



Vinalhaven Land Trust

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Photo: Sherr Romer

BLAZING NEW PATHWAYS

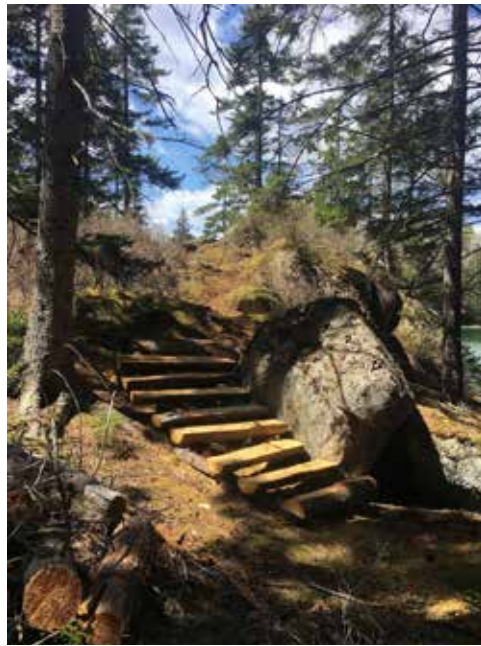
Trail-Making at VLT

Over the past decade, I've had the good fortune to lay out several new trails on properties that VLT has either acquired outright, or on private land that we've been given permission to cross with hiking trails. It's a task that I relish, and it's also a serious responsibility: once a trail is established, it's not easy to erase from the land. Your successes and mistakes as its designer will be there for all the world to enjoy or endure for some time.

Tip Toe Mountain Preserve, which we acquired in 2013, was the first chance for me to lay out new trails on a VLT property. Luckily, the dramatic topography there practically did all the work for me: there were several fine elevated viewpoints, and a beach that could only be reached by crossing an old stone dam. It was a fairly simple matter to find an easily-walked line that took hikers from the town park at Little Tip Toe up to the skyline on Middle Tip Toe and Big Tip Toe, and then down to the shore, passing through mature spruce forests and across open ledges, and ending up at a beach filled with amazingly patterned rocks.

However, we soon realized that the trail to the shore needed to be a loop rather than a dead-end, so that no hikers would be stranded by high tide on the wrong side of the stone dam. A new section of trail was added, and because of the steep and rough terrain, it posed two new dilemmas. The first was to take hikers up through a long, narrow fault in the bedrock, with mossy ledges close on either side. From there, a way was needed to get down over a steep hill; this led to the creation of a zig-zag stairway made from split spruce logs, salvaged from blowdowns on the site.

To our delight, the response from hikers to this more challenging trail was overwhelmingly positive—they liked the mossy chasm, and they really liked the timber steps. The lightbulb was coming on: give hikers exhilarating views and gravitational challenges,



Wrapping these timber steps around the shape of an existing boulder took a bit more effort, but resulted in a more pleasing design. Photo by Kerry Hardy.

but also give them the necessary structural resources to make it safe and comfortable. About this time, we also started adding benches, made with the same split logs, at some of our best vantage points—and again, the response was very positive.

These lessons from Tip Toe have now become standard operating procedure. In 2017,

we installed extensive log bridging at the Marcuse Wetland Preserve, allowing hikers to cross a peat bog filled with plants like skunk cabbage, Labrador tea, goldthread, and even some native orchids. More benches were added—not just at our own preserves, but also at a trail we helped reclaim at Middle Mountain Town Park, and at the Round Pond Trail. New trails at our Fish Hook Preserve allowed hikers more and better shore access in 2018, and 2019 saw us cutting new approaches to the summit of both Little and Big Tip Toe, to make these wonderful viewpoints accessible to hikers with a wider range of ages and abilities.

