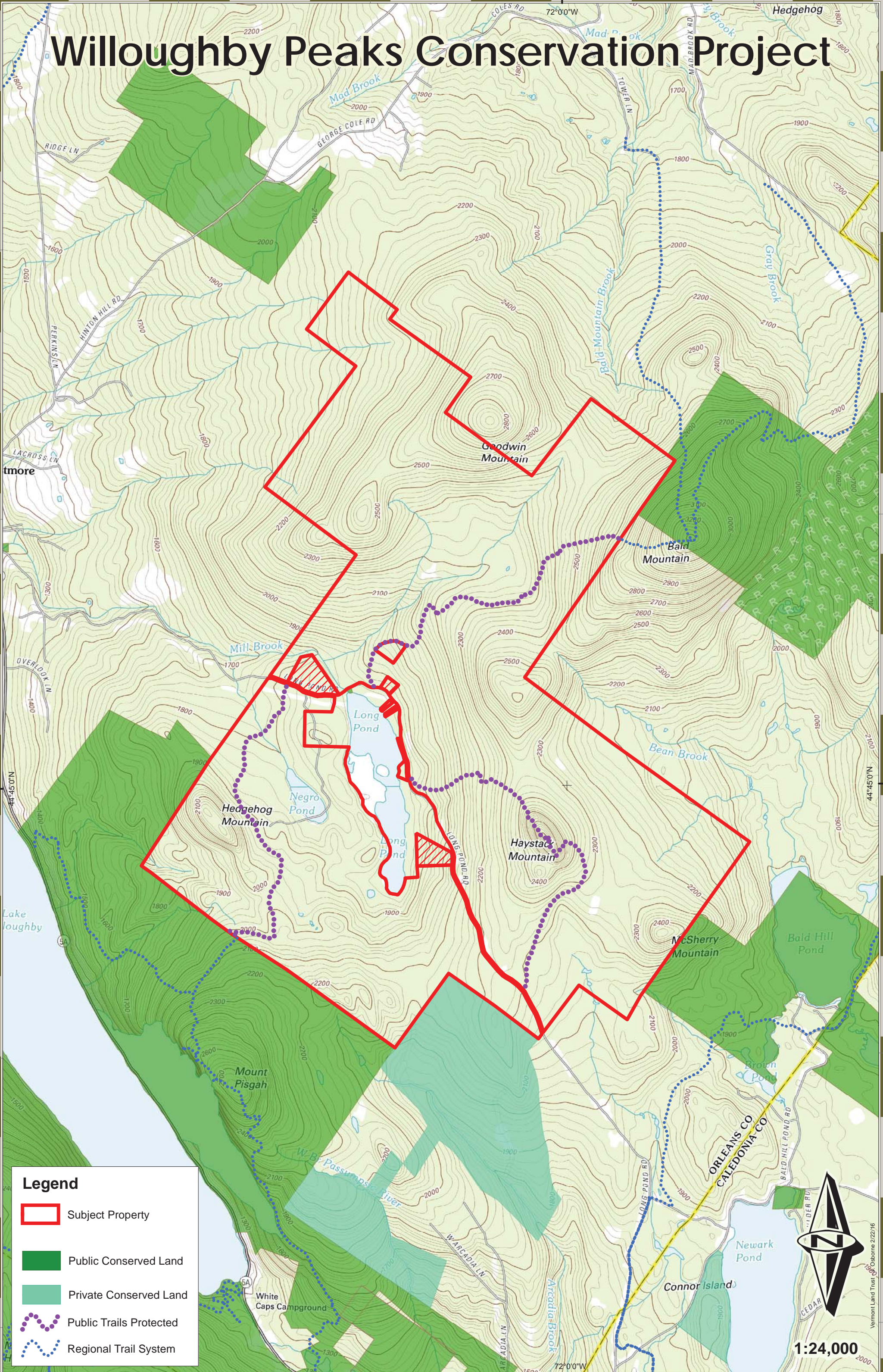






Willoughby Peaks Conservation Project



Legend

-  Subject Property
-  Public Conserved Land
-  Private Conserved Land
-  Public Trails Protected
-  Regional Trail System



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Vermont Land Trust 2/22/16

Nearly 3,000 Acres Conserved In Westmore

By AMY KOLB NOYES · NOV 7, 2015



Haystack Mountain, which is part of a recently conserved tract of forestland in Westmore, is shown here as a backdrop to Lake Willoughby. Amy Kolb Noyes / VPR

Some popular hiking trails in the Northeast Kingdom are now protected, thanks to a land conservation effort that's been years in the making.

