



The Newsletter of the Francestown Land Trust, Inc.

Spring 2026

Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation

Part 1: 1986–2005

In 2026, the Francestown Land Trust (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 3,205 acres in and around our town. And, with your support, the work continues.

In Part 1, we take a look back, the early history of the FLT, from its founding in 1986 to 2005 and the start of the “2010 by 2010” Campaign and Headwaters Project. Part 2, from 2006 to the present, will appear in the Fall newsletter.

The full history is available on our website at francestownlandtrust.org

THE FOUNDING: Francestown Land Conservation

The FLT was originally incorporated as “Francestown Land Conservation (FLC)” on December 1, 1986. Its stated purpose was simple and enduring: “To help preserve Francestown’s natural land areas for future generations and provide conservation opportunities for town residents.” The articles of incorporation were signed by Francestown residents: Scot Heath, Ruth Benedict, Herbert Benedict, Ellen Arnold, and Francestown-born native Constance Stuart Varnum. Their vision would shape the conservation landscape of the town for decades to come.

FLC met for the first time on January 11, 1987, at the home of John and Ellen Arnold. Scot Heath was elected Chair. Six other Directors were voted in: Fred Harrigan, Brenda Parker, Constance Varnum, Paul Lawrence, and David Connard. They voted to formally organize a non-profit organization and adopted by-laws.

FLC met again on April 9, 1987, at Fred Harrigan’s home, with Ellen Arnold, Connard,

Harrigan, Heath, Lawrence, Parker, and Varnum attending. The group decided that its conservation priority would be given to river frontage, lake areas, and the south side of Crotched Mountain.

Francestown resident Harriett Cope, who had already placed large parcels of her land under easement through other conservation organizations, provided a good model for moving forward. Connie Varnum described her as a “One-Woman Land Trust.”

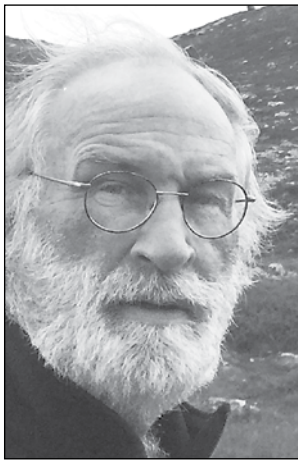
One concern was that FLC work with, but not become confused with, the Francestown Conservation Commission (FCC). Both Connie Varnum and Scot Heath were also members of the FCC at the time. The next Board of Directors included Harriett Cope, Scot Heath, Dick Cilley, David Harper, Jennifer Byington, and Bob Lindgren.

The organization’s first conservation easement protected part of the Lord Farm. The then-owners of the Lord Farm, Fred and Lillian Harrigan, had



Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation Continued on page 4

A Letter from the Chair



Spring 2026

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As the earth gradually wakes up around us, we begin to relax a bit. Now that we've made it through another New England Winter, it's a good time to reflect—not just on that seasonal accomplishment, but also on the last four decades, as 2026 is the year that the Francestown Land Trust celebrates its 40th anniversary.

Board member Ted Graham has spent time in our (not always so organized) 40 years of archives to assemble a brief history. You'll find Part 1 of this history included in this newsletter—with Part 2 coming in our Fall newsletter—and the whole history available on our francestownlandtrust.org website.

It's gratifying to see just how far we have come since our humble beginnings in 1986. We now protect more than 3,200 acres of land in Francestown and surrounding towns, with the help of the Francestown Conservation Commission (FCC) and other conservation organizations, grantors, generous land owners, and loyal donors.

Over the years, while our mission remains focused on protecting special places, our work has expanded to include outreach programs, such as the Joan Hanchett Nature Series (JHNS), Lessons in the Forest, and Exploring Our Trails. We also sponsor Full Moon snowshoe hikes, community suppers, pop-up events, and other programs—not only to build relationships in the community, but to strengthen our community's relationship to the land.