By now, we were expanding our thinking even more. Instead of simply building trails in response to acquiring lands, we were proactively seeking out partnerships with private landowners, in hopes of creating hiking access to special places that we didn't own, or to add to the overall connectivity of the island's network of trails. The Vinalhaven Water District helped us twice: first in 2019, with permission to take hikers up a long-abandoned section of the North Haven Road that emerges on a sunny ledge overlooking Round Pond; and then in 2020 with permission to create a trail ending on a rocky point with a 270° panoramic view of the wetland thoroughfare between Round and Folly Ponds—probably the best spot on the island for eagle-watching.

2020 ended with a magnificent backfire of another plan: in 2017, we had asked Charles Sullivan for permission to create a trail crossing the high ledges on his land at Mill River, and in 2020, he responded by giving us the land instead! The result was our newest trail, Overlook—and in developing this exception-

Trail-Making (continued from page 1)

al property, we've tried to incorporate all the lessons of the past decade. Here's a quick list of the principles I try to follow, all of which can be seen at Overlook Trail:

Walk the property many times, with other people, to locate the most interesting features on the property—panoramas, stone outcrops, glacial erratic boulders, big trees, lichen gardens on ledges, water views, and shore access being the ones that come immediately to mind. At the same time, locate the sensitive places, like eagle or osprey nests, and views of neighboring properties, that any trail will need to avoid.

Flag a prospective trail, and walk it with even more people, to get balanced feedback about the quality of the proposed hiking experience—which features resonate the most with people?

Stick to the shade whenever possible, because the sunny clearings will eventually become choked with plants like bracken fern or huckleberries, and require much more annual

maintenance.

Never settle for just taking the shortest or easiest route to a destination—in fact, put destinations right out of mind, and concentrate mainly on the whole journey. Hikers don't begrudge the occasional twist, turn, or steps up and down; they actually welcome them.

Use hardscape elements to enhance the experience when hikers reach the striking features of the trail—benches at the panoramas; steps, kiosks, and interpretive signage at trailheads and features. The high bench and shore access at Overlook is a good example of this; the steps leading up to the ledge, and the view of the bench at the top let you know that you've reached a feature point.

Locate benches far enough off the beaten path to feel peaceful and at least semi-private.

Leave as much of the shoreline for wildlife as possible—it's essential habitat for many species, so only bring a trail to the water's edge at specific feature points, and then take

it back into the woods.

Use natural timber or stone whenever possible in the hardscaping, and let the weather age it however it will.

Perhaps the most important principle of all: consult your inner child as you plan, design and build a trail. All of the wonderfully inefficient things that kids do—tree climbing, fort building, hiding from the rest of the group, jumping up or down from one rock to another, and walking through skinny gaps between trees or boulders—these all spring from the same spirit of adventure that makes us go hiking as adults. A good trail holds secrets, adventures, a few wonders, glimpses of wildlife, and perhaps even a bit of perceived risk, where we can inch our way out and look down over a granite ledge at a cove below... but it also needs a few good places to sit and enjoy a PB&J and a whoopie pie.

—Kerry Hardy, Stewardship Coordinator



Seasonal steward Aryeh Lieber leans on the curved branch railing made from a nearby spruce tree. Photo by Kerry Hardy.

Summer 2021: A Journal

May. I have known Vinalhaven my whole life, but never in spring — these cold mornings, the pale blossoms on the apple trees. My first day of work, Kerry shows me a trail he has sketched out, branching west from Fish Hook over open rock, past forests grown from fire. The huckleberry bushes twine knee-high; through birch leaves, we watch the tide fill the little coves. June comes. Shy, alien flowers in the woods, jack-in-the-pulpit, lady's slipper. The trail is called Overlook now; it is beginning to look like something that might last. Kerry and I prune back branches, split logs for sets of steps. Warm days, the tide far off, we talk of swimming, some summer afternoon, from the rocks. And soon it is here, high summer, the quarries full, the lupines standing like steeples over the fields. It begins to rain one day when we are making cairns, and doesn't stop, it seems, for weeks. Mush-

rooms appear along the path, more each morning, hundreds, great encampments; I know none of their names. Overlook opens, we build a last bench. We stay away a while then; the trail is no longer ours, if it ever was, and our work is elsewhere. And August is gone, September; the days tilt away. Kerry and I visit our slight new path and find it footworn, sure, as if it had been here a long time already. Then October. The nights are sharp, the summer houses dark. One afternoon we stop at Overlook. Maple leaves are falling, blotted scarlet, marigold. The tide brims with light; what a day for a swim, someone says. But it is late, there is a chill in the air... We leave; behind us, the worn path seems to be waiting to frost over, and forget itself in snow.

