



SOUTH HERO LAND TRUST

Newsletter

Fall 2023

Bike Rides Over the Water & Building Bee Hotels: Nature Campers Have Great Answers for their “What I Did This Summer” Essays

If you ask one of our campers what they did at camp this summer, you might hear something like...



“We saw Champ on the Causeway!”

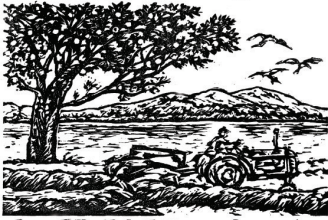
But if you dig a little deeper, you might also hear about...



...nature scavenger hunts, planting kale in the Folsom Learning Garden, and visits to local farms.

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SOUTH HERO



LAND TRUST

A nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the farmland, woodland, natural and recreational areas, and open spaces which give South Hero its distinctive quality of life

PO Box 455
South Hero, VT 05486
tel: (802) 372-3786
www.shlt.org

email: info@shlt.org
emily@shlt.org
guy@shlt.org
jenna@shlt.org

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I've been thinking a lot about why we gather, about why it is so important that we come together as families, friends, communities, and human beings. My brother gave me a copy of "The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters," by Priya Parker, and the book has been challenging me to think about the purpose of gathering, and creating gatherings that bring people together in transformative ways. So much of South Hero Land Trust's work is done through bringing people together over a shared love of the land. We explore the land together, learn about the plants and animals living here, steward and care for the spaces we love, and of course, celebrate the land and our relationship with it. I'm inspired to think about the ways we gather together and how we can use those gatherings to build real connections between people, to generate new solutions to big challenges, to have hard and valuable conversations about the future of our community, and feel more deeply grounded on the land that sustains us.

Thinking about gatherings reminds me of our Annual Celebration at Snow Farm in July (pictured above). I'd like to take a moment to say thank you to a board member who stepped down that day. Steve Robinson and I joined SHLT in the same year, 2009. Steve's family had recently conserved Islandacres Farm and I was a newish college grad, thrilled to accept a job in the community I'd grown up in. For 14 years we learned together, worked together, and made some amazing projects happen in South Hero. As I shared at our Celebration, so much of what I know about farming and the South Hero community is due to Steve, and without him I wouldn't be the leader I am today. Thank you Steve, for being a part of SHLT and my life.

With warm wishes and deep gratitude to all of our members and supporters,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long tail on the final letter.

Emily Alger, Executive Director

(continued from page 1)

This summer, South Hero Land Trust led three summer camps for students from across Grand Isle County. In our Farmers & Foragers Camps, 7-9 year old children learned about wild and cultivated foods. They made tea from garden and woodland plants, filled nature journals with dried flowers and weather records, and went on farmer-led tours of local farms. In our Explorers Camp, 11-13 year old children biked around South Hero and beyond. These adventurous campers learned about water quality visiting Round Pond, saw farm conservation at work at Snow Farm Winery and Islandacres Farm, and learned bike safety skills.

"Thank you for organizing and implementing camps like this for our children. They are such an essential part in helping the children appreciate and take care of nature!!"

~Parent of a camper



For the campers, each week was full of fun and adventure. From our perspective, we love to see the growth of these young and inspiring land stewards. Every day, we fostered appreciation for nature and community, building a foundation that will last the campers far beyond the end of the week.

It was also a lot of fun! At Explorers Camp, we held competitive games of "bike limbo" and "slow racing" (testing balance by going as slow as possible). We checked out the South Hero Bicentennial Museum, and Guy led a bike ride across the Island Line causeway to Burlington. For many, this was their longest bike ride ever!

In the two Farmers & Foragers Camps, we took full advantage of the Rec Park, following animal tracks into the woods, catching (and releasing) frogs in the marsh, and building bee hotels from reed grass. We did taste tests of crops in

the Folsom Learning Garden, and delivered produce to Food for Thought. Overall, we shared adventures with 40 children; connected with 10 local farms and organizations; and created countless memories for the campers. We're so grateful to the volunteers who helped out along the way and made these camps such a success!

