

# Community Conservation SPOTLIGHT



## Inspiring Youth Beyond School...

The Bluegrass Land Conservancy\* hosts free programs for kids and families throughout the year to explore farms and natural areas. "These programs are important to our work of building a love of the land," explains Jessie Wilder, executive director.

The first twelve years of a child's life has been documented to be critical for their educational success, development of empathy, long-term health and social skills.

Success as young adults is linked to a strong sense of self, supportive mentors and employment opportunities that provide living wages as well as life skills. Combine that with research documenting that kids lead evermore indoor and sedentary lifestyles and we have a clear case to invest in our youth using nature and the outdoors as a tool to change lives.

Land trusts, as this *Spotlight* depicts, are finding ways to combine joy, learning and connections to people to create healthier and more equitable communities. For many, it's part of their mission to ensure that their lands and waters are conserved and cherished in perpetuity.



# Year-Round After-School Programs, K–12

## Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust\*—MA

The Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust is an urban land trust operating in the City of Lowell. In 2005 it initiated an after-school program offering one program one afternoon a week. They now offer three to four after-school programs weekly, or twice weekly, in four locations across eight different schools, for grades K–12.

The educational programs are primarily funded through 21st Century federal funding to the local public schools, supplemented by additional grants. They offer the programs in partnership with Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, with each partner providing a teacher-naturalist for every program. Programs use nearby school grounds or canals, rivers and parks, in addition to land trust properties.

"This is a critical way we can add high-value programming to our community that complements our conservation work," explains Jane Calvin, executive director.

- Partners: Teachers, parents, community leaders, volunteers and students, Lowell Public Schools, Mass Audubon
- Staff: 4 FTE, all involved in programming
- [lowelllandtrust.org](http://lowelllandtrust.org)

## Vinalhaven Land Trust\*—ME

In partnership with another non-profit, offers a weekly after school enrichment program for elementary students at the local school with two programs: Grades K–2 and Grades 3–5. Each meets one afternoon a week for 32 weeks during the school year.

The program provides place-based learning activities in fields such as nature and the environment, creating with the arts, healthy living, community service, technology and problem solving all while having fun.

- Partner: Local elementary school
- Staff: 2.5 FTE
- [vinalhavenlandtrust.org](http://vinalhavenlandtrust.org)



Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust



Vinalhaven Land Trust

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# Healing from Domestic Violence

## Kaniksu Land Trust\* — ID & MT

For an organization dedicated to land protection and restoration, it was both a new language and a new way of thinking. “What I mean by this ‘new way of thinking,’” says Executive Director Eric Grace, “is that we’ve now committed to providing access to nature and open space to all members of our community, especially to those who may not already be realizing the benefits to health, education and quality of life that open space provides. Simply put, we’re elevating the importance of conservation for all people.”

Jennifer Plummer, executive director of Kinderhaven, explains that Kinderhaven is more than a domestic violence shelter. It serves children of domestic violence and works within a therapeutic framework. “We don’t just provide the necessities. Our program focuses on genuine, healthy and loving relationships between our staff and the children because healthy relationships have the power to transform their lives, to repave emotional pathways marred by abuse and neglect. We help them work through the trauma with love, routine and consistency.”

Together, Kaniksu and Kinderhaven created a series of outings that were two hours per week, for eight weeks over the summer; extended over the school year. They blended fun with learning, alternating nature hikes (bird watching, collecting leaves, studying plants) with farm visits (gathering eggs, picking sunflowers, grooming horses, harvesting garlic) and included a trip to the farmers market to learn about meal planning.

- Partners: Kinderhaven kids, organization leadership and staff
- Staff: 4.25 FTE | 1 FTE land protection specialist for program
- [kaniksulandtrust.org](http://kaniksulandtrust.org)



**“Sometimes you have to step outside the metrics and quantitative data and just go with what seems right. Using our land conservation expertise to change kids’ lives feels right.”**

— Eric Grace, Kaniksu Land Trust Executive Director



# Rural and Urban Connections

## Monadnock Conservancy\*—NH

Created in partnership with the farm manager of local CSA and with the support of several social services agencies, the Kids Connect! program provides disadvantaged youth ages 8 to 13—most with behavioral or mental health issues—a chance to get outside onto a conserved farm two times per week for six weeks, late afternoons.

The free program promotes self-esteem, teamwork, play and healthy living by connecting children to the joys of growing, and eating, local food.

- Partners: parents, students, volunteers, farm staff and referral agencies
- Staff: 1 PTE, 2 seasonal, 5 volunteers for program
- [monadnockconservancy.org](http://monadnockconservancy.org)

## Damariscotta River Association\*—ME

Camp for kids ages 5 to 19 during school breaks and the summer to connect kids to the land, river and wildlife.

Uses a multidisciplinary approach to serve kids from a variety of economic backgrounds; provides scholarships.

- Staff: 7 FTE | 1 FTE, 3 seasonal FTE, 1 two-week specialist
- [damariscottariver.org](http://damariscottariver.org)

**“Our land trust is seen as an important part of our community in large part because of our youth programs.”**

— Steven Hufnagel, Damariscotta River Association Executive Director





# Leadership, Employment Skills

## Conserving Carolina\*—NC

Conserving Carolina hosts a Summer of Service program for community members ages 17 to 19 interested in trying something new and learning more about oneself and the environmental fields of study and work.

