



**Hilltown  
Land Trust**  
AN AFFILIATE OF THE TRUSTEES

NEWS  
**Fall/Winter  
2024**

CONSERVING AND STEWARDING  
**LAND THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL**  
IN THE HILLTOWNS SINCE 1986



# Making magic in his lifetime

**What's on  
HLT's wildlife  
cameras?**

**Meet our full  
staff**

# Ecologist Accelerates Conservation of 130 Acres in Chesterfield



*Elms College students have studied salamanders in Doug's woods.*

Retired Siena College ecology professor Doug Fraser changed his mind about willing his 130 Chesterfield acres to Hilltown Land Trust. Now, he wants to donate the land to HLT within his lifetime.

Neighbors and friends already enjoy the miles of trails, interpretive signage, and varied habitats that make this place so special. It's Doug's

dream for the land to educate and inspire future generations of environmental stewards through visits from local colleges and public access.

One group of 28 students from Elms College in Chicopee recently visited Doug's woods to collect data on red-backed salamanders, a species he's studied and published work on for years. He reflected, "I always feel it's important to get kids engaged in doing something rather than me just lecturing to them. What came out of that day astonished me, because I realized some of the students had never been in the woods before."

College students aren't the only young people visiting the trails, which are also a popular spot for local seniors to walk with their grandchildren. Special touches, like a seat for wood fairies in the crook of a tree, are designed to capture young imaginations and build an early sense of connection with the forest.

Educational signs dot the trails, connecting visitors with the forest's real magic: its ecological richness. Doug has spotted bobcat, bear, coyote, and fox activity, but he's attuned to life underground as well. His continued study of red-backed salamanders will help science and the public understand the impacts of changes like beech leaf disease and invasive jumping worms, both of which affect the soil-based food web that salamanders and other forest life depend on.

Hilltown Land Trust hopes to close on the project by 2026, and to open access to the public soon after. The new timeline means that Doug's wealth of stewardship knowledge will serve as a resource both before and after the project closes. "I'd like to know that it's in good hands and that everything went through smoothly," Doug said of his decision.

Doug hopes to see the land continue to support education, and for it to keep regenerating after experiencing the impacts of more recent logging plus clear-cutting for sheep farming over a century ago.

"This land was completely cut over, totally exploited" he said. "I feel good about giving it to the land trust, so the exploitation can end. The ecosystem is putting itself back together again."



*Red-backed salamander*

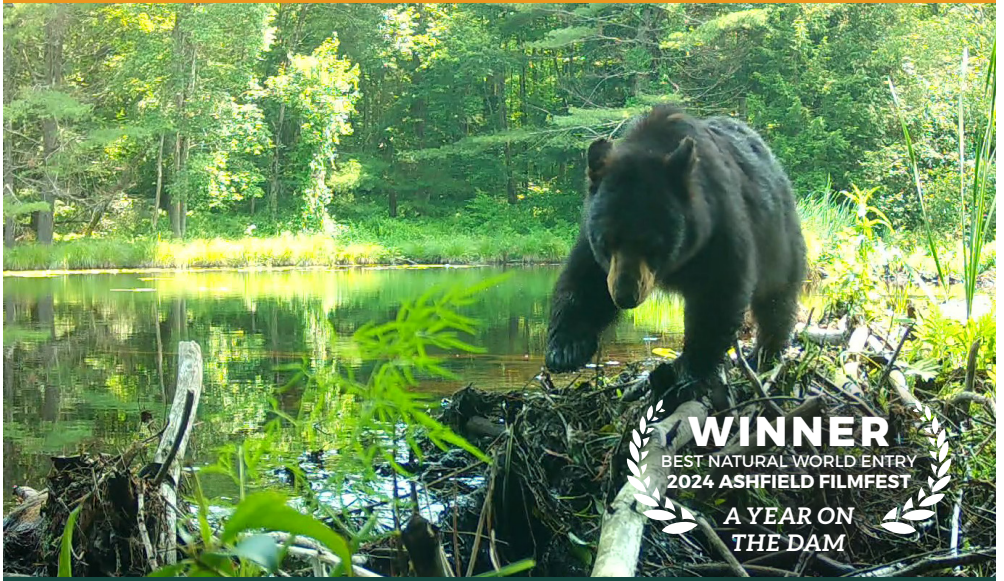
**"I feel good about giving it to the land trust. The ecosystem is putting itself back together again."**

*- Doug Fraser*



▶ To read more about Doug's vision, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw2024newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw2024newsletter)





A black bear crossing a beaver dam on HLT conserved land.

## Trail Cams: A Window on Wildlife

By Mariel Hohmann

If you've dropped by HLT's social media pages lately, you've probably seen videos of all sorts of animals walking across your screen. For the last few years, we've been hiding wildlife cameras all over the Hilltown landscape, trying to catch glimpses of the critters that call these lands home.

Wildlife cameras give us a window into the worlds that emerge when we are not there to watch.