My kids LOVED it and came home each day happy, and were more interested in eating veggies and telling me about plants to help their bug bites! They even showed me how to make chopsticks, and used them for dinner! What a great camp!

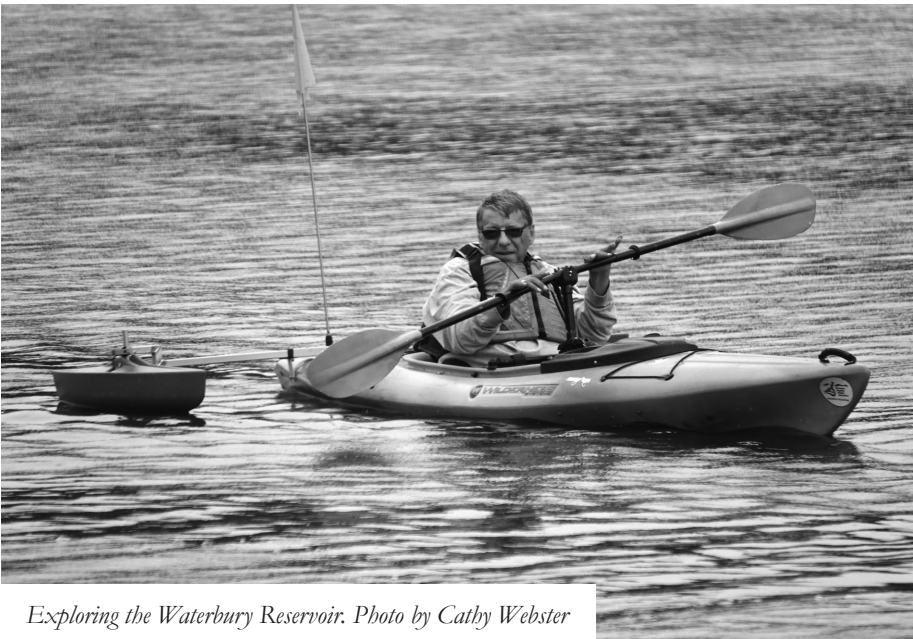
~Parent of a camper

We're also very grateful to be partnering with the Grand Isle Supervisory Union, which has been using ARPA funding to cover the costs of these camps for the past three years. SHLT strongly believes that nature is for everyone. This year, given the camps' popularity, we increased the number of camp weeks and made each a full day program (rather than half) so that more children could participate. And finally, we're grateful for this opportunity to connect with our next generation of leaders and land stewards.

Connecting on the Water

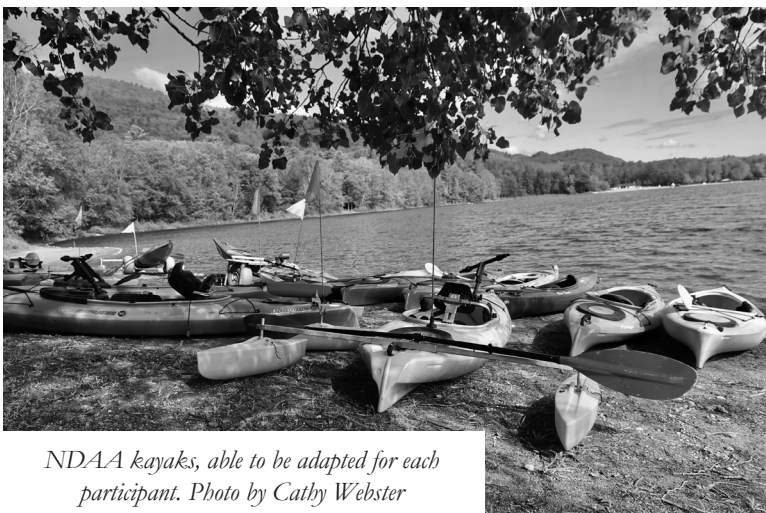


Naomi Heindel, Executive Director of North Branch Nature Center, talking with kayakers at Lake Iroquois in Williston



