

Community Conservation SPOTLIGHT



Working with Veterans...

Land trusts are working with veterans and veterans groups, like Heroic Food, to use land and water to enhance their lives, expand conservation initiatives and build stronger communities.

Greg Jacob, a U.S. Marine combat veteran who now works at The Nature Conservancy has personally felt the positive impact that connecting with nature has had in his life and in the lives of his fellow veterans. “For vets the journey from military life is often thought of as a transitional one, but with the help of nature it can be transformative as well.”

This *Spotlight* highlights a few of the land trusts that are conserving land, creating programs and developing partnerships to honor, support and connect with the men and women who are, or have, served in the military. Nature, farms and teamwork are providing new ways to bring purpose, connections and joy to them, their families and their communities. Perhaps your land trust can do so as well.

Honoring Veterans through Conservation

Hawaiian Islands Land Trust*—HI

The Hawaiian Islands Land Trust accepted the donation of a 4.5-acre parcel near densely populated Wailuku, the county seat of Maui. The property overlooks the sea and will become a peace park honoring Maui veterans.

The project is in collaboration with the Nisei Veterans Memorial Center. A park includes a nature trail, small public parking area, picnic tables, benches and informational signage. Longer-term plans include managing the site for native species and pollinator habitat.

- Partner: Nisei Veterans Memorial Center
- Staff: 8 FTE
- hilt.org

Prairie Enthusiasts—MN

The Many Rivers Chapter of the Prairie Enthusiasts in south-central Minnesota helped lead a community prairie restoration project next to the Mankato Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Vietnam Veterans of Southern Minnesota now plans on establishing a trail in addition to helping to manage the property to foster native flowers and help fight invasive species.

- All-volunteer chapter
- theprairieenthusiasts.org

“What makes Hawai‘i so special is the natural beauty and rich cultural heritage of these islands, including the legacy of our veterans.”

— Scott Fisher, Hawaiian Islands Land Trust, veteran



Hawaiian Islands Land Trust

The Nature Conservancy — MT, Nationally

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing (PHWFF) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are partnering to further the recovery of injured and disabled veterans. The collaboration holds veterans' retreats at a TNC preserve in Montana to connect veterans with nature and providing conservation-oriented educational and angling opportunities during a three-day event.

PHWFF works with veterans using fly fishing and associated activities, including education and outings. Many participants are new to fly fishing—which is where TNC will play a role. The program has expanded to different regions and partners; TNC has an internal program for veterans groups called Veterans in Nature's Service which uses nature to heal and build a sense of community.

"By learning the sport [of fly fishing], we've seen participants immerse themselves in environmental education and stewardship of our rivers and streams," said David Folkerts, of PHWFF. "Their exposure to and involvement with the educational work and natural places will play a key role in their development as anglers while simultaneously furthering their journey to recovery."

- Partners: Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing
- tnc.org

Maine Farmland Trust — ME

One aspect of Maine Farmland Trust's work is collaborating with veterans to increase veterans' access to farmland. Over the next decade, considerable land in Maine will transition to new ownership. Military veterans who wish to pass their land to other farmer-veterans hold some of that farmland.

The land trust recognizes the potential to use easement purchases at the time of a farm acquisition to help farmer-veterans make the most of their military benefits as they purchase a farm.

- Staff: 6 FTE
- mainefarmlandtrust.org



Healing Body, Soul and Land

Prickly Pear Land Trust* — MT

Prickly Pear Land Trust, with support from the National Guard's Army Compatible Use Buffer program (ACUB), purchased over 500 acres of grassland and stream access west of Helena. The properties buffer Fort Harrison, a military installation that houses one of the region's top soldier training centers and Montana's only Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital.

Veterans and soldiers, patients at the VA, local families and residents at Spring Meadow Resources (a nonprofit providing housing and services to those with disabilities) are now able to access land and a local creek, increasing recreational options, like natural picnic areas, to improve their quality of life.

The property is equipped with wide, flat trails and signage to ensure safe commuter routes between the fort, VA and town. The Americans with Disabilities Act compliant trails provide one of the only public options in the region suitable for the mobility-challenged. Patients at VA utilize nature as part of the healing process. Families with small children and school groups now grow their connections to the land.

- Partners: ACUB and volunteers
- Staff: 8 FTE | 1 FTE with program
- pricklypearlt.org/project/peaks-to-creeks-initiative



Prickly Pear Land Trust

“In a hospital situation it can be a high-intensity experience. Anything we can do to lower that level of intensity can make a big difference; getting veterans into the place that speaks to them at the time they need it...”

— Greg Normandin, physician, VA Hospital



Mojave Desert Land Trust* — CA

The land trust has hosted several events on conserved land near Joshua Tree National Park in partnership with Joining Forces: Plant to Paper Project, The Veterans Initiative in the Arts.

Veterans, active-duty military families and community members gathered as part of community-building and lands stewardship by removing invasive plants as a shared experience of service. Participants then turned the invasive plants into paper for art projects culminating in an art exhibit and celebration.

The land trust is now exploring additional ways to serve a wide range of diverse communities, including children who live at the nearby military base. One program would include field trips to national monuments and conservation areas with mentors from the humanities for interpretive exploration. The goal is to provide opportunities for self-awareness and self-esteem, as well as a stronger compassion for, and awareness of, the land.

