



The Nature
Conservancy



NATURE'S TALKING. WE'RE LISTENING.

CONNECTICUT ANNUAL REPORT 2023

State Director's Letter



Dear Friends:

Nature communicates with us in many ways—in the glow of fireflies in the summer, in the crunch of leaves in the fall. In wind and waterfalls, in blossoms and birdsong. And from our very first days on this Earth, we learn how to listen to this language without words; to use our bodies, our instincts and our senses to tune into the cues nature provides.

Often, when nature speaks to us, it's a signal that change is coming . . . that a new season is on the horizon. As a child, I learned that spring had arrived when I could hear the hum of bumblebees searching for wildflowers. As spring gave way to summer, nature spoke to me in the sweetness of raspberries picked directly from the bush. In autumn, a cool breeze on my face meant it was time to take our wool sweaters out of the closet. And I remember watching anxiously out my bedroom window for the first snowflakes to fall and signal the start of winter.

Right now, nature is speaking to us again as more change comes our way. But this time, the language is different, and the message is far more urgent. The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut is witnessing events that, until recently, were not imaginable. From the catastrophic flooding that brought destruction to towns and cities right here in northwest Connecticut and Vermont, to the devastating Canadian wildfires that darkened our Connecticut skies, to the Maui wildfires that happened far across the country in the Pacific Ocean. Each of these events had an irreversible impact on both nature and human life. And in each, what we hear is not an invitation—it is a desperate cry for help, as we are confronted with the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

The question we must ask ourselves is: How will we respond?

Thanks to the tremendous support from each and every one of you, and our partners here in Connecticut and far beyond our borders, I am proud to say we're finding ways to answer nature's call. In the following pages, you'll read about how we're working on climate mitigation and adaptation solutions, while also creating safe havens—in oceans, on lands and in rivers and streams—for the thousands of species threatened by biodiversity loss. We are also leading new accessibility efforts that recognize the many different ways people connect with nature, and honoring those differences with new programming, visitor amenities and partnerships.

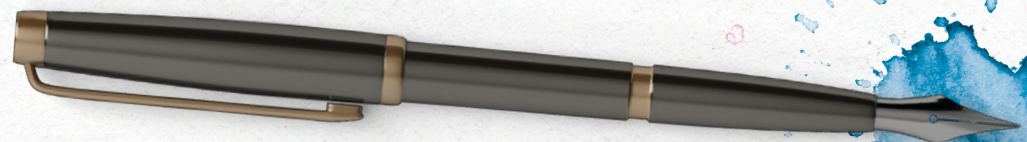
Each of these efforts is a response to nature; in each, we say: "We hear you. We are listening. Help is on the way." And each of these projects is possible because of you.

As nature signals to us that it's time for a new chapter—one that is asking us to be bolder and braver than we've ever been before—we respond with a promise to nature and ourselves, not just with our words, but with our actions, to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Yours in nature,

Dr. Frogard Ryan

State Director and Interim Northeast Division Director



Letter from the Global Managing Director for Nature Protection

Dear Connecticut Friends:

As Global Managing Director of The Nature Conservancy's "Protect Nature" strategies, I hear Nature's voice all over the world. Nature is talking to us and telling us that now is the time to step up, go bigger and be bolder than ever before.

I know you in Connecticut are hearing the same thing.

The theme of this Annual Report—"Nature's Talking. We're Listening."—is timely and poignant. It's what The Nature Conservancy has always done. If we listen closely, her message is unmistakable: We have to be bold in this pivotal decade.

Nature's voice comes to us most clearly through the weather: record-breaking heat, devastating wildfires and unprecedented incidences of droughts, flooding and storms. Her voice comes to us through the evermore-silent forests as we've lost more than 3 billion birds the last 50 years. Her call for action is in the scarcity of freshwater affecting biodiversity and people in far too many places. And her voice is heard in communities from Kenya to Mongolia to southern Alabama where I grew up and Connecticut where you live, telling us, "Do something, now, before it's too late."

