



SOUTH HERO LAND TRUST

Newsletter

Fall 2021



Bringing Stories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to the Classroom: Farms, Food, and Nature to Become Lenses for Exploring Anti-racism

Asking Hard Questions

Over the last year the staff and board at South Hero Land Trust have been asking some difficult questions. What role are we, as a land conservation organization, playing in upholding racist policies and systems? And what role can we play in dismantling those policies and systems? How are we acting as gatekeepers to public land and land in general? How can we work actively to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have access to and feel welcome on our trails, beaches, parks? How can we ensure that farmers of color have access to farmland in our community? And how can we lift up the stories and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color on the land and in our community so that we all feel seen, heard, and celebrated for who we are?

From Learning to Action

You may have read about the learning journey we have undertaken, and you may have joined us for one of our Winter Wednesday events with the Worthen Library. I feel incredibly grateful to our speakers and panelists, who so generously and bravely shared their stories and experiences with us—both the beautiful and the hard. While we still have a lot to learn as a

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“Food and farming are intricately connected to issues of racial justice and cultural awareness. Helping students understand those connections is an invaluable educational endeavor.”

*- Trevor Lowell
Farm to Institution Program Manager
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets*

SOUTH HERO



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

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

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

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Welcome to Eileen!



Hi!

My name is Eileen Fitzgerald and I am serving with South Hero Land Trust as their first AmeriCorps member this year through the Vermont Conservation and Housing Board. As the new Community Conservation Coordinator, I will help organize and expand SHLT's community-based programs and events such as Winter Wednesdays with the Worthen Library, environmental education and garden programs with Folsom School, and the Grow for a Neighbor Program, to name a few.

In 2020 I graduated from Siena College with a degree in environmental and conservation science. In school I researched a range of topics from wetland ecology to food justice, so serving with SHLT is a great opportunity to be exposed to the wide and variable nature of real-world conservation. I moved to Vermont this summer from my hometown in Western Massachusetts for a field ecology internship with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies.

Since then, I have fallen in love with the area and made the decision to live and work in the state. In my free time you can find me hiking or biking when weather allows, and crocheting or snowshoeing when it does not (and caring for my pet gecko and several plants regardless of the weather). I am passionate about the intersections of ecological conservation, community vibrancy, and social justice, and I am excited to work with the unique and growing community of South Hero to facilitate events and programs.

Please feel free to reach to me if you want to learn more about me or the work I'll be doing at South Hero Land Trust! My email is eileen@shlt.org.

Sincerely,

Eileen Fitzgerald
AmeriCorps Community Conservation Coordinator

white-led organization, we are also committed to taking action. This is why we are thrilled to have received funding from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets for a two year project with Folsom Educational and Community Center.

The focus of this project is exploring the integration of anti-racist education with our Farm to School and nature-based programs at the school. Using the lenses of storytelling, art, music, agriculture, food, and land stewardship, students and teachers will engage with the stories and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Vermont.

Additionally, we will be assessing and overhauling our own library of resources and farm to school lesson plans, field trip outlines, garden lessons, service projects, etc. to include voices and perspectives of BIPOC in our communities.

On the path towards healing

One way we have already begun this work is through participating in the Abenaki Land Link Project, a partnership between the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation, and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT). The project started in 2020 when 15 Vermont growers were given seeds of traditional Abenaki crop varieties such as Algonquin squash, Calias flint corn, true cranberry, skunk and Mohawk beans, among others. Each partner grew and harvested their crops, then returned them to the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation. They in turn distribute it to Abenaki tribal members, especially to elders, those with disabilities, and those who are food insecure. They also collecting the seeds, to ensure these varieties don't go extinct.

In 2021, the project now has 40 growers, including South Hero Land Trust/Folsom School. This spring, Folsom students in the 3rd and 4th grade sowed a packet of true Abenaki cranberry beans, while also learning about the history and importance of these and other traditional foods.