Exploring the Waterbury Reservoir. Photo by Cathy Webster

A South Hero resident explores Lake Arrowhead in Milton



NDAA kayaks, able to be adapted for each participant. Photo by Cathy Webster

"People with physical limitations are only able to get so far out into nature... having the ability to paddle freely along the shore and into coves opens up a new world to them. Having someone paddle along and answer questions and point out wildlife, and patterns in birds' behaviors is all new. The excitement it brings to so many was wonderful to see!!"

~Cathy Webster

South Hero resident Cathy Webster has been helping people with physical disabilities get out on the water for the last 8 years. Inspired by one of her physical therapy clients, who dreamt of finding a way to return to paddling, Cathy created an Adaptive Kayaking Program that is now one of the programs of the Northeast Disabled Athletic Association (NDAA).

I really enjoyed hearing and learning about the different wildlife that was in the area, especially since it was a new area for me.

~Program Participant

Over time, Cathy has built an impressive fleet of kayaks adapted with supportive seats, stabilizing outriggers, and specialty paddles that allow individuals with a diverse array of physical disabilities and neurodiversities to explore Vermont's waterways independently and under their own power.

South Hero Land Trust and Cathy share the belief that nature is for everyone, which is foundational to the new partnership between SHLT, North Branch Nature Center (NBNC), and NDAA. Starting this year, we piloted a series of 4 naturalist-guided inclusive kayaking events, during which SHLT and NBNC staff joined kayakers to explore and learn about the plants, birds, turtles, and other animals spotted along the water.



Exploring Lake Arrowhead in Milton

We had so much fun exploring nature with these kayakers, and are grateful to **Outdoor Gear Exchange, Vermont Community Foundation, and the Land Trust Alliance** for helping to make this experience possible. And many thanks to the Cathy Webster, and the naturalists at North Branch Nature Center for your partnership!

To learn more about the Adaptive Kayaking program, go to disabledathletics.org/programs



Catherine Griset, naturalist guide and Community Engagement Coordinator from North Branch Nature Center

A blue heron flew very low over us while we were on the lake! The naturalist said she'd never seen one fly so low!

~Program Participant

I really enjoyed connecting with folks on the water while sharing facts and ecological context about the plants, birds and habitats around us. I learned a great deal from the participants too. NBNC is committed to expanding our programs for those with disabilities, and this partnership has been a great step toward that growth.

~Catherine Griset, NBNC

Local Matters: A Conversation on Protecting Lake Champlain

In September, Jenna sat down with Molly Varner, District Manager for Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District, to talk water, action planning, and block parties.

Jenna: For people who aren't familiar with Natural Resources Conservation Districts, can you give a quick introduction to what they are and what they do?

Molly: Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDD) were created in 1939. Our mandate is to preserve the lands, water, forests, and wildlife of the state.

We're really community-led. Each NRCDD has a Board of Supervisors, who are all local landowners. We collaborate a lot with people and communities to encourage voluntary actions to keep our air, water, and soil healthy. We do everything from monitoring and assessing to education and outreach. I want to deliver and bring to people the knowledge and resources they need.

Jenna: How did Grand Isle County NRCDD connect with South Hero Land Trust? Can you describe this partnership?

Molly: A lot of the work of the land trust and conservation district complements each other, and when we were brainstorming the idea for the Keeler Bay Action Plan in 2020, teaming up with the Land Trust felt like a no brainer. Your connections and insights have been a huge part of this plan's success. I really believe the Keeler Bay Action Plan wouldn't have been as successful if we didn't have this partnership.

Jenna: Let's talk about that Keeler Bay Action Plan. What are the long-term goals, and what do you want to see in the next year?

Molly: Our long-term goals are simple, yet ambitious – we want to improve water quality.