At The Nature Conservancy, we are listening and believe there is hope. We are laser-focused on outcomes that will combat the biodiversity and climate crises—two existential challenges that are inextricably linked. Whether working in Indonesia to protect forests threatened by logging, delivering new and fully financed marine protections in the Caribbean, or advocating for policies to deploy offshore wind energy in Connecticut, our collaborative work, with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, uses some of the most innovative and at-scale tools ever—such as Nature Bonds and Project Finance for Permanence. We are making a difference. And we are doing this as One Conservancy, not bound by state or country lines, working towards one set of goals for this decade.

We will continue to listen to nature and accelerate bold action.

You are listening and I am, too.

We can only do this work because people like you, our Connecticut supporters, are advocating, donating and volunteering to protect the lands and waters we depend on for survival. Thank you.

In partnership with nature and you,

Dr. Jeffrey Parrish

Global Managing Director for Nature Protection





Nature speaks, warning us with record-high temperatures, melting ice caps and glaciers, horrific forest fires, devastating flooding, and the destructive fury of multiple hurricanes and typhoons. TNC listens and takes action to confront the causes and mitigate the consequences of climate change. We must all engage in this most demanding and critical conservation issue of our time.

- Allen Rosenshine, TNC in CT Former Board Chair and Current Marketing Counsel

CONSERVING THE LANDS AND WATERS ON WHICH ALL LIFE DEPENDS

Listening Through Science

Just as nature can speak to us in thousands of different ways, there are just as many ways to listen. It can mean sitting quietly in a park, waiting to hear what passing warbler might be singing in a tree nearby. It can mean spending time in your garden and sinking your hands into the earth. It can mean taking a child outside to search for animal tracks in the snow. At The Nature Conservancy here in Connecticut and around the world, we use science to listen to nature. Through carefully collected data, we observe how plants, wildlife and habitats are changing. And increasingly, we are using social science to better understand—and change—human behavior.

In this way, The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut has been listening to nature for decades. Recently, we're hearing something new: nature speaking in the urgent sound of alarm bells. Our logbooks show 100-year records being shattered in the form of unprecedented rainfalls, high temperatures, wildfires, high tides, ocean temperatures and melting sea ice. Our databases reveal populations of insects, migratory birds and other wildlife disappearing.

Without any words, nature is talking to us—screaming at us—to take bold action. And because each and every one of us is a part of nature, not separate from it, we must listen carefully and respond accordingly.

One of the most effective ways we can do this is to give a voice to nature, to use what we've learned through science to speak up and speak out on behalf of the plants, wildlife and places we love, who have no words of their own. This year, as you'll see on the adjacent map, that's what we did across Connecticut. And we asked you, our supporters, to not only listen to nature but also to heed its call to invest in its—and our—future.



2023 AT A GLANCE:

We protected more than 345 acres of critical forest habitat in the Berkshire Wildlife Linkage in Northwest Connecticut—an important section of the Northern Appalachians—one of four global focal places that have been prioritized by The Nature Conservancy. Read more on page 8.

We led guided hikes and installed a new digital kiosk at Lucius Ordway Pond/Devil's Den Preserve, making the visitor experience more safe, more accessible, and more informed. Read more on page 11.

In collaboration with Connecticut Public Broadcasting Network, we assembled a blue-ribbon, diverse panel of conservation experts—including oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle—that was featured in The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut's signature event, Nature Talks, in March 2023.

We completed GIS mapping for "The Flow Project in Bridgeport," a partnership designed to replace impervious surfaces with bioretention in our most developed areas. Read more on page 6.

We worked with partners and volunteers to install reef balls in strategic locations along the Thames River from New London to Norwich. This ecological engineering stabilizes shorelines, provides nursery habitat for aquatic life, and protects waterfront infrastructure. Read more on page 7.

