-Five trail; as well as a hike along a spur trail in the Shattuck Pond Town Forest.

Our educational series, ***Lessons in the Forest***, featured two terrific programs: a forest walk to a beaver pond with Matt Tarr from the UNH Extension; and a hike to the Draper Farm Town Forest with Brad Bull from the Francestown Improvement and Historical Society (FIHS), who shared some of the history of the farm and its cellar holes.

If you enjoyed our outings this year, are new to the trails, or would like some company on the trail, please come join us!



For more information about these programs, be on the lookout for flyers posted at the Francestown Post Office, Town Office, Kiosk, and Library—as well as notices in The Francestown News.

You can also sign up to get our Program Participant emails by contacting FLT at info@francestownlandtrust.org.



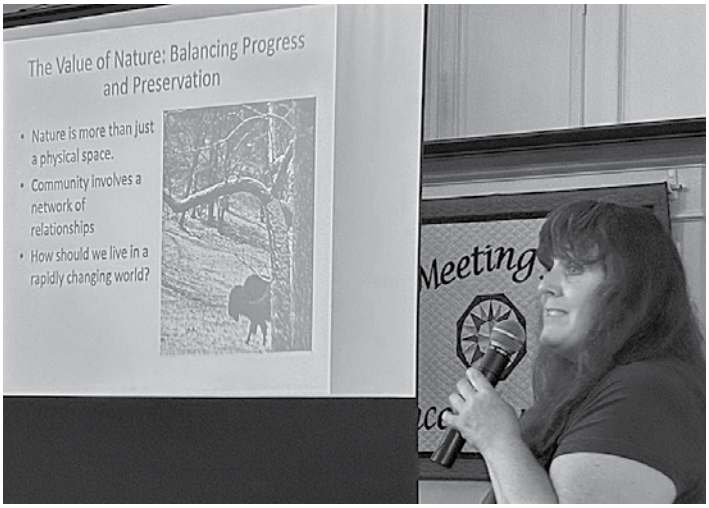
New Footbridge Over Brennan Brook

AFTER AGING GRACEFULLY for twelve years, and originally installed by a team of seven volunteers in 2014, the wooden footbridge over Brennan Brook on the Schott Brennan Falls Reserve Trail finally needed replacing.

A new aluminum footbridge was recently installed by the FLT crew of Tim Coffin, Dennis Rodier, and Ben Haubrich.

The 149-acre Schott Brennan Falls Reserve is located a short walk down Bullard Road, off of Campbell Hill Road, and is a favorite hike for those heading to the waterfall at the end of the trail.

2026 Annual FLT Meeting
The Place We Call Home



THE ANNUAL MEETING of the Francestown Land Trust took place on June 11, 2026, with 46 members attending. The evening began with a social reception, followed by a brief business meeting, including the enthusiastic re-election of four board members, each for another three-year term.

The meeting's keynote speaker, Maria Sanders, an Emerita Professor in Philosophy at Plymouth State University and author of the book *Mind the Gap: Exploring Happiness as a Community*, provided a thought-provoking slide presentation on *The Place We Call Home: Ethics, Nature, and the Future of Human Life*.

In a talk encompassing everything from AI to insights from people and places visited on a recent road trip across the country, Maria discussed the relationship of ethics, nature, and the future of human life. Stressing the interconnectedness of all living systems, she argued that since humans are not separate from the environment, but deeply embedded within it, our moral responsibilities extend to ecosystems and future generations.

Maria introduced the Ancient Greek concept of *eudaimonia*, a framework for living a full and flourishing life that encompasses personal growth, meaning, and purpose. She then contrasted two different approaches to life. *Anthropocentrism* places humans at the center of moral consideration, with nature valued primarily for its usefulness to humans, such as providing resources, recreation, or economic growth. Conversely, *Ecocentrism* places the entire ecological system at the center, asserting that whole ecosystems, all species, and even non-living elements have intrinsic value, simply because they are part of the Earth—regardless of whether they are useful to humans.

Maria suggested that achieving eudaimonia calls for a shift in perspective, seeing humans as responsible participants in nature rather than dominators. She encouraged a more sustainable, ethical approach to progress that respects ecological boundaries while supporting human well-being.

After a lively Q&A, audience members continued to socialize, making it an enjoyable evening for all.

40 YEARS STRONG

SEVENTY MEMBERS OF the Francestown Land Trust came together at the Town Hall to celebrate the milestone of 40 years of conservation.

The joy of the evening was palpable. Amidst an atmosphere of congeniality, friends and neighbors enjoyed delicious foods, including a celebratory cake, while catching up with each other. Many shared stories of the beauty of our town and the importance of conserving key parcels of land.





FLT Chair Larry Ames welcomed and thanked all the past and present donors, volunteers, and boards for making and keeping the FLT a strong and viable organization across four decades. He also moderated a conversation with Greg Neilley and Scot Heath, both of whom were early board members during the 80s and 90s and have remained continuously involved. The two touched on some of the highlights of the organization's history, which Ted Graham, FLT historian, has recently documented. *(See page 3 for "Part 2" of this history).*

The discussion began with a description of the small group of forward-thinking residents, who, back in 1986, understood the importance of protecting the natural rivers and land. This group succeeded in creating a groundswell of support for conservation and introduced a warrant at Town Meeting to establish a $10,000(!) fund for conservation. The warrant passed with a vote of 100 to 21.

Another significant event took place in May 1999 when the land trust completed its first property acquisition, a 227-acre parcel, which today is part of the Rand Brook Forest. The seller, Donald H. Hardwick, offered a $235,000 mortgage to purchase the property, which the trust paid off in one year.

Today, the FLT protects 3,288 acres that are stewarded by members in perpetuity. The desire among members to retain our rural surroundings, protect our beautiful waterways, preserve wildlife corridors, and provide opportunities for hiking, biking, snowshoeing, skiing, hunting, and fishing—right outside our own backdoors—remains strong.

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UPCOMING EVENT