We invite you to join us in these various programs—and will be keeping you posted on upcoming events related to our 40th anniversary.

Please do join us on June 11th, when we hold our Annual Meeting. In addition to a short business meeting, we will be welcoming Maria Sanders, professor of philosophy at Plymouth State University. She will talk about the connectivity of all living things and their natural environments—and share pragmatic ways to address current challenges through the generative power of nature.

Longer days, warming temperatures, and bare ground may ease our minds, but they also serve to remind us of work yet to be done. I'm pleased to report that we have some exciting projects in the pipeline, including important tracts containing peatlands, river frontage, and upland wildlife habitat. Stay tuned!

Accompanying this newsletter, please find our Spring Membership Drive envelope. Our annual membership fee is \$25, confers voting rights for two adults per household, and gets you a special place on our mailing list.

Receipts from this membership drive help cover most of our annual operating and legal costs, which, as an all-volunteer organization, we do our best to keep at a minimum.

In addition, we're always looking for volunteers willing to help us with outreach, event hosting, and the ongoing stewardship of our holdings. Let us know if you'd like to get involved, by sending us an email at info@francestownlandtrust.org.

As the seasons seem to speed by ever more quickly with each passing year, it will seem like no time at all before we are celebrating our 50th anniversary!

Who knows what might we accomplish together in the next ten years?

Larry Ames, Chair
Francestown Land Trust

Did You Know?

IN NEW HAMPSHIRE ALONE, land trusts currently protect 1,285,373 acres of land. Our Francestown Land Trust is focused on protecting sensitive lands in Francestown and surrounding environs, and currently protects 3,205 acres. FLT is one of 34 land trusts that focus on a specific region in New Hampshire. In addition, there are ten land trusts whose focus is more statewide, operating within specific watersheds, towns, or regions, such as the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, New England Forestry Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy. Together, these local and regional conservation organizations play a key role in protecting land across the state.

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To be notified of upcoming events, contact FLT at info@francestownlandtrust.org to be added to the email list.

Please Join Us!

Creating Stewards Year After Year: New Hampshire Coverts Project Training Workshop

THE THIRTY-SECOND annual New Hampshire Coverts Project Training Workshop is taking place this May at the Barbara C. Harris Conference Center in Greenfield, NH. The workshop has long played a critical role in local land conservation. At the 2025 workshop, for example, seven of the 23 participants were from the greater Monadnock area towns of Franconstown, Peterborough, Hancock, Sharon, Deering, Jaffrey, and Rindge.

Sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension and New Hampshire Fish & Game, the program trains volunteers to become stewards of wildlife and forest resources in their communities. The word “covert” (pronounced “cover” with a “t”) describes a thicket that provides shelter for wildlife.



The 3½-day workshop includes time in both the classroom and in the field, where participants learn about wildlife habitat, forest ecology, conservation, stewardship, and effective outreach. Attendees may come from wide variety of backgrounds—landowners, conservation commission members, educators, artists, nurses, firefighters, and land trust members—but all Coverts volunteers, or “Coverters” share a common interest in land stewardship and wildlife conservation.

After attending, participants agree to volunteer at least 40 hours in the following year by hosting property tours, joining

CONSERVING AND ENJOYING our Special Places is part of our long-term plan to protect our community’s rural character and quality of life. With the coming of Spring, we’re hoping you’ll come along as the FLT and Franconstown Conservation Commission (FCC) “join hands” to lead these programs to explore our Special Places!

Exploring Our Trails: If you enjoyed our hikes last year—or are new to the trails and would like company during your rambling—come join us out on the trails. Plans to-date include: a hike to the waterfall in the FLT Schott Brennan Falls Reserve; a long “Thru-Hike” on multiple trails from the Shattuck Pond Town Forest to Crooked Mountain Town Forest; and a morning dedicated to a series of short hikes.

Lessons in the Forest: This educational series will include: A Forest Walk to a Beaver Pond with Matt Tarr from the UNH Extension, and a trip through time among the old cellar holes in the Draper Farm Town Forest with Brad Bull, from the Franconstown Improvement & Historical Society (FIHS).