What You Can Do

- Volunteer with TNC in CT
- Switch to and support green energy
- Use public transit or ride a bicycle
- Plant native plants in your yard or on your balcony
- Participate in community science projects
- Write a letter to an elected official or local publication
- Invest in conservation through your continued support of The Nature Conservancy globally and locally and our partners



TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

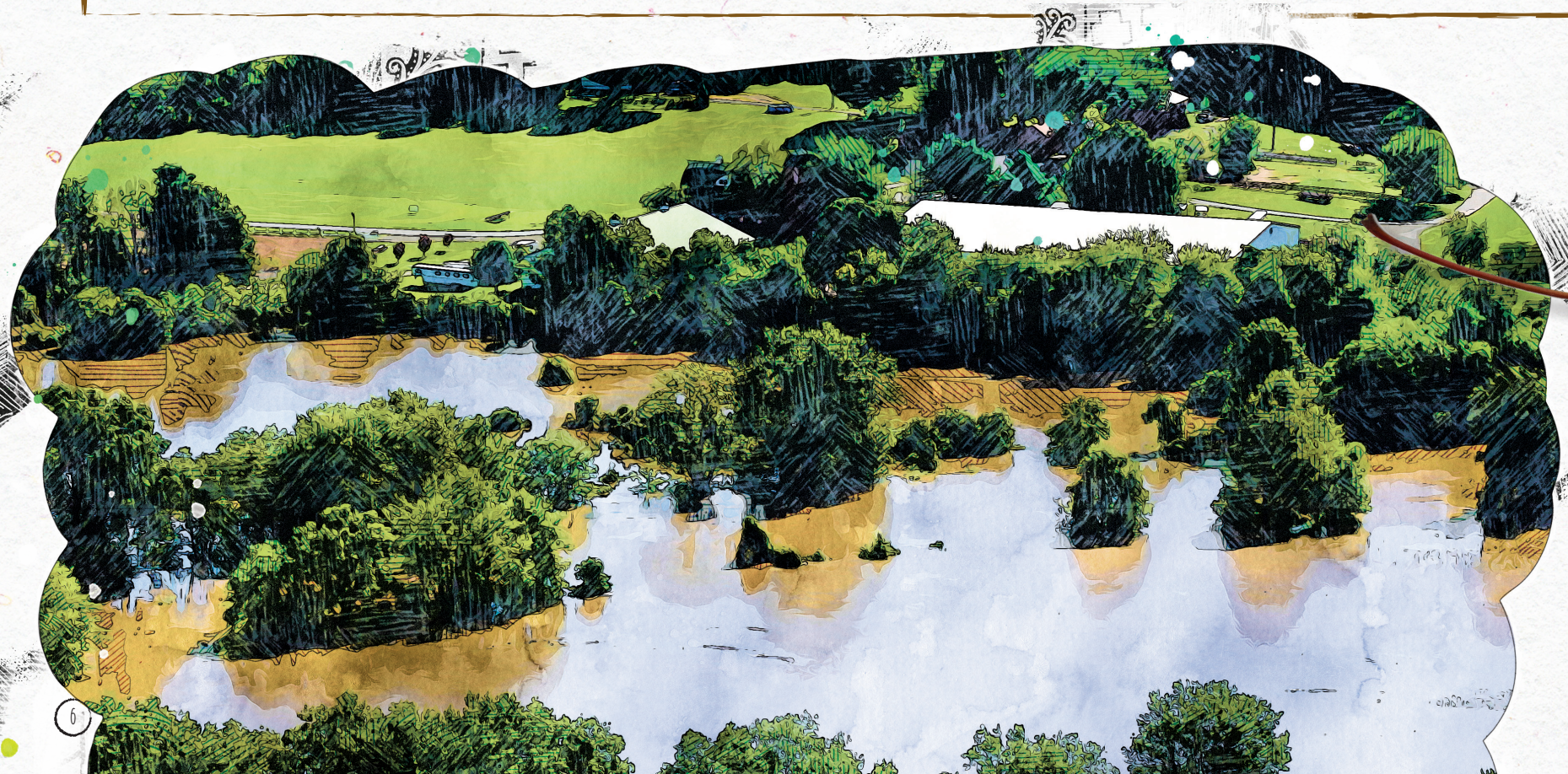
Finding the Flow in Bridgeport

On a hot summer day, a sudden thunderstorm darkens the sky. Thunder booms, lightning flashes and torrents of rain pour onto streets, parking lots, alleys and rooftops. With nowhere to go, the rain floods the gutters, drains and sewers designed to hold it, until it eventually begins to overwhelm the system, resulting in sewer backups, damaged homes and businesses or worse.