—Aryeh Lieber

ALL TRAIL CHALLENGE REPORT

VLT's 2021 All Trail Challenge was a resounding success! We sold over 100 "passports" listing the twenty-one trails on island open for hiking. Congratulations to everyone who completed the challenge! Special mention goes to Kate Walker, the first to turn in her completed passport, Steve



Clockwise from top left: Steve Robey, with his trusty bike; Mr. Bis, in a photo by his person, Gabe McPhail; Mother-daughter passport pair Carol Thompson and Shannon Thompson at the trailhead of Perry Creek Conservation Area; Kate Walker, turning in her passport; and hikers having a great time accomplishing their goal in a photo by Victoria Brett.

Robey who biked to all the trails as well as walked every trail in each preserve, and to Mr. Bis, the only dog to sign up for the challenge. Bis visited nineteen of the preserves; his person hiked the Starboard Rock and Whitmore Pond trails on his behalf, as dogs are not permitted at those two sanctuaries.



'Tis the Season to Give

One benefit of the pandemic has been getting people reacquainted with the outdoors. Our conservation efforts focus on protecting significant plant and wildlife habitats, water resources, and traditionally valued spaces that nourish our lives and our souls. Our environmental education programs at Vinalhaven School inspire the next generation to become better stewards of the island we love, and the walks and talks program educates on topics such as geology, botany, aquaculture, photography, and more.

VLT operates on a calendar year basis. Your gift by December 31 helps ensure that we will meet our 2021 budget. While gifts of all sizes are important and welcome, we are especially appreciative of gifts of \$250 or more, which traditionally represent about 80% of all funds raised. You can also make a gift of appreciated securities; in addition to being able to claim a charitable income tax deduction for the full fair market value of the shares, you also avoid paying a capital gains tax on appreciation. Donate by mail or securely online at vinalhavenlandtrust.org/donate, or by phone at 207.863.2543. Thank you!



CONNECTING THE FUTURE

A planned gift of almost any size will help ensure the protection of the habitats and scenic views we all love. Such a gift could be accomplished by simply adding a codicil (amendment) to your will, or by naming VLT as the beneficiary of an insurance policy or retirement plan. In planning your gift, you should consult with a financial advisor or attorney to discuss your particular situation. Please call Linnell Mather at 207.863.2543 for more information on planned giving options.

Honoring Our Volunteers

VLT would like to thank all the incredible people who gave their time and energy in this past year. This year we were overwhelmed by the support of our volunteers: over 100 people volunteered over 300 hours, in addition to the many hours our board members give to VLT! Please accept our apologies if we have inadvertently omitted your name.

Committee Members

Board members are active on all of our committees, which also include both seasonal and year-round community members. Dick Byrd, Louisa Ives, and Charlie Lowrey lend their skills to the Investments Committee. Toria Brett and Elise Stockly brings their expertise to the Development Committee, as does Sarah Forbes to the Communications Committee, and Pam Alley to the Stewardship Committee.

Annual Meeting

Addison Ames put up the tent for our annual meeting, Mike Mesko and Steve Rosen provided ice, David Lawrence and Bill Alcorn served as bartenders, and Carol Thompson lent us a tablecloth.

Office Help

We are so grateful to those who have come in when we call for help with mailings, edit-

ing and reviewing our newsletters, picking up materials from the printers, and other office assistance. Thanks to Sophie Benzie, Amy and Dave Calkins, Phil Crossman, Sarah Forbes, Fred Granger, Pam Grumbach, Suzanne Heller, Ed Hirst, Matt Jablonski, Pam Johnson, Sylvia Lacey, Ann Lane, Stevie Mesko, Lila and Sophie Sawatsky, Lila and Sofia Schaefer, Carol and Skip Thompson, and Mary Lou Upton. Thanks to David Lawrence for delivering membership packets to John McLeod in Perry Creek. And kudos to John McLeod for sharing information about VLT with boaters in Perry Creek.