For more information about dates, times, and places, be on the lookout for flyers posted at the Franconstown Post Office, Town Offices, Kiosk, and Library, as well as notices in *The Franconstown News*. Or simply sign up to get our Program Participant emails sent to your inbox by contacting Hannah Proctor (hproctor@gmail.com or 603-325-5124).



Please Join Us!

Abigail Arnold Legacy Society

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING the Abigail Arnold Legacy Society with a planned gift or bequest to the Franconstown Land Trust. The Society honors the memory of Abigail Arnold (1944–2022) and the many ways she helped to preserve special places in Franconstown.

Launched less than a year ago, the Society is off to a wonderful start thanks to generosity of several founding members and others in the greater Franconstown community.

By including the FLT in your estate planning, you help the organization continue its mission of protecting open space for years to come.

For more information, please visit our website at francetownlandtrust.org

Or: Email us at info@francetownlandtrust.org

Or: Call Greg Neilley at 603-547-2856

conservation commissions, writing articles, or organizing community conservation projects to share their knowledge and inspire others.

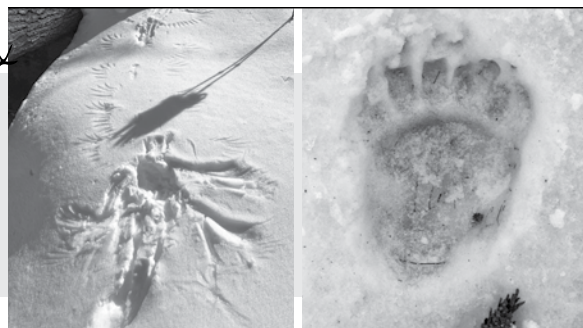
Seventeen Franconstown “Coverters” have completed the program since 2002, including the following actively serving on the Franconstown Land Trust Board: Betsy Hardwick, Ben Haubrich, Larry Ames, Greg Neilley, Ted Graham, Tim Coffin, and Hannah Proctor—and those actively serving on the Franconstown Conservation Commission: Betsy Hardwick, Robin Haubrich and Elizabeth Hunter Lavallee.

Almost 500 trained Coverts volunteers from all over New Hampshire educate the public on how sound forest management and conservation practices can enhance wildlife habitat. If you would like more information, e-mail Haley Andreozzi at haley.andreozzi@unh.edu, or visit the project website at www.nhcoverts.org.

Hannah Proctor

Winter Tracks

A WINTER SEASON of bountiful snow captured lots of activity in the forest. See if you can identify what animals left their tracks behind. You'll find answers on the bottom of page 7.



already expressed interest in working with the Conservation Commission to protect the farm, but didn't want to move forward unless the two abutting lots, still owned by Lord heirs, were protected as well. The FCC approached the heirs and eventually they agreed to sell the lots at what their approximate value would be if subject to a Conservation Easement (CE). Unfortunately, the Board of Selectmen at the time declined to let the FCC accept the CE. But with the help of Meade Cadot at the Harris Center for Conservation Education, that organization agreed to protect the property with a CE. The Harris Center then transferred the easement to FLC in February 1989.

THE REAWAKENING: Francestown Land Trust

After successfully protecting the Lord Farm property and another in Whiting Meadows, the organization entered a period of dormancy. However, as the 1990s brought new development pressures, community interest in and enthusiasm for land conservation grew in the town.

In September 1998, the FLC reconvened. In attendance were Connie Varnum, David Connard, David Harper, Pat Nelson, Scot Heath, Harriett Cope, Jennifer Byington, Dick Cilley, Greg Neilley, Bob Lindgren, Sirkka Holm, and Dodie Finlayson, who was also Chair of the FCC at the time.