We've seen this kind of intense rain event happen here in Connecticut, in New England and around the world. And as the climate changes, even more are on the horizon.

But imagine a scenario where those hard, impervious surfaces are replaced with rain gardens, wetlands and other natural infrastructure to store and filter the stormwater. To allow it to trickle slowly down into the soil, removing impurities along the way, so that it is clean, clear and ready to begin its journey all over again.

This is the goal of The Flow Project. Together with numerous partner organizations, TNC is looking to add green space to urban areas across Connecticut to soak up stormwater, improve water quality and provide other benefits to communities. Currently, TNC and partner organizations are focusing on bringing bioswales—carefully designed gardens nestled among sidewalks and parking lots—to the West Side and West End of Bridgeport.



"A bioswale abuts sidewalks and guides water off the street in order to collect runoff, soak it into the ground and filter out pollution, while simultaneously diverting this overflow from the sewer system," says Drew Goldsman, Urban Conservation Director in Connecticut. "But they have additional benefits, from battling the heat island effect, to providing habitat for birds and pollinators, to increasing access to nature in urban areas."

At the start of the year, TNC and partners focused on GIS mapping to get a better understanding of where bioswales could be built in Bridgeport. We identified 120 locations where installation would not only be feasible, but would have a measurable and positive impact on water quality and flood mitigation. After an in-field assessment, TNC and partners narrowed the list to 100 potential sites, which we are currently presenting to key stakeholders, including residents, for their input and feedback.

To that end, as part of The Flow Project, TNC and partners have held several events to engage residents, hear their stories, learn about their goals for the neighborhood, and find ways to collaborate. The events included street mural paintings and a tree planting effort that brought 40 trees to streets and yards across Bridgeport.



I feel privileged to be part of TNC's important work to protect our environment and sustain it for future generations. I hope to do my small part in the vital effort to safeguard our amazing nature and wildlife.

By opening our minds and hearts to what Mother Nature communicates, we can all find our own way to contribute and make a positive impact, for example through recycling our waste, increasing use of public transportation and avoiding pesticides and other harmful products.

- Ama Amoah, INC in CT Trustee

Also This Year

- We focused on the Community Resilience Building (CRB) process conducted in partnership with Yale University. CRB provides a safe and inclusive "anywhere at any scale" approach for community members to co-create resilience action plans with municipalities, academic institutions and supportive organizations. Through this community-driven process, participants identify top hazards, current challenges, strengths and priority actions to improve their community's resilience to natural and climate-related hazards today and in the future. Today, CRB is trusted by close to 500 communities across 14 states now on a path to greater resilience, sustainability and equity.

- As more of Connecticut's tidal wetlands are lost each year to erosion, development and rising sea levels, we worked with partners, donors and volunteers to install reef balls in partnership with Connecticut College in the Thames River. These hollow-core, pH-neutralized concrete balls can help trap sediment and create new reef habitat, which protects shorelines and provides habitat to numerous wildlife species. Through these efforts, we have installed more than 300 reef balls in the Thames and are in the process of identifying new sites for future projects.

ADDRESSING BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Linking Lands for Wildlife in Northwest Connecticut

While nature is sounding alarm bells in many parts of the country, as you step into the Berkshire Foothills, part of the Appalachian Mountains in the Northwest part of the state, you'll hear something different. In the call of red-tailed hawks, the scent of wildflowers, the flow of cold-water rivers and streams and the dramatic sight of moose and picturesque summits, you'll hear and see signs of hope.

The lands located between the Connecticut River and the New York border are known as the Berkshire Wildlife Linkage, part of The Nature Conservancy's global "Focal Landscapes" initiative, which also includes similar landscapes in Kenya, Indonesia, and Brazil. This geography has an estimated 75 percent forest cover and includes the most intact forest ecosystem in southern New England. It not only provides essential habitat to plants and wildlife today, but will play a key role in fighting the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss tomorrow and in the years to come.

