

# Community Conservation SPOTLIGHT



## Partnering with Schools...

Across the country, land trusts, like Lake Forest Open Lands Association, are focusing on the next generation, providing land, programs, support and funding to enrich the educational experiences and lives of youth in their communities.

Numerous studies document that time outdoors is critical for the health and well-being of a child. Increasing green space and outdoor experiences is now well documented in better health, increased focus and academic success, and lowering rates of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Yet across the country, children are spending less time in play and engaging in the wonder of farms and nature. This *Spotlight* provides examples of how land trusts are working with schools to create healthy communities and a long-term conservation ethic. Whether it's convening organizations to get kids outside, offering educational programs on their lands, acquiring land close to schools or implementing other programs, land trusts are making a difference now that will last for years to come.



# Creating a Culture of Caring

## Little Traverse Conservancy — MI

For nearly 30 years, the Little Traverse Conservancy (LTC) has offered programs and activities on their lands, as well as in the classroom, to foster a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural environment.

Annual reach of their program averages more than 4,500 children from over 270 school groups to help them appreciate nature and learn about the outdoors in the outdoors. In addition to the students, hundreds of parents and teachers attend and assist with the activities.

“I find it essential in today’s society to get our kids outdoors. Many of my students do not have opportunities nor take the opportunity to appreciate nature. By building in time with LTC, I not only am able to meet several state standards, but allow my students to discover and learn in a way they may have never imagined,” explains Christie Meyer, teacher at Concord Academy Boyne and a partner with Little Traverse Conservancy.

- Partners: Approximately 50 schools, public and nontraditional, homeschool groups and scout troops, parents and volunteers
- Staff: 15 FTE | 1 FTE plus 2 seasonal staff dedicated to education
- [landtrust.org](http://landtrust.org)

**“Education is not  
the filling of a pail,  
but the lighting  
of a fire.”**

— William Butler Yeats





## Kennebunkport Conservation Trust — ME

Kennebunkport Conservation Trust (KCT) has provided field trips for the local elementary school for 10 years. Each grade adopts a different land trust property, learning its unique environmental and historical landscape during visits two to three times a year.

KCT expanded it to include other elementary schools in the area, summer camps for middle schoolers, high school programming for the Alternative Education Class, and even college studies.

- Partners: University of New England, environmental science teachers at the local elementary, middle and high schools, summer camps, volunteers
- Staff: 3 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- [kporttrust.org](http://kporttrust.org)

**“Our community supports our land trust in large part because of these programs; our financial resilience is linked to our educational programs.”**

— Tom Bradbury, KCT Executive Director

## Sycamore Land Trust — IN

Sycamore Land Trust believes that building an appreciation for nature is critical to its mission of protecting land and to creating a healthier Hoosier landscape.

The land trust's 16 public nature preserves offer opportunities for a hands-on approach to learning about nature. By providing environmental education to people from preschoolers to retirees, the land trust creates a community of people who understand the value of nature and want to protect it.

- Partners: K–12 schools (public and private), corporate funders, like-minded nonprofits, and Indiana University
- Staff: 7 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- [sycamorelandtrust.org](http://sycamorelandtrust.org)



# Mentoring Urban Youth

## Lookout Mountain Conservancy\*—TN

The land trust works in partnership with a local high school grappling with the lowest graduation rates in Chattanooga. Leadership Interns (11 to 18 high school students per year) are hired to work with land trust staff on a weekly basis, all school breaks, and full-time during the summer to participate in leadership training and the transformation of a property into an urban nature-based park and community oasis.

The land trust uses conservation as a tool to change lives by providing academic and life-skills mentoring; community job-shadowing and enrichment activities; a sense of place in the outdoors, including growing and cooking food, trail design and maintenance and habitat restoration; and a community of support. Students who decide to enroll in college or technical schools are provided mentoring support and summer employment.

