South Hero Land Trust
ANNUAL REPORT 2020
growing farms, building community, working together
December 1, 2020

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Partners,

As we come to the end of a year of immense challenge, sadness, and fear, I am thinking a lot about how we move forward. As individuals, families, communities, and a nation. How can we come together and solve the daunting crises of racial injustice, climate change, and a global pandemic? As a white woman living in a predominantly white state, there are systems in place that encourage me to ignore my role in the solutions to these connected crises. Racial injustice, climate change, and the pandemic are hurting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) more severely than white people. And all I have to do to perpetuate this inequity is to do nothing.

As the leader of a conservation organization, ending racial injustice is central to my work. While our mission at South Hero Land Trust is to protecting the land we live on, I only have to look to the natural world around us to see that diversity matters. Healthy ecosystems are deeply diverse, and each living and non-living creature brings something essential to the system. Healthy ecosystems also thrive on change, no matter how painful that change may feel at first. Our differences make our lives richer, and those differences hold in them the possibility of new ideas and innovation.

When I think about my role in the solution, as a parent, a community member, and a leader—cultivating, creating, and celebrating diversity feels important. I have a lot of learning to do on this journey, but here’s where I am starting today. I’m letting go of some familiar and comfortable ways of doing our work that are not inclusive. I’m looking for ways to lift up and support BIPOC people and organizations in our community. And I’m learning how to break down the systems that perpetuate oppression and build up systems that perpetuate equity, inclusion, and diversity instead.

At the same time, we are continuing the good work of land conservation, education, and community building in South Hero. Programs Director Guy Maguire has been leading our efforts to keep trails open and rebuild the Folsom School and Community Garden as an outdoor classroom, while I have been focused on supporting local farmers. I am thrilled to share some updates with you, and hope you will get in touch with any questions or ideas. Your support goes directly to projects and program, and I thank you for your ongoing generosity.

With deep gratitude and warmest wishes,

Emily Alger
Executive Director

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South Hero Land Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the farmland, woodland, natural and recreational areas, and open spaces which give South Hero its distinctive quality of life.
CONSERVED LANDS & TRAILS

1. Allenholm Farm (1997)
3. Crescent Bay Farm (1999)
5. Maxham Farm (1999)
6. Wright Property (1999)
7. Round Pond Natural Area (2001)
12. Islandacres Farm (2008)
15. Tracy Woods (2018)
16. Landon Community Trail
17. Round Pond Trails
18. Tracy Woods Community Trail

FARMS ADAPT TO FEED COMMUNITY

As the deep impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic spread through our community this spring and summer, one of our biggest fears was about feeding our families. Grand Isle County farmers stepped up and got creative. Just a week into the spring shut-down, the first online ordering systems and home delivery options were developed. Farm stands opened early and offered curbside pick-up. The Champlain Islands Farmers’ Market adapted to changing rules and opened for business. We’d like to say thank you to all our local farmers for feeding us this year!

CONNECTING TO THE LAND

We all realized just how important our local trails, woods, and beaches were this spring, when we needed their recreational, social, and healing powers more than ever before. South Hero Land Trust was proud to help keep our local trails open and safe through the summer and fall. And we loved gathering activities, articles, videos, and ideas for ways to connect with nature from your favorite trail or a chair near your window. We’ll keep sharing these resources, and creating new ones for connecting to nature through the winter. And we are planning a new series of winter talks with our partners at the Worthen Library.
Since early March, South Hero Land Trust’s focus has been on supporting our local community through the pandemic. Drawing on our skills working with local farmers, teachers, and community members, we have worked on four central projects:

- helping farmers and the Champlain Islands Farmers’ Market promote and sell their products;
- providing seeds, vegetable seedlings, and fresh foods to families at experiencing hunger in the Islands;
- rebuilding the Folsom School & Community Garden to serve as an outdoor classroom for students; and
- keeping our trails and outdoor spaces safe and open for everyone to use.

**Keeping Farm to Table Connections Strong**

The first thing we did after moving to remote work in March was check in with local farmers. With restaurants, school, and large offices shut down indefinitely, what was happening to their markets? Farmers were very concerned that they would not have customers this summer, and they had already invested in seeds, compost, new chicks, and other resources for a regular summer season.

We connected with our partners at the Healthy Roots Collaborative and Champlain Islands Farmers’ Market, as well as individual farmers. We focused our efforts on helping farmers develop online sales platforms, set up curb-side pick-up and home delivery options, marketing what farmers had available and how community members could access that food, and helping the Farmers’ Market open safely.