"The Berkshire Wildlife Linkage is part of what TNC calls the 'Resilient and Connected Network,'" explains Sarah Pellegrino, Connecticut Land Protection Manager. "These are undeveloped habitats across the country that are able to withstand the impacts of climate change, which means that by protecting them now, we give plants and wildlife a chance to move through these corridors and find new places to call home as the climate shifts."

In 2023, we worked with partners and generous donors to add even more acres to the Berkshire Wildlife Linkage. We're listening, Nature!

The first donation from Holley Atkinson and Stephen Plumlee consisted of 330 acres of land in Winchester, which will more than double the size of the existing Silas Hall Pond Preserve. Silas Hall Pond Preserve is part of a large network of open space, including Winchester town watershed land, land trust and other privately protected land, and Algonquin State Forest.

In addition, Julia Wilson and Eric Wilson had donated 16 acres in Canaan to expand Wangum Lake Brook Preserve, where TNC has already protected 435 acres (through a combination of ownership and easements). The preserve is close to an extensive complex of more than 7,000 acres of protected land that includes Housatonic State Forest, Canaan Mountain, Robbins Swamp, and TNC in CT's Hollenbeck Preserve, among others.

"The communities of Northwest Connecticut have a long tradition of embracing land conservation," says Connecticut State Director and Interim Northeast Division Director Dr. Frogard Ryan. "Working with area partners, individuals and communities, The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut spent much of 2023 identifying the best opportunities for land protection in the region. We are thrilled to announce these new land donations, which will help us protect Northwest Connecticut's important forest and wetlands habitats."



Long Island Sound is a small body of water compared to the world's oceans, but it is a big part of our Connecticut lives. You might start your day at dawn in a kayak and end sailing to dinner on the coast. Maybe a ferry takes you to an island for swimming. Or maybe you just want to sit gottly at the beach, listening to the waves. Water calms, invigorates, and relaxes. No matter how you enjoy the water, you enjoy the water.

- Susan Bevan, TNC in CT Trustee



Also This Year

- We co-hosted the inaugural Long Island Sound Coastal Watershed Network Summit 2023: Funding and Strategies to Tackle Local Water Pollution. The event provided an opportunity for more than 100 environmentalists, educators, elected officials, scientists and concerned citizens to hear presentations on a variety of approaches to improving local water quality and accessing related funding. The 600-member Network brings together communities, groups and individuals working to reduce pollution loads that harm Long Island Sound's rivers, bays, and coastal habitats.
- We formally joined the Long Island Sound River Restoration Network, a coalition of conservation practitioners working to remove and upgrade human-built infrastructure that impedes the natural flow and function of streams such as dams, bridges and culverts. Many of these structures disconnect access for fish and wildlife to their breeding, feeding, and nursery grounds. We're proud to be helping the Network address these issues and accelerate the pace of river barrier removal by sharing information and resources, engaging dam owners, and helping identify and raise funds for future dam removal and culvert replacement projects.



● PRIORITIZING EQUITABLE CONSERVATION

Sowing Seeds of Inclusion

Communing and communicating with nature don't look the same for everyone. Different people have different experiences with nature depending on a variety of factors. For some, nature is the lone tree growing in a sidewalk planter on their block that lowers the summer thermometer. For others, nature is a public park or beach to cool off or watch the ocean in awe. Those fortunate enough to have a deep relationship with nature are more likely to be active participants in her conservation. That's why we are listening to and learning from the many voices who are speaking up on behalf of our lands and waters here in Connecticut, across the country, and around the world. And in doing so, we're finding new ways to connect with people at our preserves and project areas, and new ways to protect them for future generations.

This story began when The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut identified the need to enhance and more efficiently support safe and inclusive access to our local preserves. In response to these needs we launched an internal, cross-functional Accessibility Implementation Team (AIT). Last year, the AIT selected a few priority projects that would improve not just physical access but also community access to our preserves and information about them. We received internal funding through TNC's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Action Fund for some of this work, which—when combined with private philanthropic support—have enabled the seeds of this effort to take root in many different ways. For example, we are translating informational materials into Spanish, and we have adopted an interactive and arts-based approach to community events that helps us understand what kinds of engagement opportunities appeal to potential preserve visitors.