Boat Transportation

Thanks to George Fosque for transporting hikers across the water for a hike on North Haven, and to Katie, Lila, and Sophie Sawatsky for assisting with the safe docking of the boats, and guiding walkers off the boats.

Trail Work

Trail volunteers include Lisa Cherbuliez, Annemarije de Boer, Hal Holt, Jennifer Kimball, Joseph Lieber, Steve Robey, Marjorie Smith, Maddie Terry, and Katie Walker. Mae Applegate, Donna Carter, Cait Clapham, Sue Dempster, Ann Osgood, Kelly Richards, Samantha Thompson, and Mary Lou Upton helped update and maintain the stories on

the Story Trail. Niall Conlan plowed the trail heads all over the island when it snowed, enabling our winter hikers access to the trails they love. Thank you all!!!

Trail and Coastal Clean-ups

Last winter, there were several cleanup efforts, and lots of dedicated volunteers took care of roadsides all over the island. In the spring, there were two cleanups at the Basin, and a coastal cleanup in the fall. The volunteers that gave their weekend time to these efforts were: Maisie, Merry, and Wilson Boone, Atim Boykin, Francois Deschamps, Kathy Garnett, Marion Grogan, Allan and Jeanie Hayes, Pete Jaques, Norbert and Sally Leser, Lisa Lewis, Don and Valerie McQuillan, Banner Moffat, Rick Morgan, Jack Myer, Steve Robey, Josh Safdie, Laura Spinner, Allie Wood, and Velna Zuzick.

Monitoring

For their invaluable assistance in making sure that the restrictions on VLT's properties under conservation protections are being observed, we would like to thank volunteer monitors Carol Baker, Colleen Conlan, Niall Conlan, Pam and James Grumbach, George Kendrick, Charlie Lowrey, Audrey Nichols, Herb Parsons, Anna Poe, Susie Rodriguez, Patience Trainor, and Marthana Webster. A special thanks to Jamie Lowrey for boating



Volunteers cleaning the shores of Pocus Point this fall. Photo by Norbert Leser.



Office help is always appreciated, and these awesome young volunteers were a delight! Photo by Sheri Romer.



Kerry Hardy to monitor islands and volunteering three full days of his time.

Photos

Thank you, Pat Benzie, Victoria Brett, Chelsea Crochere, Rich Holschuh, Pete Jaques, James LePage, Norbert Leser, Banner Moffat, Rick Morgan, Diego Perez, Terri Peterson-George, Heather Swears, and Agnes Terry for providing such beautiful images of our preserves and of people enjoying them.

Walks and Talks

Thanks to Merry Boone, Claudia Dengler, Beth Gilford, Janet Gohres, Norbert Leser, Banner Moffat, and Rick Morgan for organizing a great summer of walks. Birds walks were led by volunteers Janet Gohres, Pete Jaques, Suzette Jones, Jay Manning, and a special thanks to Rick Morgan for organizing the leaders, and leading some himself.

Other Volunteers

Nevins Bartolomeo, Joe Marcus, and Young Fan offered technical assistance. Banner Moffat and board members removed and replaced some rotting sheathing and shingles on our office building at Skoog Park.

Finally: We could not do this without the support of the board of directors. They, too, volunteered their time and skills for many of

the opportunities above, as well as leading walks, monitoring properties, proofreading and editing, and sharing their wisdom and insights through their work on VLT's many committees.

TRANSITIONS

New Board Members

Marjorie Stratton and Yvonne Thomas were unanimously elected to the board this July by the 200+ members who returned their ballots. Their bios can be found on our website.