- Partners: High school, parents, local professionals for job shadowing, Chattanooga Rotary
- Staff: 2.5 FTE | 1.75 FTE for summer program, 1 seasonal assistant
- [lookoutmountainconservancy.org](http://lookoutmountainconservancy.org)

## Lake Forest Open Lands Association\*—IL

Lake Forest Open Lands Association hosts the Center for Conservation Leadership (CCL), a conservation, service learning and student leadership development program for high school students in diverse communities throughout north-eastern Illinois. CCL connects teens to nature by facilitating place-based learning experiences that empower students with extensive stewardship and leadership training.

Through mentor-guided stewardship projects, these future environmental leaders serve a pivotal role in their own communities—improving local natural areas, raising environmental awareness and fostering a deeper civic and conservation responsibility in Lake County.

CCL supports its students in conservation education throughout high school and identifies and helps place them in internships and higher educational opportunities as they grow.

- Partners: Over 2,000 students in pre-K–12th grades reached each year
- Staff: 13 FTE | 1 FTE dedicated to education
- [lfol.org](http://lfol.org)





# Farming, Youth Leadership and Academic Success

## Trust for Public Land\*—HI Chapter

The Trust for Public Land partnered with MA'O, a rural nonprofit, to purchase a total of 18.5 acres of its 23.5-acre organic farm (MA'O leases 5 acres from a neighbor) in two separate projects to enhance local food, leadership and educational opportunities. In addition, TPL is assisting MA'O to acquire an additional 21 acres, with another phase planned for 236 acres that may include an affordable housing element.

MA'O provides certified organic fruits and vegetables to community members while also offering career direction and leadership training to O'ahu's youth. As part of this work, MA'O is developing a comprehensive and living local food system—educating youth, fighting hunger, improving health and nutrition and growing the organic agriculture industry.

Education is a core part of the MA'O operations, developing programs with Wai'anae High School, an associate degree program at Leeward Community College and a bachelors of applied science in sustainable community food systems at the University of Hawai'i West O'ahu. The interns, most of them fresh out of Wai'anae's high schools, work the farm three days a week while attending community college full-time. MA'O pays interns a stipend based on farm and educational performance and pays for tuition waivers to Leeward Community College.

MA'O mentors the students to run the farm and assist the students in transitioning from high school to college. In this underserved area of West O'ahu, many public high school graduates are not adequately prepared for college.

MA'O sells its produce at farmers markets, natural food stores and award-winning restaurants, and was selected as one of the first local suppliers for Whole Foods in Hawai'i.

- Partners: Wai'anae Community Re-Development Corporation (dba MA'O Organic Farms), high schools, colleges
- TPL provides the technical assistance to acquire land, MA'O staff work with students, families, community members
- [tpl.org](http://tpl.org), [maoorganicfarms.org](http://maoorganicfarms.org)



**For more examples check out  
Addressing Food and Hunger  
Spotlight.**



# Transforming Land to Become “Learning Landscapes”

Feather River Land Trust\* — CA

As part of its land conservation strategy, the land trust pioneered an integrated program for long-term conservation ethics and impact, community visibility and organizational support:

- Conserve land adjacent to every school so teachers can bring students outside to learn and have fun;
- Enhance school and educational lands by installing trails, signage and seating areas;
- Support K–12 teachers to independently “Teach from the Land” throughout the year. “Learning Landscapes” annually connects with approximately 2,500 school children in six communities of the Upper Feather River Watershed.
- Partners: Elementary, middle, and high schools
- Staff: 9 FTE | 0.5 coordinator, 0.5 FTE various staff for program
- [frlt.org](http://frlt.org)

**“We are committed to conserving land in perpetuity and ensuring that every child in every generation will have this opportunity to connect to and care for the land.”**

— Rob Wade, Feather River Land Trust Learning Landscapes Coordinator



Feather River Land Trust



## Aspen Valley Land Trust\* — CO

Aspen Valley Land Trust protected Basecamp, a rugged, aspen-tree covered property the Aspen School District's eight-grade outdoor program has used for over 50 years. Kids backpack 25 miles through wilderness, arriving there for three days of team building and individual growth activities.

In 2018, four new school groups will use Basecamp to experience mother nature's recharge with a dozen more interested in developing outdoor education programs in the future.