If you've hiked Haystack Mountain, in Westmore, any time in the past quarter century, then you've walked on land belonging to Vince and Louisa Dotoli. You may have even seen the Dotolis, who spend a lot of time out on the land as well.

"We take a hike 365 days a year, every morning, said Vince Dotoli." The Dotolis recently worked with the Vermont Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy to secure a conservation easement on the property they have been allowing the public to enjoy for decades.

Louisa Dotoli says she and her husband know their property is special, and should be conserved.

"We looked for over 20 years for a very unique and beautiful property and found this one in Westmore, in the Northeast Kingdom," she explained. "We've lived here for, I guess, part-time

and full-time, close to 27 years, and enjoyed it. We've kept the trails open while we owned it and we're looking forward to this as an opportunity to keep them open."



*There are two trails up Haystack Mountain, both of which are entirely on the Dotolis' property.
Credit Amy Kolb Noyes / VPR*

Public recreation is just one of several reasons conservation groups and the state sought a conservation easement for the Dotoli's property. It's also a working forest and sensitive wildlife habitat.

"The property that we've just conserved is just under 3,000 acres," said Vermont Land Trust Conservation Director Tracy Zschau. "It includes five peaks over 2,000 feet in elevation. It includes significant frontage on Long Pond, the entirety of another small pond called Mud Pond on the property, eight miles of cold water stream frontage that form the headwaters of the Willoughby, the Clyde and the Passumpsic rivers."

Zschau says the property is significant for its own right, and it also sits within what is now a 15,000-acre block of unfragmented conserved forestland. The protected block of land is a combination of public forestland, Willoughby State Forest, Bald Mountain Wildlife Management Area, and other private conservation lands.

John Binhammer, Director of Land Protection at The Nature Conservancy, says it is important to conserve large tracts of forestland like this one.

"It's in a wildlife corridor that we've identified with our partners where wildlife is able to move ... basically from the wilds of Maine all the way to the Adirondacks," Binhammer said of the

Dotolis' property. "This is a critical piece of that wildlife corridor ... It also has just an amazing variety of habitats, from the low elevation down by the pond here to high elevation land, spruce fur forests, just a wide variety and diversity."



Louisa and Vince Dotoli flank John Binhammer, of The Nature Conservancy and Tracy Zschau of the Vermont Land Trust. They have been working together for almost three years to put together a conservation easement for the Dotoli's land in Westmore.. Credit Amy Kolb Noyes / VPR

The Dotolis still own the property, but now the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board hold a working-forest conservation easement. Tracy Zschau, of the Vermont Land Trust, explains how that type of legal document works.

"It sets forth restrictions that bind the deed going forward," said Zschau. "So, the property stays in private ownership. It can be bought and sold like other land. But there are restrictions that stay with the deed as the land passes hands."

And, Zschau explains, that means protection in perpetuity for important wildlife habitat and four popular hiking trails that the Dotolis have kept open to the public.

"So, they had been used by the public at the landowner's discretion, but at any point could have been closed down," Zschau said of the trails. "They're trails that are really iconic in the region. People come from further away around the state to hike them – trails up Bald Mountain,

Haystack Mountain and also Pisgah. And now, as part of the conservation easement, perpetual public access is ensured to those trails."



The Dotolis have worked with NorthWoods Stewardship Center to keep the trails on their property accessible to the public. A new conservation easement ensures that arrangement into the future. Credit Amy Kolb Noyes / VPR

John Binhammer explains, this particular conservation easement is something that's been on the radar for some time.