Outgoing Board Members

Carol Baker served two terms on the board. She was a member of the Executive, Strategic Planning, and Communication Committees. She also served as chair of the Monitoring Committee, where she supported staff in the filing and mailing of completed reports. Carol was always a willing volunteer, whether one needed help with a mailing or an acting secretary for a meeting.

Pam Kittredge served on the board since 2018, contributing to the work of the Preserve and Conservation Easement Monitoring, Strategic Planning, and Nominating Committees. Pam brought to the board an insightful gentleness that helped guide us in listening to all opinions and coming to agree-

ment about the future.

Susie Lawrence served on the board for sixteen years! She is that rare combination of high standards, strong work ethic, high intelligence, both emotional and otherwise. She helped to coax VLT into the smooth-running professional operation it is today. In addition to serving on many committees, she chaired the 25th Anniversary Campaign that raised 1.7 million dollars to both acquire Tip Toe Mountain Preserve and to ensure VLT had the financial resources to steward all our protected properties.

Meagan Miller served on the board since 2015, as a member of the Nominating, Preserve and Conservation Easement Monitoring, and Environmental Education Committees, and served as VLT's secretary for four years.

Thank you all for your service to VLT!

THANK YOU!



o Perez



Botanist Javier Penalosa led a lichen walk at Overlook Trail in September. Photo by Norbert Leser.



There was a great turnout for the spring Basin cleanup. Photo by Norbert Leser.

NOTES FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The arid, dry landscape of Utah, in contrast with the very wet Folly Pond on Vinalhaven. Utah photos by Linnell Mather. Folly Creek photo by Kerry Hardy.

I just returned from a week of hiking in Zion and Bryce National Parks in southwest Utah, my first “real” vacation in almost two years, thank you, Covid-19. Though I had seen pictures of the splendors of both parks, I was unprepared for the sheer scale of those landscapes, and found myself comparing and contrasting there to here.

I am someone who rejoices in the “big” views: the 270° views one sees from Tip Toe or Fox Rocks, as well as the close ups: an apple tree that has dropped its crop on a pile of lobster traps. Neither landscape disappoints. Here, our vistas are mostly out over the endlessly changing lines and colors of the ocean. There, the views are over wide expanses of open land with mountains forming the backdrop, with only rarely a pond or tiny stream cutting across the landscape,

Bryce National Park lists its elevation at the visitor’s center as 8,000’. According to my phone, my office here at Skoog Park is at 20’ above sea level. No wonder I was out of breath on some of those steeper climbs! Hiking the narrow canyons, with nearly sheer 2,000-foot-tall cliffs rising on both sides of me and just a trickle of a stream at their base to remind us of the millions of years it took to create those canyons left me in awe of the power of flowing water.

Zion receives on average 15” of rain a year; Vinalhaven receives about 49”. Southwest Utah is experiencing its worst drought in recorded history, yet development continues apace. Talking with my fellow hikers from across the country, I was surprised to learn how few of them knew where their municipal water supply came from and how at risk that supply might be due to climate change and population growth. During our dry months, I always glance at the water level in Round Pond as I drive by, to see how fast it is dropping and how worried we need to be about our fresh water supply, both to wells and for those on “town water.”

Rocks are a prominent feature of both landscapes. For us, it is the granite, worn away by 420 million years of glaciation, erosion, and weathering to the point where only someone with an active imagination would declare that Tip Toe, at an elevation of only about 100’, is really a mountain. The mountains of the southwest are young and raw, comprised of layers of sandstone and limestone laid down about 110-270 million years ago, with signs of even newer lava flows still evident. Compared to granite, sandstone is easily eroded, and over the ensuing millions of years, streams and rivers have carved out dramatically beau-

tiful deep canyons throughout the area.

The vegetation of southwest Utah is sparse and hardy. There are plants whose leaves, bark, bloom, or fruit were generally familiar to me: plants such as Utah juniper, scrub oak, Utah serviceberry, desert sage, and columbine. And there were new friends: Mormon tea, mesquite, bitterbrush, and cottonwoods. The aspens were glowing in their bright yellows of fall; I came home to the maples starting to transform our woods and roadsides with their pops of brilliant orange and red. Our mosses and lichens brighten the rocks and forest in shades of greens and grey, so thick in places one has no choice but to tip-toe across them. In Utah, it can take years for small pockets of cryptobiotic soil to form and support plant growth—and where a careless footstep can result in damage that might take many years to heal. No matter where you are hiking, “Stay on the trail” is important advice for many reasons.