Several of these early members donated easements: Finlayson easement on Todd Road; Cilley easement on Poor Farm Road; Neilley easement on Old County Road South; and Heath easement on Dennison Pond Road. There is also a Varnum easement on Todd Road, held by the FCC.

Around this time, local artist Carol Sanchioni designed the iconic deer logo that has been used ever since by the FLT on newsletters, stationery, hats, and boundary markers.

On March 30, 1999, the board held a special meeting to address the possible purchase of a 227-acre parcel owned by Donny Hardwick. He had offered to sell it to FLC for \$235,000, less than offers he had received. The board unanimously approved signing a purchase and sales agreement and began fundraising. A letter to potential donors from Chair Jennifer Byington said, in part:

"The people of Francestown have been afforded an extraordinary opportunity! ... But we need your help. Imagine 227 acres of fields and forests, small streams traversing grassland, then plunging down hillside woods to join Rand Brook on its journey to the Piscataquog River. The Hardwicks are offering it to us at a very fair price with generous terms: half the principal down by April 30, 1999, and one year to raise the rest. The good news is that we have already raised half the amount we need by April 30th. But we need your help to raise another \$50,000. And we must do it in the next two weeks."

Thanks to the generosity of Francestown residents and grant support, the fundraising succeeded. The mortgage to Hardwick was discharged on April 26, 2000. Days later, FLC celebrated with a picnic on site. In October 2001, an easement deed was granted to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF). This tract is the first property the land trust owned in fee. It is the foundation of what today is the Rand Brook Forest. Its acquisition marked FLC's transition from a fledgling organization to a confident land trust capable of complex transactions and community-wide campaigns.

At the same time, the board wrestled with organizational and administrative issues common to all-volunteer, non-profits, such as quorum requirements, easement stewardship, the need for baseline data, tax return requirements, and confirming status as a nonprofit organization. Membership dues were set at \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a family and the organization gained a reliable base of donors. Committees were set up to address grants and easement research, education, maps, communications, and fundraising. Mike Greenberg volunteered to develop an FLC website.

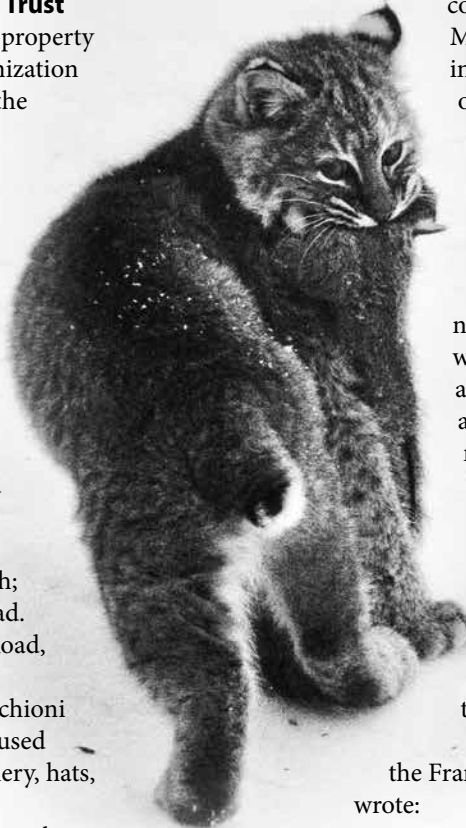
In 1999, FLC began publishing a regular newsletter to keep members informed and which today provides an archive of land trust activities. From time to time, members, in addition to board members, have contributed nature-oriented articles of interest to the membership. For example, Meredith Allen wrote a lovely article entitled "The Pond" that appeared in the Spring 2013 issue. (Back issues of most of the newsletter are available on the FLT website. We would be grateful if anyone could share a copy of Issue #1 and/or a few other missing early newsletters for the archives.)

In 2004, FLC officially changed its name to the Francestown Land Trust. Then-Chair Greg Neilley wrote:

"This organization that sat dormant until 1998, now finds itself steward of 316 acres of open land and six parcels totaling 134 acres protected by easement, thanks largely to the tireless work of our past Chair, Jennifer Byington. It is clear that we are no longer a fledgling organization."