"Both we, the Nature Conservancy, and the state have been looking at this property for over 30 years," said Binhammer. "...But we're very pleased to work with our partners, the Vermont Land Trust and the Dotolis, to conserve the property for future generations. And keep it working forest but also have trails open for public use."

The Dotolis say they're happy with the arrangement too. Now they can take their daily hikes knowing generations to come will enjoy the land just as they do today.

NEARLY 3,000 ACRES OF FORESTLAND PROTECTED IN WESTMORE

Vermont Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy protect notable Recreational and Natural Resource

WESTMORE— An exceptional opportunity to protect 2,965 acres of forestland surrounding Long Pond, in an area designated as a National Natural Landmark, came to fruition with the conservation of a property owned by Vincent and Louisa Dotoli, the Vermont Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy recently announced.

This parcel joins Willoughby State Forest, Bald Hill Wildlife Management Area, private conservation land, and stretches of the broader northern forest that connects the U.S. and Canada. It has more than a mile of undeveloped frontage on 90-acre Long Pond and the entirety of 13-acre Mud Pond, along with popular hiking trails to Bald Mountain, Mount Pisgah and Haystack Mountain.

“In these times when the health of our forests is threatened, we are delighted by the opportunity to protect the Dotolis’ land,” said Gil Livingston, president of the Vermont Land Trust. “Conserving this spectacular forest will protect water quality, and ensure sustainable forest management, wildlife habitat connectivity and public access to an important trail network. It is a homerun for Vermont’s effort to protect important forestland. We sincerely thank the Dotoli family and The Nature Conservancy for joining us in fulfilling our shared vision for a large, healthy working forest—serving our economy, en-

joyed by our citizens, and supporting the resilience of our wildlife for generations to come.”

This forestland has been recognized for its excellent ecological assets. The property is located within a cross-border region that is a conservation priority for Two Countries One Forest, the Open Space Institute, the Staying Connected Initiative, and Corridor Appalachian.

The property includes more than eight miles of frontage on 22 streams that form the headwaters of the Willoughby, Passumpsic, and Clyde Rivers — all located within the international Memphremagog watershed. Protecting these waterways secures the natural drainage system of the land and its water quality.

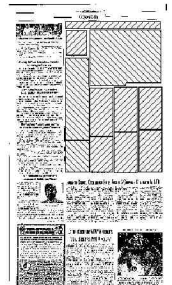
The land has five summits and many smaller knobs that are above 2000 feet in elevation. These provide stepping stones of montane and boreal habitat — features that are threatened by climate change — in close proximity. The property will become a part of a protected block of land that now totals more than 15,000 acres, making it well suited for migrating large mammals.

“The interconnectedness of our forests is essential for wildlife to meet their life needs,” states Heather Furman, Vermont State Director of The Nature Conservancy. “TNC’s science identifies critical wildlife corridors like the ones

found on the Dotoli parcel, used by moose, bear, otter, fisher cat and lynx. This conservation success celebrates intact forests and their multiple benefits such as improved water and air quality, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat protection. We are grateful to the Dotoli family for their vision and proud to help secure these values for future generations of Vermonters.”

The Dotolis have owned the land since the late 1980s. As a result of their excellent stewardship, the property has a good network of logging roads and forestry-access trails. With the conservation easement in place, the Dotolis will continue to own and manage the property.

The Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board now co-hold a working-forest conservation easement, with an executory interest held by The Nature Conservancy. The land is subject to a forest management plan and is enrolled in the Current Use program. Conservation ensures that the land will not be subdivided into small parcels or developed—pressures that are contributing to a decline in Vermont forests for the first time in a century. This forestland forms scenic backdrop from many vantage points around Willoughby Lake and Long Pond. The Dotolis have allowed hiking trails that both originate on, and pass through, their



property. These trails provide access to popular peaks including Bald Mountain, Haystack Mountain, and Mt. Pisgah, the summit of which is located in Willoughby State Forest. The conservation easement ensures public access in perpetuity, along with formal management and protection for these trails.