But some things were the same. Hikers everywhere are a friendly bunch, saying hello as they pass, cheerfully yielding when the trail is narrow, or offering encouragement and advice on how many more switchbacks to the top of the cliff. (The answer was always more than one was hoping.) Like here, it’s possible to go out at night and find a quiet spot for star and planet gazing, a luxury those without “dark skies” can’t enjoy. As almost everywhere, concerned volunteers help care for the special places in their communities, whether through litter patrol, trail maintenance, leading walks, installing interpretive signage, and much more.

And like here, time in nature is a benison to the soul, restoring one’s spirit. There, as here, my days were filled with pauses to drink in the majesty of the landscape—whether it was the 360° view from Scout Lookout in Zion, with a young condor circling overhead, or a tiny catmint, blooming determinedly from a soil pocket at the base of a hoodoo in Bryce. Here, I pause to watch a busy pollinator exploring a fall blooming aster, or to embrace the expanses of spruce, fir, rocks, and ocean that make the climb to the top of Starboard Rock so spectacular.

I am grateful to the visionaries that protected those vast areas in Utah, and to those who have protected our much, much smaller, but equally wonderful and needed preserves on Vinalhaven. Thank you.

Linnell Mather

President's Message

Many thanks to our members for your support this year, and helping make possible all of our activities this past summer. It was great to see many people under the tent in late July at Annual Meeting, and many thanks to our speaker, President of Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Tim Glidden.

It has been well reported around the country, and experienced locally, how much people have enjoyed getting outdoors during the pandemic. Vinalhaven Land Trust's trails were well used this summer, and some of the more actively used trails were at the new Overlook Parcel, part of the expanded Lower Mill River Preserve. My first view of these new trails was a morning in late May on a volunteer trail day with our stewardship coordinator, Kerry Hardy. A question I have heard, and asked myself, is how does one decide how a trail should be laid out, and what considerations go into the design? I learned something going through the woods that day, and elsewhere in this newsletter, how Kerry goes about this process.

As previously announced, the board approved our new strategic plan in July, and the staff and board are at work turning this document into practice to help shape how VLT approaches its work over the next few years. While the number of people coming through the office dies down at this time of year, the work goes on, and the Walks and Talks Committee is already discussing programs for 2022.

Have a great fall and winter!

—Lee Campbell, President

CORRECTIONS

Two corrections to articles in the spring, 2021 newsletter have been brought to our attention. In the lead article on new properties: the fire on the Overlook Parcel was in 1965, not 1933.

In the timeline, prior to Lucy McCarthy being hired as staff in 1995, VLT also had a part-time contract person supporting the board with administrative tasks.

VLT GIFT IDEAS

Trying to think of a gift for someone who has it all? How about a gift membership to VLT! We will send an informational packet and a photo card of a VLT preserve. You can also order a few select VLT items such as VLT mugs (\$15), caps (\$20), bucket hats (\$30), fleece vests (\$45), and bags (\$25).

Call the office number (207-863-2543) or go to the website to order any of these items. Shipping and handling will be added to each order. Payment can be made by credit card via PayPal.



This common tern was spotted at Lane's Island during one of the weekly bird walks this past summer. Photo by Rick Morgan.

TIME FLIES

Our 2021 Bird Walks in Review

Although VLT bird walks are similar on the surface, no two are ever alike. Those similarities are important: we attract friendly, curious, interested, collaborative people, from complete experts to inquisitive first timers. Each week we go to one or more of four places: Lane's Island, State Beach, Armbrust Hill, and Folly Pond; taken together their ecological diversity is broad for such a small island. We typically see twenty or more avian species on a given morning.