The bulk of the program runs from June–August with 30- to 40-hour weeks paid on an hourly basis. The program is designed to build confidence, trust, teamwork, environmental and service-oriented ethics, and to introduce participants to educational and career paths they may not have otherwise considered.

Projects include land restoration, natural area playground improvements, trail building and maintenance and invasive plant removal. Fun activities are designed to inspire a love of land and water and build self-confidence with overnight backpacking, hiking and swimming in streams and lakes and day trips to other natural areas and parks.

- Partner: AmeriCorps
- Staff: 13 FTE, 3 AmeriCorps | 1 FTE, 3 AmeriCorps for program
- [conservingcarolina.org](http://conservingcarolina.org)

## Groundswell Conservancy\*—WI

Groundswell Conservancy partners with Operation Fresh Start to provide job training and on-the-land conservation education for at-risk youth ages 16 to 24. The youth crews improve wildlife habitat and build fishing platforms, trails and other visitor amenities at nature preserves and parks.

Construction projects, such as a wildlife viewing platform in the shape of a bird, bring math and learning to life. The partnership employs the youth crews for weeklong periods at various times throughout the year.

- Partners: Operation Fresh Start, Patrick Marsh Conservancy, local foundations, civic organizations
- Staff: 6 FTE, plus volunteers
- [groundswellwisconsin.org](http://groundswellwisconsin.org)





# Farming, Wildlife Camps and Field Trips

## Agricultural Stewardship Association\* — NY

The Agricultural Stewardship Association teamed up with local organizations, including The Arts Center, to offer a unique program to middle school students during the summer for a weeklong day camp program focused on farming, food and photography. Kids explored, tasted and photographed food and animals from local farms, discussed where their food comes from and prepared farm-to-table meals using local produce, dairy and meats.

As part of the program, the campers document their time on the farms and in the kitchen through photography; then edit their photographs at The Art Center's state-of-the-art Digital Art Studio and blog daily.

Campers come away with a portfolio of photographs, recipes and an appreciation for the role that local farms play in our lives and in what we eat.

- Partners: The Arts Center
- Staff: 5 FTE, 3 PTE | 1 seasonal staff delivering program (120 hrs), 1 overseeing program (20 hours) and 1 summer intern (80 hrs)
- [agstewardship.org](http://agstewardship.org)

## Boothbay Region Land Trust\* — ME

"Babes in the Woods" meets once a month throughout the year providing age-appropriate games, crafts, stories and other activities that connect participants to the natural world.

Team leaders put a special emphasis on sensory exploration of ecological themes, usually including a short and easy walk.

- Partners: Children 2 to 5 and their caregivers
- Staff: 5 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- [bbrlt.org](http://bbrlt.org)



Agricultural Stewardship Association



Boothbay Region Land Trust



## Sequoia Riverlands Trust\*—CA

Students learn about the importance of their community in the Central Valley of California. Outdoor education programs supplement educational curriculum with hands-on understanding, transforming learning into an unforgettable experience.

- Partners: Students in grades K–12, ecology clubs and adults
- Staff: 11 FTE | 3 for programs
- [sequoiariverlands.org](http://sequoiariverlands.org)

## Kaniksu Land Trust\* — ID & MT

A nature-based summer camp offers full scholarships, as needed, so any child can participate. The program provides free lunch to all campers and works with the local food bank to contribute healthy snacks. Approximately half of participants (80 children in 2018) have taken advantage of the scholarship.

- Partners: USDA Summer Meals, Food Bank, Social Service groups, volunteers
- Staff: 4.25 FTE | 1 for program
- [kaniksulandtrust.org](http://kaniksulandtrust.org)



**“I think this has been the best week of my life and I’m not just saying that to make you feel good.”**

— Sadie, Camp Kaniksu



# Six Tips for Inspiring Youth Beyond Schools

- 1. Talk to parents and organizations in your community.** Ask them what they are working on or what they need to enrich the lives of youth.
- 2. Brainstorm what kinds of programs would be helpful.** Resist the temptation to develop “educational” programs: There are many ways to enrich lives with conservation. Work to understand where these kids are coming from and what issues/needs they have. What challenges are they facing in their lives that conservation could help with?
- 3. Consider who might be needed to create a program that is interesting, fun and effective.** Is this a program that could be run by volunteers? Might seasonal or year-round staffing help? What are the expectations of your partnering organization? How might parents be involved?
- 4. Consider the safety of kids.** Where will you bring them? Who will have contact with them and what will their training and screening be? What insurance will you need? How can you ensure the children have a fun experience with safety in mind?
- 5. What would the parents, or partner organization, consider to be a successful experience or program?** How might you gauge what you feel is success? Consider creating a pilot program to learn as you go.
- 6. What funding do you need, who might fund it?** Often these are very low-cost programs yet there will be some costs affiliated with them, such as insurance, food/snacks, transportation, possible equipment or supplies, etc.

## Interested in other tips, examples, and suggestions?

Go to the Land Trust Alliance's website at [www.lta.org/community-conservation](http://www.lta.org/community-conservation)

**Do you have a program or project to spotlight? Email [communityconservation@lta.org](mailto:communityconservation@lta.org)**

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**“If ‘environment’ is going to receive more than 3% of annual charitable giving, we have to serve our communities better.”**

— Carol Abrahamzon, Mississippi Valley Conservancy Executive Director



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## Join the conversation

Community Conservation Learning Network forum on the Learning Center  
<https://tlc.lta.org/CCLNforum>

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\*Denotes accredited land trust. See [landtrustaccreditation.org](http://landtrustaccreditation.org)