Also in 2004, the FLT announced a major new initiative: **"2010 by 2010."** The campaign was inspired by a challenge issued by SPNHF to every community in New Hampshire: to conserve at least 25% of its land to help create a statewide network of parks, trails, recreation land, forests, farmlands, and other open space.

In Francestown, 25% of the town's 30.7 square miles works out to about 4,900 acres, which was considered by some an unrealistic goal. However, with this challenge in mind, the FLT, FCC, and the Piscataquog Watershed Association, now the Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC), agreed to work together



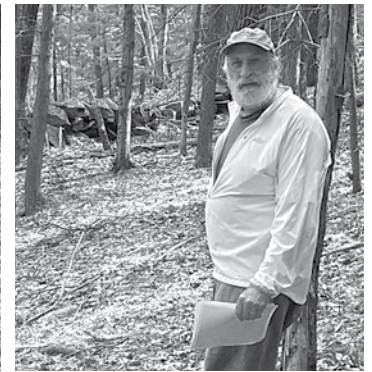
Welcome to the Ames Family Forest

IN MAY OF LAST YEAR, Rob and Larry Ames generously donated 75 acres of their family land on Poor Farm Road to the FLT. After inheriting the land, Rob and Larry decided that they would like to honor their father's vision by conserving the area as undeveloped open space for wildlife and sustainable forestry. The land will also be open to the public for low-impact recreational uses.

"We are pleased to know that the land will be cared for by the FLT so that future generations can enjoy the land as much as we have," said Larry after closing on the property.

The Ames Family Forest is located within a large block of forestland important for wide-ranging species, including black bear, bobcat, and fisher. It is directly adjacent to a 61-acre parcel of already conserved land in this ecologically significant area. The property provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, including fox, deer, snowshoe hare, porcupine, squirrel, and other small prey species, as well as pileated woodpecker, turkey, grouse, and many different songbirds. This donation will not only serve to protect this important forestland; it will also protect approximately 700 feet of scenic frontage on Poor Farm Road.

Transaction funding for the project, such as closing costs and



Rob and Larry Ames (left to right) honor their father's vision by donating the Ames Family Forest.

legal fees, was provided in part by the Merrimack Conservation Partnership (merrimackconservationpartnership.org), a public/private effort for land conservation in the Merrimack River Watershed.

The FLT is pleased to be able to facilitate the protection of this valuable conservation land and is grateful for the generosity of Rob and Larry Ames.

Betsy Hardwick

Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation *Continued from page 4*

to save an additional 2,010 acres by 2010—which worked out to roughly an acre a day! Despite the naysayers, the campaign succeeded.

By 2005, the FLT owned three properties totaling 302 acres and had stewardship responsibilities on six properties with easements, totaling another 213 acres. The 2-acre Peterson tract was donated by Emma M. Peterson in 2001 in memory of her brother, Lt. (JG) Carl W. Peterson, Pilot, US Navy, who was killed in action in 1942. A commemorative plaque is on a rock along the South Branch of the Piscataquog River at the site. The Normandin fee project added 77 acres to Rand Brook Forest, and the Cilley and Finlayson easements were acquired.

The Spring 2005 FLT newsletter reported on another important initiative, the **Headwaters Project**, which even today continues to define FLT conservation priorities and helps to secure grant support:

"An exciting and ambitious tri-town project to protect three tributaries of South Branch of the Piscataquog River – the Rand, Brennan, and Cold Brooks – in Frankestown, Greenfield and Lyndeborough... this project brings FLT together with six other conservation groups and numerous private landowners to preserve water quality and wildlife habitat... These three brooks drain 13,000 acres and connect over a dozen large, unfragmented areas, which create a still-wild corridor from Greenfield and Bennington to New Boston."

To be continued...