"This is an incredible opportunity to conserve a part of one of Vermont's most scenic mountain environments," said Luke O'Brien, development and trails director at North Woods Stewardship Center in Charleston. "The Dotolis have been excellent land stewards and this project ensures that these mountains and trails are conserved in perpetuity."

"This property has long been identified as a conservation priority in the region," said VLT's Tracy Zschau. "I greatly appreciate the Dotoli's long-term stewardship of this forestland and their decision to make that permanent through a conservation easement,"

Conservation was made possible by grants from the Open Space Institute's Transborder Fund, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's New England Forests and Rivers Fund, and private donors. Both the Vermont Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy contributed conservation funds held by the organizations, restricted for the protection of exceptional forestland.

"Undeveloped forestland near the US-Canadian border provides essential livelihoods and wildlife habitat," said Jennifer Melville, Vice President of the Open Space Institute and head of its Transborder Fund. "Conserving lands today is critical to filter drinking water, purify air and harbor wildlife under the changing climate of tomorrow." Open Space Institute is managing the Northern Forest Transborder Protection Fund, a \$3.15 million fund established to protect the ecologically significant forested landscapes in the Northern Appalachian/Acadian eco-region, an 80 million acre region spanning the eastern edge of North America and the boundaries of the United States and Canada.

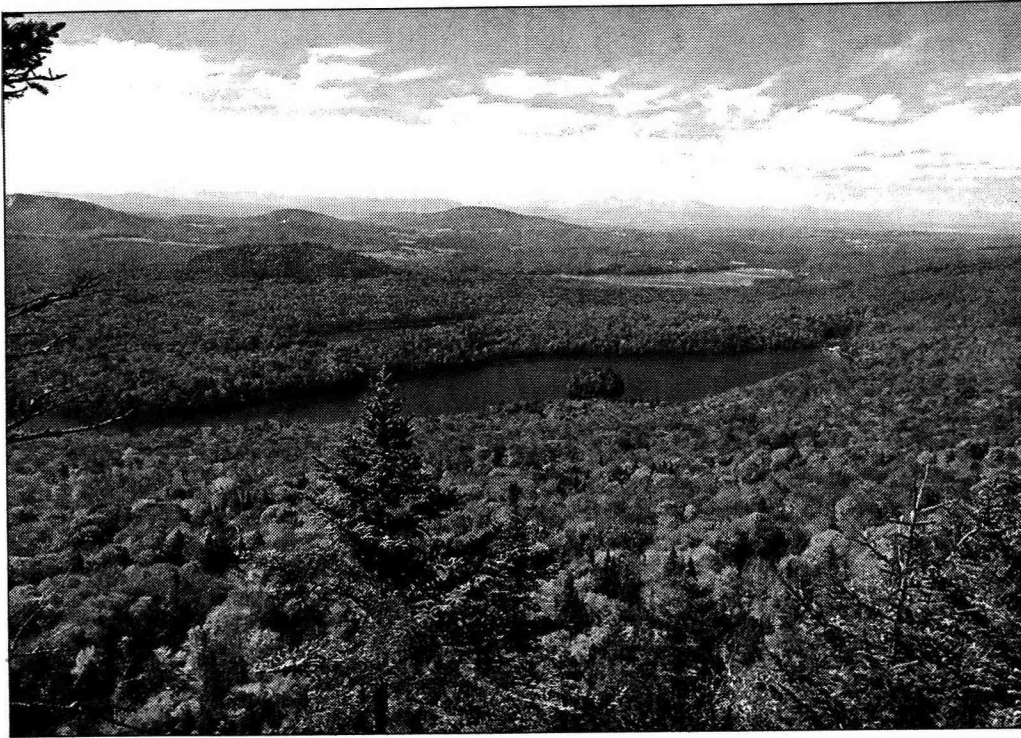


PHOTO CREDIT COURTESY OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY.

Views from Haystack Mountain to Long Pond