At the core of much of this work is the understanding that inclusive access to nature begins with listening to the needs not only of nature but also of communities, developing authentic relationships, and building trust. “Over the course of recent tabling events, we became familiar with organizations that might be interested in partnering with us and started building relationships through organic conversations,” explains Sophie Duncan, Equitable Stewardship Manager. “One of these is with Doreen Abubabkar of the Community Place-making Engagement Network (C-PEN), which is based in the Newhallville Neighborhood in New Haven.”

This summer, the AIT worked with C-PEN to support the West River Watershed Conservation Crew, which provides environmental job-training for youth and young adults in Newhallville and facilitates transformation of community green-space at the West River, through a series of events and workshops both at the West River and our Burnham Brook Preserve.

The DEIJ Action Fund combined with donor support also allowed our team to provide the West River Watershed Conservation Crew with materials for community photography workshops that documented the possibility for transformation at the West River, as well as outdoor exploration materials that supported the needs of the program.

Investing in this work is critical to better connecting people and nature. We look forward to working with, listening to, and learning from more communities of people to make the places stewarded and protected by TNC in CT safer and more inclusive—while aligning with the ecological needs of our lands and waters on which all life depends.



We all experience nature from different perspectives and experiences. Whether it's through a long jog along a tree-lined path or a slow amble along the shoreline, each of us can discover some restorative power in nature. And when we can really tune into what an ecosystem is telling us, we can better understand what nature might need from us as well. The Nature Conservancy is the preeminent organization for advocacy and action when nature itself cannot be directly heard by all.

- Dr. Robert Javonillo, TNC in CT Trustee

Also This Year

- We updated the website and installed a new digital kiosk at the Lucius Ordway Pond/Devil's Den. This change provides visitors with relevant conservation and safety information in English and Spanish, as well as collects feedback that will inform future improvements. Preserve staff also hosted guided hikes with free safety kits for attendees and visitors throughout the summer. These activities are led with the goal to improve safety at the preserve and recruit volunteers to help out with preserve maintenance.
- Students from the Franklin Academy—a school for students with unique learning styles—joined TNC in CT for an educational program and guided hike at our Burnham Brook Preserve, where they helped build bluebird houses as part of their Capstone Project. This outreach was made possible through a grant from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County.

Saluting Our Supporters

The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut wishes to thank the following donors for their support and service in fiscal year 2023. This list represents those who have contributed at least \$1,000 between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023 to the Conservancy's local, national and international conservation work.

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* We make every effort to be accurate. If we have inadvertently overlooked anyone, please accept our sincere apologies as well as our deep gratitude for your generosity.