- Partners: Crested Butte Land Trust, numerous schools and youth programs throughout the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys
- Staff: 6.25 FTE | 0.5 FTE for program
- [avlt.org](http://avlt.org)

**“If we want land trusts to thrive we have to inspire and engage the kids. They're our future.”**

— Suzanne Stephens, Aspen Valley Land Trust Executive Director

## Groundswell Conservancy\* — WI

Nearly 80% of Lake View Elementary School children come from low-income families, typically living in apartments with no yard or natural areas nearby to explore.

Groundswell Conservancy is building them a nature course on a 1/2-acre of wooded land abutting the school where students can have fun while learning about nature.

- Partners: Elementary school, volunteers, community youth involved in Operation Fresh Start
- Staff: 6 FTE | 1 FTE focused on land protection
- [groundswellwisconsin.org](http://groundswellwisconsin.org)





# Bringing Food into the Classroom

## California Farmland Trust — CA

Sponsored by Raley's, this "Raley's Field Trips on the Farm" program connects 240 fourth- and fifth-graders per year to the land. With classroom lessons followed by visits to farms and Raley's grocery stores, the students and their teachers learn about the entire food cycle and come to appreciate the land that provides for them.

One of the aims of the program is to encourage the students to create healthy eating habits long-term. They see firsthand where their food comes from and meet the hard-working people who make the food they eat possible.

- Partners: Raley's Family of Fine Stores, Lodi Unified School District, Ag in the Classroom, Steamboat Acres (a local farm), first generation farmers
- Staff: 3 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- [cafarmtrust.org](http://cafarmtrust.org)

## Athens Land Trust\*— GA

Athens Land Trust partners with FoodCorps and Clarke County School District to provide in-school and after-school education.

As a host site, FoodCorps service members work directly with students and teachers to provide hands on learning in the classroom and garden, role modeling and taste testing in the cafeteria and help to promote a school wide culture of health.

The ultimate goal of this partnership is to connect kids to healthy food in schools.

- Partners: FoodCorps, Clarke County School District
- Staff: 31 FTE | 1.5 FTE for program
- [athenslandtrust.org](http://athenslandtrust.org)



**California Farmland Trust**  
© Melanee Cottrill



**Athens Land Trust**  
© JJ Harris



# Immersion Programs

## Blue Ridge Land Trust — VA

As part of its pledge to protect land in perpetuity, the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy is preparing the next generation to appreciate the environment and natural resources and become good future stewards of the land. The conservancy also runs weekend programs to bring the public onto conserved lands and share its conservation successes with the community.

The “Bay and River Days” program invites area fourth-grade students once a year to a property protected by a conservation easement to learn about water quality and watersheds, and how their actions at the headwaters of a local river can impact water quality and the livelihoods of people downstream.

The “Outdoor Adventure Series,” which runs from May to October each year, includes hikes to local scenic mountaintops protected by the conservancy, as well as craft programs and educational classes.

- Partners: Rural and urban school districts, local nonprofits and government organizations
- Staff: 2 FTE, 0.5 FTE with community programs
- [blueridgelandconservancy.org](http://blueridgelandconservancy.org)

## Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust\* — CT

Joshua's Trust partners with EASTCONN, a public, nonprofit, Regional Educational Service Center, to provide a formative field experience over six to seven summer weeks building and maintaining trails, learning about invasives and how to remove them, and building/repairing bridges and boardwalks.

The students are paid by Eastern Connecticut Workforce Board (ECWB) and work side-by-side with land trust staff and mentors.

- Partners: EASTCONN, ECWB, students, mentors
- Staff: 1 FTE
- [joshuastrust.org](http://joshuastrust.org)



Blue Ridge Land Trust

© David Perry



Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust

© Sue Beach



# Youth Exploring Rural Landscapes

## Mohonk Preserve\* — NY

Mohonk Preserve hosts a “STEM Rising” initiative, which engages underserved students in grades six to eight from Newburgh, New York. This project brings students to the wild, green spaces along the Shawangunk Ridge to learn about land conservation and stewardship ethics through STEM and project-based learning and community service. Lessons include guided field projects on the land such as trail design and restoration, animal tracking, landscape reading, and short-term weather forecasting, along with all equipment, from compasses and snowshoes to trail impact assessment tools.