The great news is that our community is buying more local food than ever before. And because the diversified farms in the Islands were able to adapt- they were able to increase local retail sales to balance out some of the loses in their wholesale markets. Ongoing support is needed through the pandemic and beyond, as we support the recovery of our economy. And South Hero Land Trust will be here to partner with local farms and help them come out of this crisis even stronger, more flexible, and more creative than before.

**Neighbors Feeding Neighbors**

Unemployment has been another devastating impact of the pandemic, and many families have become at risk for going hungry over the last several months. When community members Regan Henry and Erin Morse reached out to South Hero Land Trust in March, this is what they were most worried about. Was there a way that South Hero Land Trust could utilize our community and farmer connections to help feed our neighbors? We decided to find out.

We brought together these local parents with our partners at Food for Thought and the Healthy Roots Gleaning Program to create a new “Grow for your Neighbor” campaign. With seed money from the Ben & Jerry’s Foundation and local
donors, we worked with Regan, Erin, and other community volunteers to grow donation gardens at Health Hero Farm and the Folsom School & Community Garden. We created a free seed library at the Worthen Library. And we bought seedlings from local farmers and distributed them directly to families through local partners. Finally, we signed up volunteer gardeners to grow extra plants for local food shelves and meal programs.

We were able to:
- partner with 5 local farms and 15 volunteer gardeners,
- distribute 85 packets of seeds through the free Seed Library at the Worthen Library,
- send 350 packets of seeds home with students in the Islands through partnership with the Healthy Roots Collaborative,
- give away over 450 vegetable seedlings distributed directly to families in need and volunteer gardeners, and
- donate over 400 lbs of produce donated to local food shelves and meal programs.

Keeping Nature Open
As schools, workplaces, and social spaces shut down in March, and anxiety levels skyrocketed, many turned to outdoor spaces for help. We were isolated from each other, we worried about the impact of school closures on children, and we needed ways to stay active. Our trails and natural areas became essential: as a space where we could safely connect with friends and family members, as an amazing learning opportunity for children and families, and as a place for moving our bodies in all kinds of healthy ways.

South Hero Land Trust wanted to support access to the outdoors by keeping trails safe and open, and by providing tools and activities for community members or all ages and abilities to connect with and heal through nature. We rallied volunteers to care for our trails, and gathered and shared resources for learning and enjoying the outdoors with the community.

Taking Learning Outside into the Garden
A year ago, we began to plan a complete renovation of the garden at Folsom School. First built in 2009, this has been a well-loved space for growing vegetables for the school, learning and art projects, and social activity. Students were learning about root growth and pollination. The Champlain Islands Parent Child Center’s cared for two beds in the summertime, and kids in the Grand Isle County Mentorship Program met their mentors there. Food was grown for the school meal program, as well as summer meal boxes distributed by Food for Thought. Over time the seasons wore down the beds, and over its uses outgrew the space. Then the pandemic hit, and the garden became even more critical than before, as an outdoor classroom for students.

With funding from the Vermont Community Garden Network, RiseVT, the Ben & Jerry’s Community Action Team in St. Albans, and local families, we broke ground on the new garden in September. And the space has already made outdoor learning for students possible this year!

Students have harvested produce for the school kitchen, built a new compost system, moved soil and mulch to build new beds, and recently planted garlic, blueberries, daffodils, and a native flower bed to provide habitat for bees and other pollinators! Teachers have also been using the garden to teach math, science, and more through interdisciplinary learning alongside garden activities. Students and South Hero Land Trust Programs Director, Guy Maguire, wrapped up fall in the garden with a lesson on de-colonizing Thanksgiving. They learned the story of the holiday from different Native American perspectives, and then planted traditional Abenaki crops and flowers to give thanks to nature for its abundance.
OUR MEMBERS & SUPPORTERS

WHERE OUR FUNDING COMES FROM

- Program Service Revenue
- Government Grants
- Individual Donors
- Foundations
- Chuck de Burlo Endowment Fund
- Membership Dues
- Grants

WHERE YOUR SUPPORT GOES

- Farm Initiative
- School-based Educational Programs
- Farm to School Program
- Office Expenses & Administration
- Community Outreach & Educational Programs
- Conservation Project Development
- Friends of Island Trails

*Numbers for July 2019-June 2020*

THANK YOU

Here are some photos from our events in the 9 months prior to the pandemic. We can’t wait to see our community in-person again. Wishing you all a Healthy and Happy 2021!