



Bobcat crossing a beaver dam on conserved land in the Hilltowns.

# Hilltown Land Trust Strategic Plan

2024-28



# Introduction and Context

Topics such as climate change, diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and social justice have grown in importance in the world and our community. It is clear that the work of all conservation organizations, even small ones like Hilltown Land Trust, must become more relevant for a wider spectrum of stakeholders and meet the moment that climate change demands. As a result, Hilltown Land Trust took a more inclusive approach to creating a new strategic plan in 2023 than we had in previous planning efforts. We must also acknowledge that we are not the original inhabitants of these lands, and that we have much to learn from, reform, and repair in our relationships with the land and its Indigenous peoples.

In this strategic planning process we sought out input from community members bringing new voices and perspectives beyond the typical inner circle of HLT.

We began the process with a public survey and series of conversations with people familiar with HLT as well as people offering new perspectives and considerations. More than 200 people offered feedback about HLT's past work and future priorities, and helped shape the next phase of our process. We also interviewed eight community thought leaders who brought a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and lived experiences to our conversations. Diversity among this group was a primary goal.

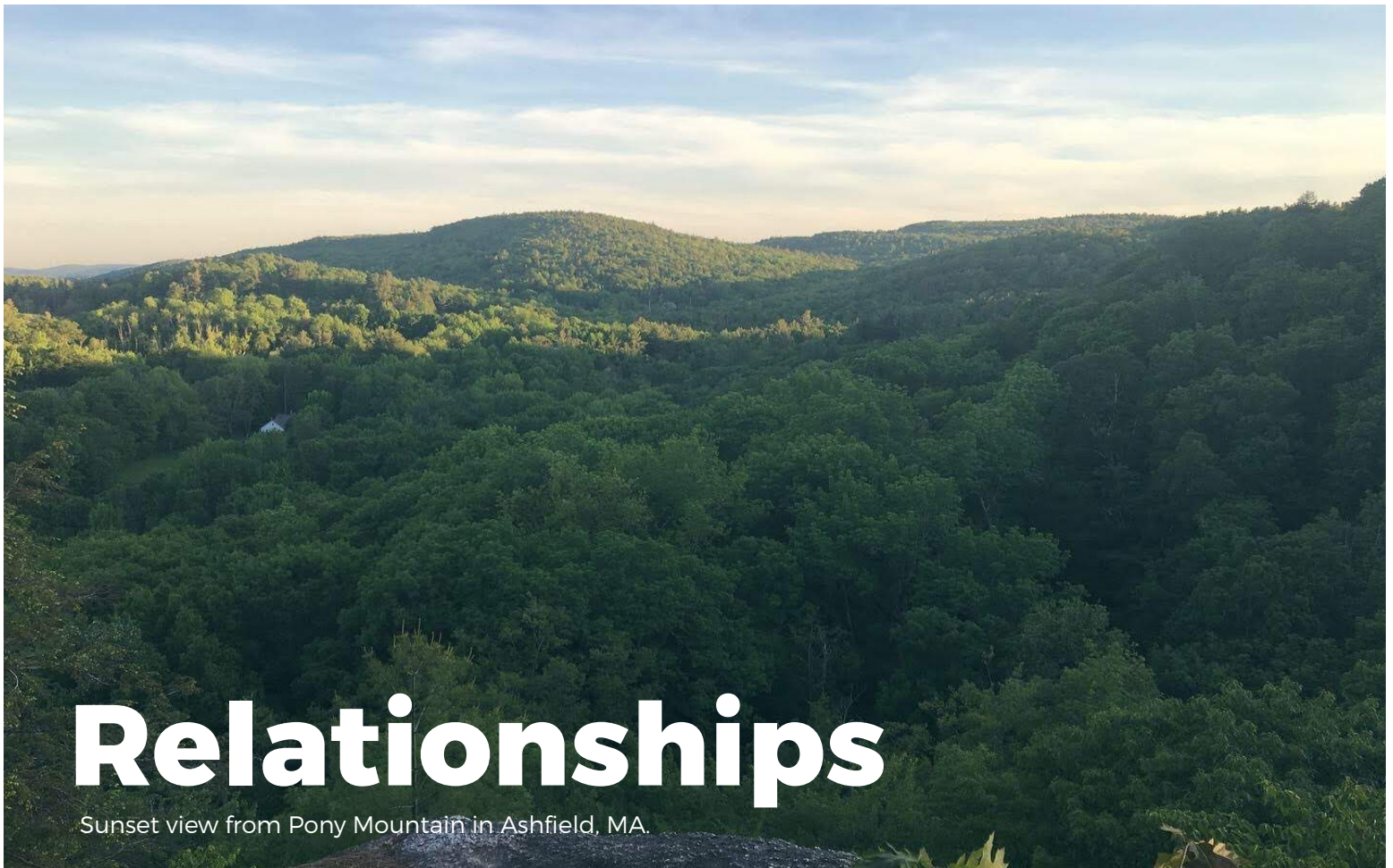
HLT's board, staff, and TerraCorps members crafted the resulting strategic plan during two day-long retreats. The first retreat also included four community members bringing broader diversity of background and expertise to our group. These outside advisors shared our passion for land and conservation issues and included people from other conservation organizations, academics, persons with physical challenges, people of color and a citizen of the Hassanamisso Band of Nipmuc. That group gave us candid and valuable advice on revising and updating our Mission and Vision statements.