Every time we see footage of a beaver placing a branch just-so in its dam, a porcupine waddling back into its rocky den, or a moose snacking on the tender leaves abundant through an early-successional forest, we are reminded of why we must preserve corridors of travel and nurture varied habitats.

**Wildlife cameras give us a window into the worlds that emerge when we are not there to watch.**



Mariel installs a trail cam.



A Year on the Dam, our wildlife cam short film, is a hit!



See our short film! ↘

We caught these porcupines play fighting.



Mariel trained HLT's Smith College summer intern Maggie Brisbois in camera maintenance.



▶ See more wildlife photos and videos and read more about HLT's wildlife camera program: scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw24newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw24newsletter)

# All Together Now

## Welcome, Sara Muller-Ravett!

Join us in welcoming Sara Muller-Ravett to our staff! As HLT's Development Manager, Sara brings her experience in nonprofit operations and advocacy, as well as grants and program management, as she works to build community support for land conservation in the Hilltowns.

With Sara's arrival, HLT has a full staff of five, plus our TerraCorps service member. HLT added Sara's Development Manager position to support the land trust's efforts to increase capacity for land conservation.

Now that we're all together, the HLT crew recently visited Doug Fraser in Chesterfield to hike the land he plans to donate to us. The group said walking with Doug was "a balm for the soul" - especially when we got to search for salamanders together at his research plots! We're all excited to contribute to the work of conserving and caring for the Hilltowns as a unified team.



L-R: Alli, Sarah W, Sally, Sara M-R, Mariel, & Jess.



## Welcome back, Mariel!

Our intrepid Land Stewardship Coordinator Mariel Hohmann just returned for her second year of TerraCorps service with HLT.

"I'm excited to get back into the woods with our volunteers, partners, and conservation restriction caretakers," said Mariel. "I'm in a constant state of learning, both through observation and through conversation with the people who know these lands so well, each in their own way."

To read the full version of this and other articles, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw24newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw24newsletter)



## Challenge Grant Update: \$320k of \$420k Goal Raised for the Land!

Last fall, HLT secured a major challenge grant to help us double our pace of conserving land in the Hilltowns. We need to raise \$100k more to unlock the full amount of this transformative grant.

To learn more or to give, visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/donate](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/donate), contact [sally@hilltownlandtrust.org](mailto:sally@hilltownlandtrust.org) (413) 628-4485 x 2, or send us a check with the memo line "Conservation Capacity Campaign."



# We moved to conserved land - and now we give back, too.

By Conan Deady, HLT Donor & Conservation Restriction Landowner

**W**e purchased our home in Chesterfield after 30 years away from the Valley. Our house is situated on 230 acres of fields, woods, and swampland, and when we first moved in, we were a bit intimidated by the size of the property and the responsibilities that came with it.

A portion of the land was already under a conservation restriction with Hilltown Land Trust. After learning more about the mission of HLT, we became supporters because we believe that the most

**"An important goal for us is to maintain the land for the benefit of all of its non-human creatures, all of whom have a right to enjoy the land."**

valuable resource of the Hilltowns is the natural environment. Preservation of that resource for its human and non-human residents, as well as visitors, seemed to be a very worthy goal.

Since our early days on the land, we have gotten more comfortable, and we are particularly enjoying cohabitating with the local wildlife. In addition to the many deer we see on almost a daily basis, moose have strolled through our yard, choruses of coyotes have serenaded us in the early evening, and a pair of sandhill cranes has decided to call our house home. We have set up a trail camera by the swamp that has filmed these neighbors, as well as bobcats, raccoons, mink, beavers, porcupines, and assorted others.

Land conservation in the Hilltowns has many benefits, but an important goal for us is to maintain the land for the benefit of all of its non-human creatures, all of whom have a right to enjoy the land. I'm grateful that we can partner with Hilltown Land Trust to preserve a place here in the Hilltowns where they can continue to live as they were meant to live.



Conan Deady and  
Cynthia Berliner



Bobcat from Conan and  
Cynthia's trail camera

## Members like Conan and Cynthia help ensure all creatures can thrive in the Hilltowns.

You too can show your love for this interconnected ecosystem with a gift to Hilltown Land Trust. Become a member today by scanning the QR code, or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/donate](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/donate)



## Hilltown Land Trust Board of Directors

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PHOTO BY GRAHAM OXMAN

**It's a 5k...  
and so much more.**

## **The Gorge après Gorge turns 20!** **Sun, Dec. 1, 9:30 & 10:30 am**

**I**t's the best of the Hilltowns' autumn splendor: a walk or run along the stunning Chesterfield Gorge with handmade hat prizes, a potluck, and our all-are-welcome community spirit, now going on 20 years. Come down to the Gorge and celebrate!



**▶ To learn more and register, scan the QR code or visit:  
[hilltownlandtrust.org/gorge-apres-gorge](http://hilltownlandtrust.org/gorge-apres-gorge)**

**Have you visited one of our trails recently?**  
We want to hear your trail tales! [ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org](mailto:ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org)

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