During a recent event organized by NOFA to celebrate the 2nd year of the project, Chief Don Stevens of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation addressed the crowd, saying he doesn't view this project as a charity, but a way to reconcile the past injustices done to the Abenaki and other native peoples, who have survived despite wars, disease, theft of land, familial separation, and the eugenics movement. He then told the story of how the first European settlers were starving, until the Wampanoag taught them how to grow native crops such as corn, beans, and squash. So, this project, explained Chief Don, is a way for the descendants of the settlers to show gratitude for that gift, and start the process of reconciliation.



Students in the fall SHLT afterschool club taste ground cherries, another Abenaki food, for the first time.



Students harvest True Abenaki Cranberry Beans grown at the Folsom Learning Garden

In the first week of October, students came back to the Folsom Learning Garden to harvest two large buckets of beans they'd planted earlier this year, dried and ready to give back to the Abenaki people. Now, just as these crops will nourish Abenaki people through the winter, they will also provide a gateway to help us begin this process of healing through education, connection, and partnership with the Black, Indigenous and People of Color who have been too often left out of the story of food and farms in Vermont.

We are looking forward to more to come! Those curious to learn more about the Vision Grant or the Abenaki Land Link project can visit the web version of this article at www.shlt.org/news.

Let's Read Together!

Exploring Stories, Nature & Community at the Recreation Park

Looking for a new way to explore the outdoors as a family in South Hero? Take a walk at the South Hero Rec Park behind Folsom, and read a book as you go!

This summer South Hero Land Trust and the Worthen Library launched a new, permanent Storywalk® with the South Hero Recreation Commission. Every few months we will be posting new books featuring stories, multi-lingual activities and literacy tips.

The inaugural book is "The Hike" by Allison Farrell, a story about a group of kids and the adventures they have along an epic hike together in the woods. The book is great for young readers, but also has fun plant ID and other ecological tidbits for older kids and adults to enjoy as well.

Unfortunately, as you may have heard, the first version of the book was stolen! Thankfully, the signs themselves were not damaged, and thanks to the generosity of two SHLT board members, we were able to get a new copy of the book installed at the park quickly.



A young reader visits the storywalk during the grand opening in August

Folsom Students Give Back



Students gleaning produce at Pomykala Farm

This September SHLT organized the 4th annual Fall Day of Service with the Folsom middle school students. During the event over 75 students in grades 5-8 helped out across South Hero and Grand Isle.

One group went gleaning at Pomykala Farm, another helped at the Worthen Library. Two groups did projects to maintain local public trails, and the last group harvested produce at the Folsom learning Garden to be donated to local food shelves.

Later in the month, SHLT staff and Grand Isle County Forester Nancy Patch led hikes with students to Stowe Pinnacle and Mt Philo as part of the back-to-school activities.

"Thank you for organizing a fun and productive morning for Folsom middle school students! We appreciate being part of this generous and supportive community."

*Julie Pidgeon
5-8 Language Arts Teacher*

Thank you Garlic Mustard Volunteers!



Garlic mustard is best to eat in the spring, before it blooms.

Once again, South Hero Land Trust partnered with Lake Champlain Land Trust to coordinate efforts to remove the edible, yet invasive, garlic mustard along conserved trails in South Hero.

Earlier this spring twenty-one volunteers spent over 40 hours pulling garlic mustard at the Landon Community Tracy and in Tracy Woods, collecting 17 garbage bags in total!

One group of volunteers even took it a step further: the brewers from Kraemer & Kin Brewery in North Hero removed garlic mustard at Tracy Woods, while harvesting some to brew with, a very creative use of an invasive species! For a limited time they had a “garlic mustard saison” available for sale.

Looking to next year, SHLT and LCLT are coordinating how to best address the growing populations of garlic mustard across South Hero’s natural areas.

Research out of Cornell University suggests that long-term pulling of garlic mustard is not as effective as once thought. But interestingly, in areas where deer were excluded, garlic mustard infestations were much less vigorous, and tended to fade away sooner. This is perhaps because deer tend to avoid eating garlic mustard, instead going after native understory plants and tree seedlings, thereby allowing garlic mustard to flourish.

Despite this new research, we will most likely continue to organize garlic mustard removal, at the very least to protect native wildflower populations along the trails. But, we are keeping a close eye on new research, and we are talking with local experts and landowners about alternative solutions. So stay tuned!