At our second retreat, the Board and staff compiled, clarified and winnowed all the input into a number of major goals, with several objectives to support the achievement of those goals.



Red-backed salamander.

***Note:** This is a living document! We are currently working to refine the language, and will continue to update the plan to reflect our needs and work.*



# Relationships

Sunset view from Pony Mountain in Ashfield, MA.

A cross-cutting theme emerged that every goal and most objectives required building new **RELATIONSHIPS** with individuals, partner organizations and communities, or deepening and enriching the **RELATIONSHIPS** we have today.

Other components of this Plan that we want to emphasize include:

Consistency with HLT's mission, vision, and values is intended in all goals and objectives.

The Plan includes big words such as partnership, wildlands, and priority landscapes and we are committed to thinking deeply about what we mean by these terms in our annual action items.

We extensively discussed the use of terms "landowners" vs. "land stewards", in light of HLT's commitment to fostering a stewardship ethic in which we care for and are in relationship with land rather than owning or controlling it - a lesson we are learning from our Indigenous partners who have been in relationship with the land in this region for over 12,000 years.

This Plan is a multi-year document. We will articulate HOW our objectives will be met through action items in annual work plans.

This plan is ambitious - but we are not doing it all on our own. Partners will be key, and leveraging our **RELATIONSHIPS** are essential to amplify and accomplish everything contained in this plan.



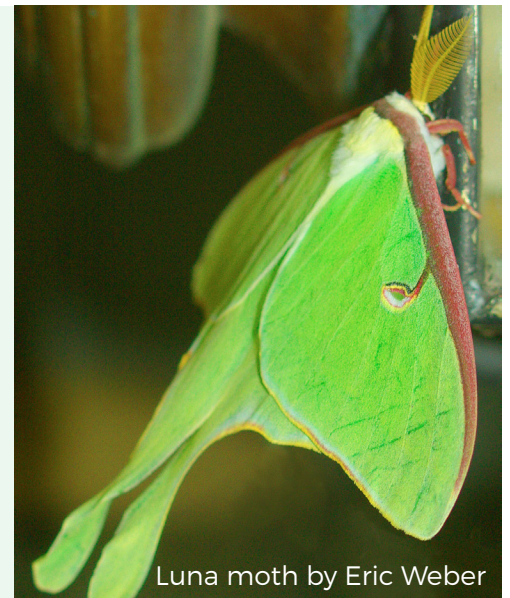
Chester, MA by Eric Weber

## Mission

Hilltown Land Trust conserves and stewards land through strong relationships to ensure clean water, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, recreational opportunities, and healthy farmland for the benefit of all.