PART 2: 2006 - TODAY

...in the Fall 2026 Newsletter

...or at francestownlandtrust.org



Ted Graham

Snow Moon Hike

EACH WINTER the Frankestown Conservation Commission and the Frankestown Land Trust jointly host a community-wide moonlight snowshoe hike.

This year, on the last Saturday of January and just one evening shy of the full Snow Moon, some thirty hardy souls gathered at the Coffins' West End Farm on Farrington Road to brave the frigid temps and set off through the deep snow. The hike crossed a snow-covered field glowing in the brilliant moonlight and then snaked along a winding forest trail out to the town forest and the Joslin trail. Circling back to Farrington Road via Bullard Hill Road, the intrepid snowshoers returned to the farmhouse to warm up around the fire and enjoy the generous variety of potluck refreshments.

Come join us! The Conservation Commission and Land Trust host events throughout the year, and we'd love to see you there. It's a wonderful opportunity to connect with your neighbors, explore the outdoors, and discover the beautiful network of protected lands and trails that are open for everyone to enjoy. Whether you're a longtime resident or new to the area, there's something for everyone—so come on out and be part of the community!

Visit the francestownnh.org or francestownlandtrust.org websites for more information on trails and upcoming events.



THE JOAN HANCHETT NATURE SERIES (JHNS) is a free program for adults and children of all ages. It is sponsored by the Francestown Land Trust, George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library, *The Francestown News*, and the Francestown Conservation Commission.

Fall 2025 JHNS presentation: **Resurgence of Bald Eagles in New Hampshire**

IN NOVEMBER, an audience of seventy-four enjoyed a terrific JHNS presentation by Chris Martin, senior raptor biologist for NH Audubon. Chris spoke in detail about the dramatic recovery of eagles in New Hampshire and described the management efforts and partnerships that have helped them.

Nesting pairs of the Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, all but disappeared from the New Hampshire landscape between 1950–1987. After the banning of DDT (on the last day of 1972), no eagles were sighted in the state until 1988, when one pair established themselves along the Connecticut River. From 1988 to 1997, they were the only documented nesting pair in NH. But

then the number of eagles steadily began to grow. After another twenty years, in 2017, the population of bald eagles had grown to the point that they could be removed from the state’s threatened and endangered species list—and by 2025, 128 territorial pairs with 94 active nests were documented in NH.

To illustrate his information-packed lecture, Chris showed slides of amazing up-close photographs of eagles. We learned about the life cycle of eagles (they

can live more than 20 years); how their appearance changes as they mature (their head turns white); which of the pair is the larger (the female), why they select the nesting locations they do (where fishing is good); and how to tell a Bald Eagle from a Golden Eagle (that white head helps!).

He also outlined the management approaches that are currently being taken to protect, track, and document eagles in our state. In close collaboration with NH Fish & Game, Chris recruits, trains, and supervises an enthusiastic corps of NH Audubon volunteer field observers who monitor eagles (and other raptors) all across the state. He encouraged the audience to be on the lookout for and report breeding pairs in and around Francestown, where he suspects they may be under-counted.



Spring 2026 JHNS Presentation: **Silent Sparks – The Wondrous World of Fireflies**

ON FRIDAY April 10th, an audience of seventy-five was treated to an engaging presentation by Sara Lewis, biologist and professor emerita at Tufts University and co-chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) International Firefly Specialist Group.

You may already know that fireflies, often called lightning bugs, are neither

flies nor bugs, but are in fact beetles, with one pair of wings and a second pair of wings hardened into a hard covering over their soft body. Their amazing bioluminescence is created by enzyme activity.

However, as Sara quickly pointed out, “if you think that if you’ve seen one firefly, you’ve seen them all,” you should know that there are more than 2,600 different firefly species worldwide, with 125 species in the U.S., and 15 species in New England.

Fossils show that fireflies existed nine million years ago. Some fireflies over-winter on tree bark, others in soil, with their egg-to-larvae-to-pupae period taking one to two years. Adults live only about two weeks, during which the male firefly performs a species-specific pattern of flying and flashing. Females tend to “lay low” and, if interested, will flash back.