The program addresses local community needs while helping to implement the Preserve’s strategic goals for inclusivity, community conservation and using nature education as a way to engage young people in life-affirming outdoor discovery experiences on protected land.

Mohonk Preserve is also teaming up with Marist College to conduct ongoing surveys of the students who participate in the STEM-based environmental school field studies programs to help generate ideas for developing and promoting more inclusive experiences in nature.

- Partners: Local middle schools and Marist College
- Staff: 38 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- [mohonkpreserve.org](http://mohonkpreserve.org)

## Montezuma Land Conservancy\* — CO

The land trust owns 83 acres in rural Colorado, in a county that experiences a poverty rate of 29% for those under 18.

The property serves as an agricultural education center providing a space for community collaborations that partner with educators to engage students with hands-on agriculture and conservation projects focused on reconnection to place and creating opportunities.

- Partners: Served 500 youth in 2017 including a paid summer internship program for local at-risk high school youth.
- Staff: 3.25 FTE | 2 FTE for program and land conservation
- [montezumaland.org](http://montezumaland.org)





# Climate Change, Community Collaboration

## Save the Redwoods League\*—CA

As one of the oldest land trusts in the country, Save the Redwoods League's "Redwoods and Climate Change High School Program," brings students from all walks of life from San Francisco Bay Area cities into a local redwood forest to conduct scientific research and study the impacts of climate change.

This program consists of four classroom lessons and a field trip to the redwoods. Students analyze real scientific data and have an opportunity to explore the forest as a scientist.

- Partners: Elementary, middle, and high schools, citizen scientists, volunteers
- Staff: 50 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- [savetheredwoods.org](http://savetheredwoods.org)

**“Kids and their love of nature and farms are the future of conservation. Without them our work may not withstand the test of time.”**

— Nicole Baddock, Solano Land Trust Executive Director

## Northwest Arkansas Land Trust\*—AR

The land trust coordinates the Kessler Mountain Outdoor Classroom and Nature Center, a community collaborative effort.

The Outdoor Classroom, provides environmental education programs for all ages, including guided field trips with activities designed to meet current Next-Gen Science standards, open house family events, and other community programs.

- Partners: Pre-K through high schools, Arkansas Native Plant Society, National Park Service, Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association, Boston Mountain Solid Waste District, Mt. Kessler Greenways
- Staff: 4 FTE | 1.5 FTE for program
- [nwalandtrust.org](http://nwalandtrust.org)





# Six Tips for Partnering with Schools

- 1. Listen to what the challenges might be in your local schools.** Identify a few people who know the needs of the area: a teacher, town manager, parks and rec person, retired experts or even businesses that provide public outreach and education.
- 2. Talk to organizations in your community that work with youth.** What are the challenges they see? Ask them how they are enriching the lives of youth and how you might help. What would your partner organization consider to be a successful? Does that match your goals?
- 3. Consider the safety of kids** and what the experience will be like. Will they go to nature or will nature come to them? How will you train and screen those who will have contact with them? Check on insurance.
- 4. Brainstorm types of programs.** What do teachers and parents want? Resist the temptation to develop your own “educational” programs unless that is really necessary. There are a lot of existing programs you could tap into. Clarify with teachers if the program needs to meet state education standards. Who will advocate for the program in the school?
- 5. Design program sustainability.** Will your staff or seasonal staff run or oversee the program? How could volunteers be involved? Or parents? Look for another group that is not being served and opportunities to engage them though conservation, like pairing elders with a younger generation.
- 6. What is the funding source?** Often these are low-cost programs yet there will be some costs—such as insurance, food, equipment or supplies and transportation.

## 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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**“I saw my son come out of his shell. He found a passion and built trust...It has changed him in a way that I had only dreamt was possible.”** — Mary M., parent of a Little Traverse Conservancy participant



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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)