Introducing the Trees of South Hero Geocaching Adventure!



This year, South Hero Land Trust partnered with the South Hero Historical Society and the Worthen Library to debut a fun new way for kids and families to explore natural areas across South Hero, in the form of a geocaching adventure series!

Scattered across town is a series of 4 secret caches. Each geocache is made up of a small box hidden near a particular kind of native tree.

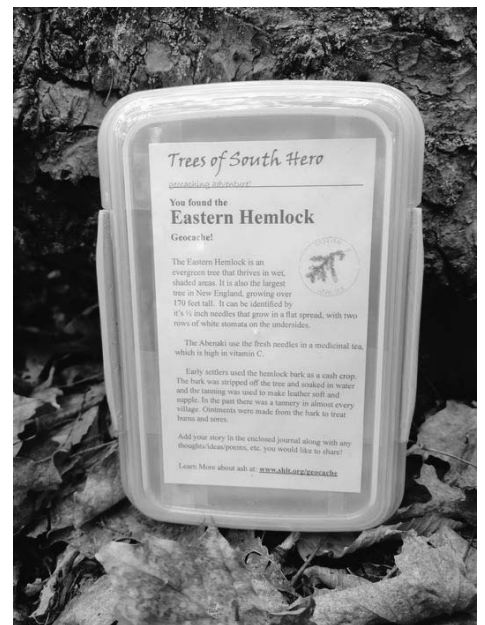


The series can be completed using the app found at geocaching.com, or old-school using pen, paper, and some clever thinking. Each cache also features free stickers designed by our ED Emily Alger!



To get started, all you have to do is visit shlt.org/geocache and download the instructions, or pick up a print copy at the Worthen Library.

Happy geocaching!



The Hemlock Geocache is waiting to be found!

Ensuring a Future for Ash Trees

Before the changing of the seasons stripped the ash trees of South Hero of their foliage, SHLT staff completed their annual survey of the lingering ash monitoring plot at the conserved Tracy Woods.

Over the course of a sunny afternoon, Eileen and Guy visited each of the 40 ash trees in the plot (mostly green and black ash), checking each one for defoliation, flaking bark, d-shaped exit holes, and shoots around the trunk, all signs that the invasive emerald ash borer (EAB) might be present.

The emerald ash borer has already killed more than 25 million ash trees in the Midwest, and is predicted to wipe out over 95% of ash trees across the state.

One of hundreds across the Northeast, this plot is part of a citizen science initiative called Monitoring and Managing Ash (MaMA), developed and directed by the regional Ecological Research Institute (ERI), and coordinated locally by Vermont Land Trust Staff Ecologist Allaire Diamond.



SHLT Staff Guy Maguire examines a black ash tree at Tracy Woods

Using lessons learned from past efforts to restore the American Chestnut and American Elm, two trees also decimated by invasive species in the past century, this project was created to monitor for “lingering” ash trees which will survive the coming devastation and can be used to help repopulate ash. Research led by the USDA Forest Service has shown that selective breeding of lingering ash trees from twig samples may produce EAB resistant ash after two generations.

We are excited to play a role in this compelling research, and be part of effort to protect and eventual restore ash trees. Grand Isle County Forester Nancy Patch estimates that upwards of 40% of all trees in the Islands are ash. Also, black ash is a culturally significant tree for the Abenaki people, who consider it a sacred tree. The Abenaki, and other first nations use black ash extensively as a source of materials for making baskets.



Still shot from a video we created in collaboration with the Grand Isle County Natural Resources Conservation District about EAB, available on our youtube page.

We all play a role

In the meantime, slowing the spread of EAB is vital--and we can all help:

- 1) Don't move firewood! EAB can only fly 1-2 miles per year. The main way it spreads is through infected wood being carried to new areas.
- 2) Learn to identify ash trees and signs of EAB. Visit vtinvasives.org for more info.
- 3) Get involved with the Grand Isle County Emerald Ash Borer Task Force. Email guy@shlt.org to learn more.

PLUS: Check out the [SHLT YouTube Channel](#) for a video we made on EAB!