It's ambitious because this is not going to happen overnight. We've identified over 25 projects that will reduce runoff. But that's just the first step. We are currently drafting designs for 6 of the projects we identified. Next steps will be to apply for funding but it could be 1-2 years before we "break ground."

If folks want to learn more, vacd.org/KeelerBayActionPlan is a great resource.

Jenna: I know the Keeler Bay Action Plan is about to wrap up, but as you said, it's the "first step" of this project. If folks want to get involved, what can they do?

Molly: Simply because this project is about to conclude doesn't mean our work in Keeler Bay will end. We'll always be looking for projects that further our goal of cleaning up the Bay. I hope the plan and the types of projects identified will inspire others to look differently at their land, what they're doing well, and what could be enhanced. We had a ton of community involvement, including residents who attended our education events to learn about water quality or invited us onto their properties to identify projects. South Hero is made up of many private parcels and, if our work inspires even a fraction of them to make positive changes on their land, that's a success in my book.

And we want to hear about it! I'd love to see this model take hold in other towns! In this small, 7-square mile watershed, we found 25 projects. There's a lot of potential for expansion to other areas in the islands.

Jenna: There are a lot of other ways folks can protect water quality, right?

Molly: We have a wide scale of opportunities – from giant water quality projects that are really complex, to things as simple as planting a few trees in your yard or installing a rain barrel. That's what we've been trying to communicate through the "Block Parties" that we've been working on with SHLT – fun community gatherings that will help us go "to the source" – the people in different communities – and we can deliver the resources solutions, stories, experiences, etc., that are unique to them.

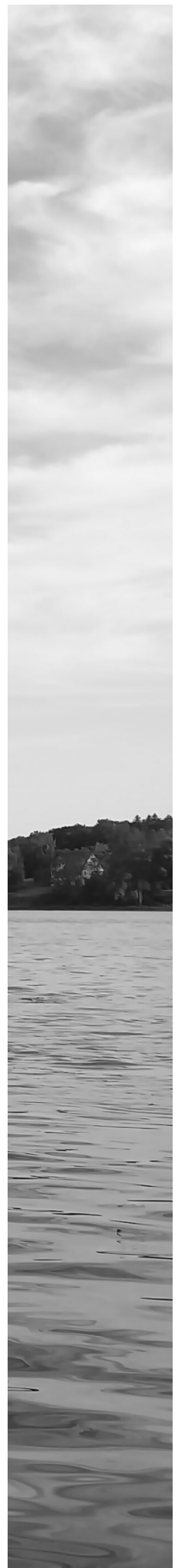
This summer, we've had two Block Parties. Our first was in North Hero, and focused on strategies to enhance water quality through shoreline practices. In early September, we had a Block Party in Grand Isle, focused on identifying potential water quality issues on private roads and cost-effective solutions.

Jenna: And we'll be holding a Block Party in South Hero next year, right?

Molly: Yes! Next spring or summer.

Jenna: If people have ideas for Block Parties in South Hero or have questions, how can they get in touch with you?

Molly: Please reach out! My email is molly.gicnrcd@gmail.com. I'm also happy to chat by phone at (845) 323-2153.



Ways to Support SHLT

Donate

South Hero Land Trust depends on people like you to support our work. We intentionally keep our membership dues low, so that everyone can be part of the important work of protecting the land.

An annual membership for an individual is \$10, and \$25 for a family.

Please go to **SHLT.org/Donate** to make your gift today, and help keep South Hero Land Trust and the South Hero community strong.



Volunteer

From building and maintaining local trails, to serving on our Board of Directors, to growing food and caring for our gardens, there are so many ways to volunteer with South Hero Land Trust.