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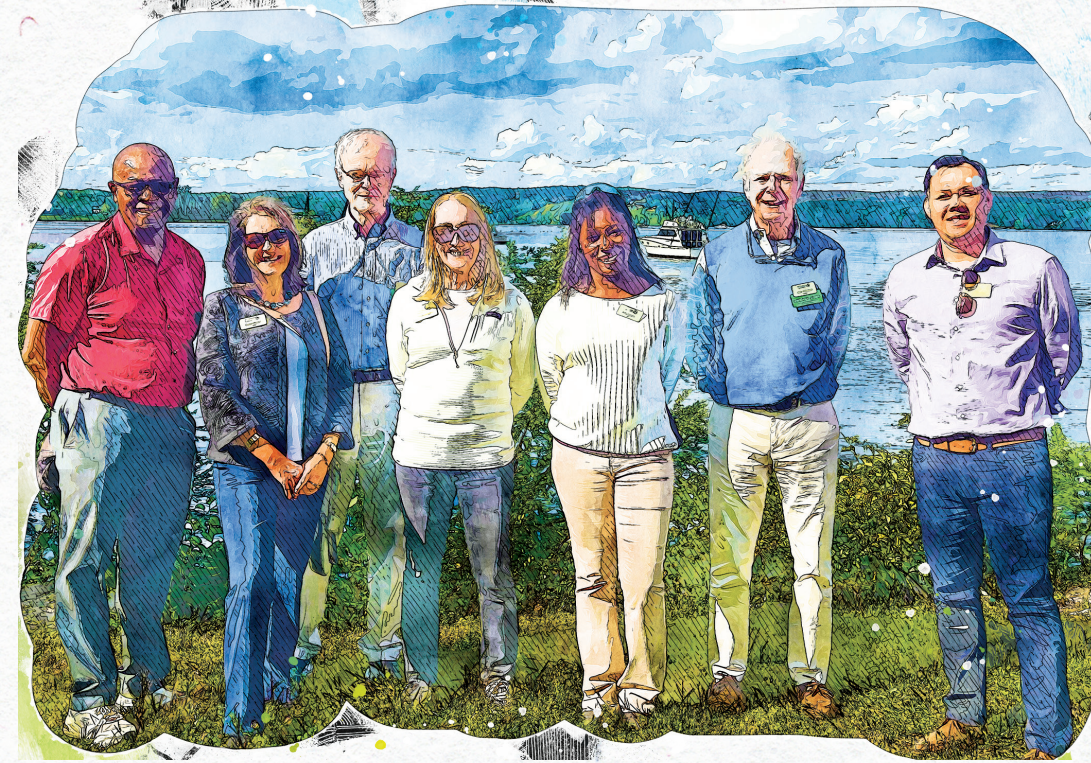
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Silas Hall Pond Preserve is part of our family legacy, and we were inspired to learn of its importance to the Berkshire Wildlife Linkage corridor and regional climate, wildlife, and water ecosystems. We're happy to contribute significantly to its expansion. Now more than ever, we must all pay attention to what Nature tells us, and each do what we can to preserve the planet and climate for future generations.

- Holley Atkinson and Stephen Plumlee, TNC in CT Supporters



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IN MEMORIAM

Our respected and beloved Trustee Emeritus Stewart Greenfield, 91, passed away on July 19, 2023. He served on The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut's Board of Trustees from 1992 to 2002 and previous to that served on the Lucius Ordway Pond/Devil's Den Preserve Advisory Council for nearly 20 years. Stu was a pioneer in every way - as a highly successful business leader, respected political advisor, diehard conservationist and generous philanthropist. Born in Brooklyn, Stu earned a bachelor's degree from Saint John's College in Annapolis, served honorably in the United States Army and had a successful business career, including working at IBM and Sprout Ventures and co-founding Oak Investment Partners and Alternative Investment Group. He helped start and fund several early climate technology investment funds and was a pioneer in making business more socially impactful and more equitable. At one point in the 1980s, 50 percent of the female partners in the National Venture Capital Association worked for Oak Investment Partners. Stu's TNC legacy will always be his uncanny ability to anticipate change, including the power of working globally and the urgency of addressing climate change, decades before others saw this coming. Among his many accomplishments and unique qualities, one stands out: his humility. We thank you, Stu, and will continue on the conservation course you charted.

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Marie Orsini Rosen has spent the past 13 years leading The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut's fundraising efforts. In that time, Marie has raised transformative gifts for Connecticut, North America, and other regions across the globe that have truly made our world a better place for people and nature.

As Marie moves onto the next phase of life, she will always treasure the relationships that she has built with you, our most beloved and passionate supporters. Thank you, Marie!

Frogard Ryan

Dr. Frogard Ryan





THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN CONNECTICUT STAFF

The TNC in CT Team (L to R), back row: Michael Davidow, Ben Croll, Sophie Duncan, Kieran Runne, Ann Budzynski, Will Kenny, Erica Anderson, Adam Whelchel, Sarah Pellegrino. Front row: Marie Orsini Rosen, Diana Nguyen, Martha Rice, Jessica Cañizares, David Gumbart, Wayne Woodard, Nathan Frohling, Holly Drinkuth, Frogard Ryan, Minna-Marie Murphy, Emily Hadzopoulos, Drew Goldsman, Cynthia Fowx, Laura Weinberg.

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The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut
55 Church Street, Third Floor
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