Fighting Hunger Takes A Community

From visiting or living in cities, most of us are familiar with the sight of people going hungry. Whether a line of people at a soup kitchen or a homeless encampment, food insecurity in urban areas is often hard to miss. However, hunger impacts people in rural areas just as much, or more than in urban ones. The difference is that the effects are dispersed, often out of sight, and largely invisible to the general population. Add to that the cultural stigma of being poor, and oftentimes, you may not even know when a friend or neighbor is having a difficult time.

At the low end of estimates, according to FeedingAmerica.org, about 7.9 percent, or 550 individuals, are food insecure in Grand Isle County. Of those, only about 50% are eligible for federal assistance, leaving a large gap in services. On the higher end, according to the Vermont Agency of Education 2019 Child Nutrition Programs Annual Statistical Report, as much as 49% of students in the county are considered low income (below 130% of the federal poverty level), and eligible for free and reduced price school meals.

Fortunately, there are many church groups, nonprofits and individuals who are working together to address hunger in the Islands. These include C.I.D.E.R's meals program for seniors, Food For Thought's summer meal program for kids and families, the Grand Isle Food Shelf, and the food shelf at Islands in the Sun in Alburgh, to name a few. Not to mention all the local farmers, residents and gardeners who are involved.

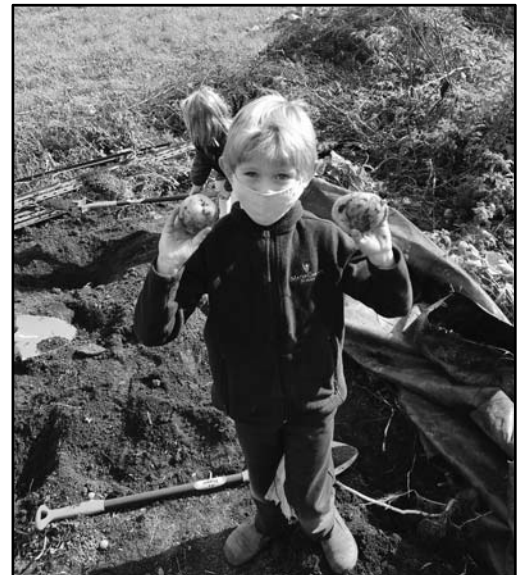
As Peter Jenkins, the Gleaning Coordinator at Healthy Roots Collaborative (HRC), says: "Hunger is a problem everywhere, including in GIC." During the growing season, Peter works with farmers and volunteers to get produce to local food shelves. He continues: "We have such a vibrant local food system here in the Islands, but not everyone is able to participate in and benefit from it. Gleaning and donating the fresh produce to a local food shelf is another part of the local food system that includes even more people."

Stepping Up to Pandemic-era Challenges

While SHLT has been involved with food access efforts as part of our Farm Initiative for years, the onset of the pandemic and the resulting increase in joblessness and hunger spurred us to step up our efforts. Through our "grow for your neighbor" program, we support home gardeners to grow a little extra for those in need, use donations to purchase food from farmers that go to food shelves, and more.



Boxes of produce headed to the Grand Isle Food Shelf



Volunteers harvesting potatoes at the food shelf garden

We also are partnering more often with Peter on his gleaning projects. In 2020 we helped launch a collective food-shelf garden with a group of local residents, located on the conserved Health Hero Farm. This site has grown into a big project in year 2, and we invite anyone who wants to lend a hand to join us in the harvest!

One of the main recipients of our food programs during the summer is Food For Thought, run by Kaight Altoff and based at the South Hero Congregational Church. According to Kaight: "Each time children come and they look through the boxes of food and get excited about strawberries or cheese or when they connect an item we give them to a recipe their mom makes, I just love that!"

With thanks to Kaight, Peter, and everyone who is raising awareness and working to end hunger in the Islands, we invite you to get involved too! Reach out to info@shlt.org, and/or visit shlt.org/grow-for-a-neighbor to learn more.

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER



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Shop Locally for the Holidays at the Champlain Islands Farmers' Market!

Winter Markets Inside The Congregational Church
24 South Street, South Hero, VT

10 to 2pm. Nov 6th & 20th and Dec 4th & 18th

Get the latest information at
www.champlainislandsfarmersmarket.org