## Vision

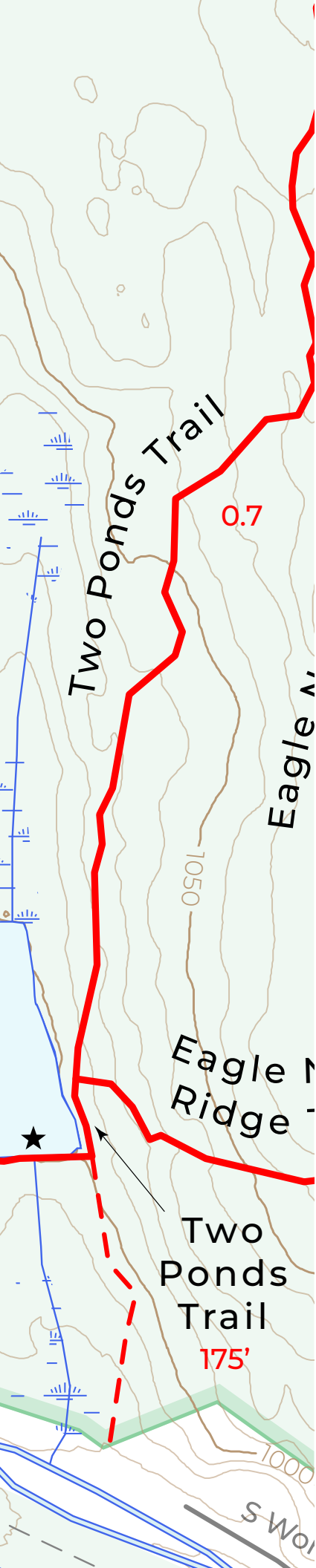
The Hilltowns are a place where abundant conserved, well-stewarded, and accessible land supports ecologically, socially, and economically vibrant communities for all.



Luna moth by Eric Weber

Bluebead lily (*Clintonia borealis*)





# Values

## Community

The benefits of conserving land stretch beyond just our geographic service area. Our HLT community includes partners, donors, visitors, volunteers, and supporters from many places and walks of life. By welcoming and embracing diverse opinions and identities, our Hilltown Land Trust community and the land we care for will have greater impact both within our service area and beyond.

## Sustainability

We believe that the health of the land, fauna and flora, air and water, people and communities, require care over the long term. Our mission and actions must be anchored in the truths of the past, the realities of today, and be focused on long range outcomes.

## Collaboration

We seek to build lasting partnerships through listening and sustained engagement. We pool our resources with others to advance shared goals. By leveraging our collective strengths and expertise, we accomplish more than we would on our own.

## Accountability

We understand that honesty and transparency are essential to earning the trust of our donors, members, volunteers, partners, and the communities we serve. Additionally, as a land conservation organization, we hold ourselves accountable to telling a complete history of the land we conserve and steward.

## Belonging

All people benefit from the preservation of the natural world and have a right to be heard and included in issues that affect their lives and those of future generations. We seek to reduce historical and systemic (present-day) barriers to accessing our natural world.

## Climate Change

We believe that climate change presents real dangers to our world and action to address it is essential. Conservation and stewardship play a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of climate disruption.

# 2024 - 2028 Goals & Objectives



UMass Amherst student volunteers at the Stevens Property.

**Increase the pace of land conservation, with a focus on proactive project identification.**

## Objectives:

- Work with partners to do more and bigger land conservation projects and do them at an increased pace.
- Ensure project selection processes reflect current priorities.
- Develop and implement an outreach strategy in priority landscapes.

**Protect and enhance the conservation value of lands in our care.**

## Objectives:

- Increase HLT's capacity for proactive stewardship of lands in our care.
- Ensure all lands in our care have feasible stewardship plans.
- Articulate the role that land stewardship plays in mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Establish a vision and process for designating some HLT land as "wildlands".
- Strengthen relationships with title holders of land covered by HLT Conservation Restrictions.
- Identify and advance opportunities for landscape-scale land stewardship.



Volunteer Graham and former-staff-turned-volunteer Katie, enchanted by moss.



Blue cohosh requires moist, rich soils.

## Ensure that our outreach focuses on building, nurturing, and sustaining relationships.

### Objectives:

- Complete a community relations and communications assessment and plan.
- Develop and foster strong relationships with community partners, including the towns and other conservation organizations in our service area.
- Develop, foster and deepen relationships with Indigenous partners.
- Seek innovative partnerships that align land conservation with other community priorities such as affordable housing and agriculture.
- Develop, foster and deepen relationships with people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, disabled people, sports & recreation groups, hunters, farmers, low-income residents, renters, youth, and others not already engaged with HLT.
- Enhance education and outreach activities to better advance strategic goals.

## Increase and optimize HLT's organizational capacity.

### Objectives:

- Develop a long-range strategic fundraising plan.
- Recruit, retain, diversify and support a staff and Board sufficient to achieve HLT's goals.
- Structure and optimize volunteer management systems.
- Use, manage and ensure adherence to effective data management systems.



HLT won an award for our 2023 entry in the Ashfield Film Fest, "Spring on a Hilltown Wildlife Highway."