Want to get involved? Please go to **SHLT.org/Volunteer** or contact Programs Director Guy Maguire at Guy@SHLT.org

Left: SHLT Board Member Natalie Kendrach and her children, volunteering at Green Up Day

Planting the Seeds of Community Conservation



Anna Johnson wrapped up her 11-month stint as our Community Conservation Coordinator, (through the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's AmeriCorps Service Program) in August. Anna's first taste of the Islands was a year ago, when she attended the VT County Foresters Retreat at Snow Farm Vineyard & Winery. Keeping up with a group of foresters discussing complex ecological interactions and species heretofore unknown to Anna must have been a challenge.

But 9 months later, there was Anna at Snow Farm again, teaching a group of summer campers about protecting forests from deer browse damage, identifying invasive garlic mustard, and how to look for signs of emerald ash borer.

While Anna has completed her service with South Hero Land Trust and is heading off on new adventures far from Vermont, her legacy will live on in our Island community. The apple trees she planted at the Folsom Learning Garden will grow up to give shade and sustenance to many future Folsom students. The hundreds of oaks, cedars, and willows she planted at the South Hero Recreation Park will one day become the mother trees of a future thriving forest. And perhaps most importantly, the seeds of kindness and compassion for living things she planted in the minds of students, will serve them and bear fruit for many years to come.

On behalf of South Hero Land Trust and the greater community, we would like to extend our gratitude to Anna for everything she brought to us during her time in South Hero. Thank you Anna, and best of wishes in all your future endeavors.

Images

Top: Anna removes a fallen tree at the Tracy Woods Community Trail

Right: Anna guides students through a seed planting exercise in the Folsom Learning Garden's raised garden bed



What's in Your Pocket?

Did you know that Jane Goodall slept with worms under her pillow when she was a kid? Or that deep sea explorer William Beebe loved to collect birds' eggs? We didn't, until we worked with the Worthen Library to install a new book along the South Hero Rec Park.



Each season we feature a different story, and another fun and creative way for families and children to connect with the land around them. *What's in your pocket? Collecting Nature's Treasures* by Heather L. Montgomery highlights the stories of nine scientists, and how they were inspired by exploring nature as children. Keagan Calkins, Worthen Library Director, chose this book for its fun illustrations and how it helps children see themselves as young explorers and scientists.

Want to visit? The South Hero Rec Park is open from dawn to dusk, with free parking in the lot shared by Folsom Education & Community Center. The StoryWalk begins along the boardwalk (entrance on the right of the parking lot) and continues along the meadows and forests. Check out the author's Rules for Collecting, bring

along our coloring page for a fun scavenger hunt, and keep an eye on our social media, where we'll feature images from the park's trail cameras showing what animals are reading the book too!

Heather Montgomery's "Rules for Collecting"

To respect nature:

- I collect only things that are not alive.
- I collect only if it won't hurt nature.
- I never take rare items or things an animal might need.
- I collect only if it is allowed. In the United States it is illegal to collect parts (feathers, feet, bones, beaks, even eggs) of many kinds of birds.

To respect the people I live with:

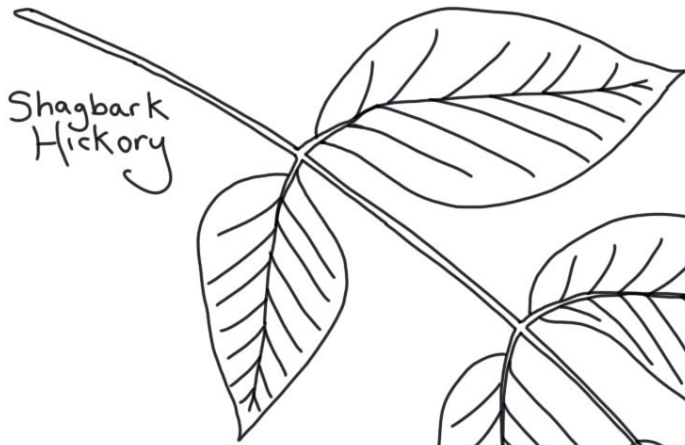
- I make sure my artifacts are clean and (mostly) stink-free.
- I have areas set aside for my treasures.
- I make sure my collections do not bother my family.