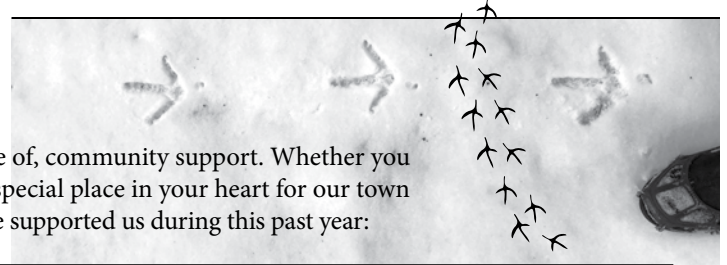
Habitat loss and light and chemical pollution negatively impact fireflies and Sara suggested creating a firefly-friendly landscape by leaving the leaf litter, providing moist soil, reducing pesticide use, and encouraging neighbors to “turn off their lights!”

Sara is also the author of the book *Silent Sparks: The Wondrous World of Fireflies* and has generously donated a signed copy of her book to the George Holmes Bixby Memorial Library.



Thank you to all our supporters!

The Francestown Land Trust is dependent upon, and deeply appreciative of, community support. Whether you are a Francestown resident, a neighbor in the region, or you just have a special place in your heart for our town and its wild places, we would like to express our gratitude to all who have supported us during this past year:



Anonymous (10)	Catherine & Richard Eby	Gary Leighton	George Sanderson & Tracy Zimmerman Szanto
Beverly Abbott	Jim & Deb Farrow	Bob & Linda Lindgren	Joanne Santospago & Jim Tovey
Robert Abbott	Ruediger Flik	Mark & Joni Lohr	Larry Savage ***
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Anna Jo Dingman		Christopher and Deborah Rogers	
Marsha Dixon			

* In Honor of Bob & Linda Lindgren

** In Honor of Ben Haubrich

*** In Memory of Diane L. Savage



CONTINUING A "LASAGNA LEGACY"

that stretches back many years, board members from the Francestown Land Trust served dinner to more than 70 people at the Francestown Community Supper in February. Guests enjoyed a selection of five(!) delicious varieties of lasagna—along with a choice of salads, bread, fruit, and scrumptious desserts.



WINTER TRACKS ANSWERS: PAGE 3: from left, Owl, photo by Larry Ames and Bear, photo by Barry Wicklow | PAGE 6: Opposum, photo by Barry Wicklow | PAGE 7: Turkey, photo by Hannah Proctor | PAGE 8: Porcupine, photo by Barry Wicklow

OTHER PHOTO CREDITS: PAGES 1 & 4: by Barry Wicklow | PAGES 3, 5, 6 & 7: by Hannah Proctor



**FRANCESTOWN
LAND TRUST**

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**FRANCESTOWN
LAND TRUST**

2026 ANNUAL FLT MEETING

Thursday, June 11, 2026 • 6:30 PM

Old Meeting House, Francestown

THE FRANCESTOWN LAND TRUST will hold its Annual Meeting on Thursday, June 11, 2026 at the Old Meeting House in Francestown. Please join us for refreshments and conversation at 6:00 PM, a brief business meeting, including a report to members and election of directors starting at 6:30 PM, and a fascinating presentation on ethics, nature and the future of human life.

The slate of candidates for board of directors, as recommended by the board for voting, are as follows: Betsy Hardwick, Barry Wicklow, Hannah Proctor, and Tim Coffin.

This year's featured speaker will be Maria Sanders, an Emerita Professor in Philosophy at Plymouth State University and author of the book *Mind the Gap: Exploring Happiness as a Community*. Her presentation, *The Place We Call Home: Ethics, Nature, and the Future of Human Life*, looks at the interconnectedness of all living systems. She argues that since humans are not separate from the environment, but deeply embedded within it, our moral responsibilities extend to ecosystems and future generations.