From late spring to early fall there are evolutions to discover and observe—June's noisy mating and nesting in the brightest feathers to August's molting and September's migrations. As summer nesters head south, arctic breeders arrive here for the winter and a few year-round species like guillemots begin to change color. We are spoiled by so much diversity. That said, over the past three or four years, several of us have noted a distinct decline in the numbers and variety of birds we have been seeing, a great concern as yet un-

explained. Climate change? Diseases? Losses of habitat? Pollution?

This year we have held 14 bird walks with only one rained out. With the help of our volunteer leaders, what we see (or hear) is often unpredictably random. How about an osprey chasing an eagle away? A flyby raven scattering a bunch of crows. A rare yellow-crowned night heron pulling worms out of the mud. A merlin doing aerial acrobatics chasing a tiny shorebird and failing. Baby common terns begging to be fed by mothers. A kestrel hovering above Lane's Island before a head-long dive toward its prey. Belted kingfishers rattling, catbirds mewing, ring-necked pheasants screeching, goldfinches calling "potato-chip potatochip" as they swoop.

Such wealth! We look forward to next summer with the hope that our avian friends will return in greater numbers.

—Pete Jaques and Rick Morgan

Our Leadership

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Help Conserve the Nature of Vinalhaven

Join us in protecting Vinalhaven's natural beauty with your membership or additional contribution. Use this form or donate online at www.vinalhavenlandtrust.org. Yearly membership is \$20 per person. Thank you!

\$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 Other \$ _____

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All donations, including dues, are tax deductible and will ensure that you receive VLT's newsletter and notice of special events. Contributions at all levels are greatly appreciated.

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Vinalhaven Land Trust conserves and stewards our island's important natural, recreational, and agricultural resources, including scenic and other traditionally valued places, for the benefit and enjoyment of the entire Vinalhaven community. Through education and engagement, VLT seeks to advance understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

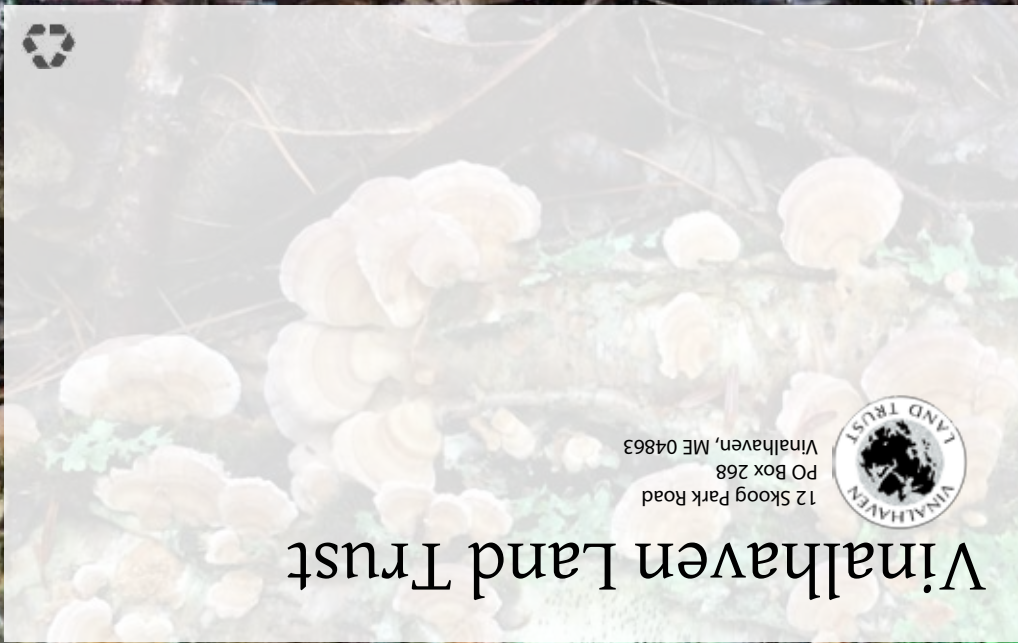


Photo: Kerry Hardy