To respect myself:

- I don't put my hands where my eyes can't see (like under a rock or log).
- I learn about plants and animals that could hurt me, and avoid them.
- I never put unknown items in my mouth.

Excerpted from "What's in Your Pocket?"

Fall Leaves in the Champlain Islands



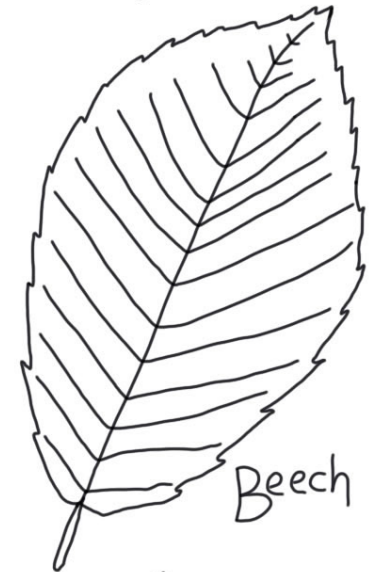
Shagbark
Hickory



Red
Maple



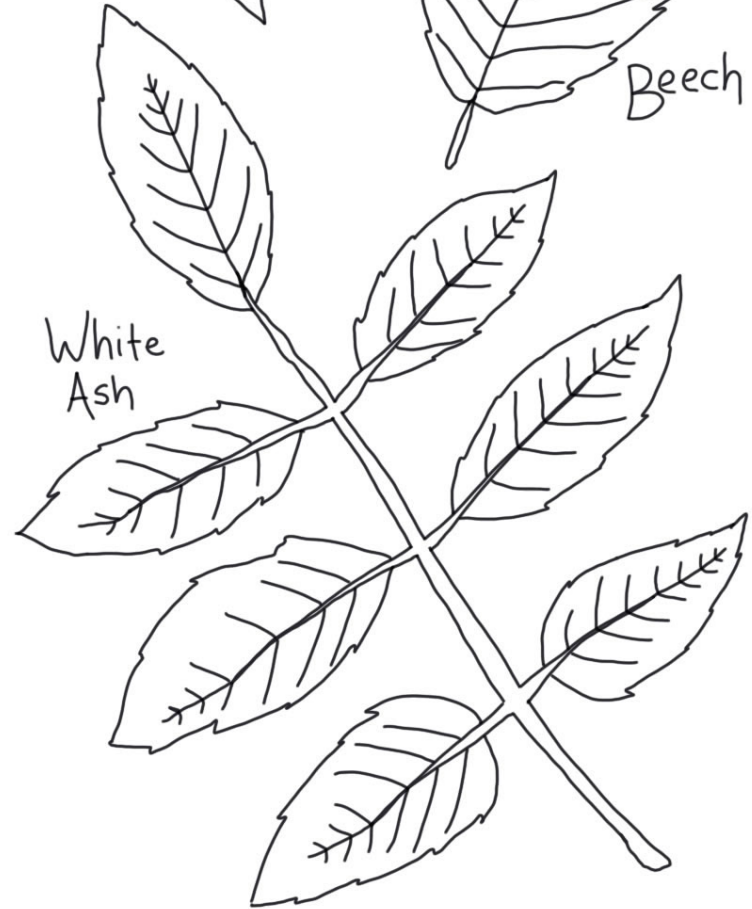
Bigtooth Aspen



Beech



Northern Red
Oak



White
Ash

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NATURE AT NIGHT

A FAMILY EVENT!

OCTOBER 27
5:00-6:30 PM

TRACY WOODS
COMMUNITY TRAIL

Watch the full moon rise, make new friends, and explore the mysteries of nature at night.

We'll take a short walk, do some fun nature activities, and end with stories and s'mores around the campfire.

Nature at Night is all about connecting with nature in new and fun ways. This series is for children between the ages of 2 and 7 and their families (including siblings of all ages).

Learn more & Register at
www.shlt.org/events