- Partners: Joining Forces: Plant to Paper Project, The Veterans Initiative in the Arts, 29 Palm Marine Base, volunteers
- Staff: 23 FTE | 3 FTE with the engagement programs
- mojavedesertlandtrust.org

The Ward Burton Wildlife Foundation — VA

The Foundation annually invites veterans to “The Cove,” approximately 2,500 acres of protected land in Halifax County, for camping, archery, shooting, fishing and sometimes just “being.” Archery, fishing, clay pigeons and target shooting competitions, with prizes donated by sponsors, are highlights. Lunch and dinner are provided.

Says founder Ward Burton about the program, “It’s more of a healing atmosphere when you are around wildlife and natural habitats, just a calming, soothing atmosphere. Everybody can take time, relax and have fun. It’s rehab for the spirit.”

- Partner: Army National Guard, 30 volunteers
- twbwf.org



Healing Body, Soul and Land...continued

Five Valleys Land Trust*—MT

Partnering with veterans groups Team Red, White & Blue (RWB) and Team Rubicon, the land trust tackles a variety of forest management work on conservation lands, including their Rock Creek Confluence Property. The work with veterans groups allows Five Valleys to complete stewardship goals while giving the veterans an “on-the-ground” classroom to hone their skills.

Team RWB hand piled slash to reduce forest fire danger, and Team Rubicon cleared downed trees and thinned standing timber to improve forest health.

This stewardship work provides crews with the opportunity to improve their chain saw techniques through their Emergency Response Saw Training programs. The experience allows for training needed to effectively respond to natural disasters around the country. Beyond disaster relief, partnerships with veterans can help them find a renewed sense of purpose when they return to civilian life.

- Partners: Team RWB, Team Rubicon, other veterans groups
- Staff: 9 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- fvlt.org, teamrwb.org

“Partnering with veterans groups has been a win-win for everybody.

Conservation lands provide the perfect space for veterans to apply their skills while completing much needed stewardship work on the land. ”

— Amber Sherrill, E.D.,
Five Valleys Land Trust





Archi's Acres – VSAT



Operation Groundwork

together

“Working with the land gives many veterans a purpose. They can be part of their community.”

— John Lind
Team Rubicon



Heroes to Hives

© Sarah Scott



Homegrown By Heroes

© Matt Smiley



Veterans Employment Base Camp – Certified Organic Garden

Partnering with the Army

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust* — NY

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust works with Fort Drum, in northern New York, to proactively conserve farms and wildlife habitat adjacent to the base.

“The Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program provides funds to purchase conservation easements, with match from New York State. The program is critical to ensuring compatible land use near the military base,” explained Linda Garrett, executive director. “Fort Drum wants to minimize possible conflicts, while maximizing training capabilities, and land uses like agriculture, wildlife conservation and forestry are preferred.”

The partnership includes Ducks Unlimited and provides funding to purchase easements from area landowners. State matching funds have been provided through the state’s Environmental Protection Fund. The ACUB program has been identified as a Regional Priority Project in the NYS Open Space Plan.

- Partners: U.S. Army, ACUB program, Ducks Unlimited
- Staff: 4.5 FTE
- tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org

Georgia-Alabama Land Trust — GA

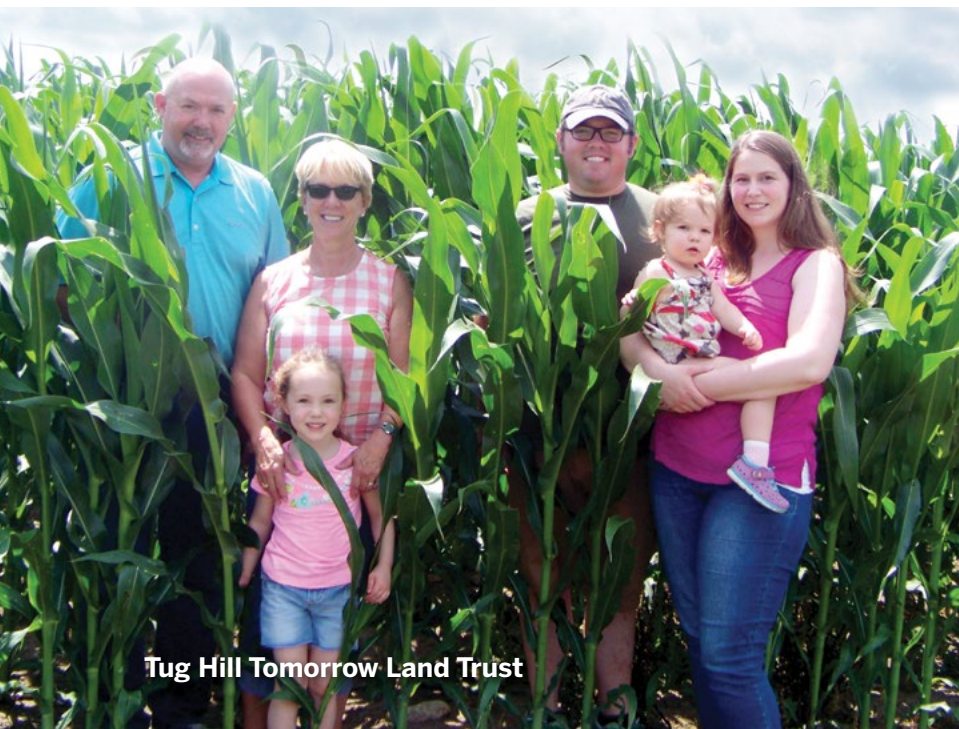
The land trust works with Fort Stewart, Sentinel Landscape (a program of the USDA, Department of the Interior and Department of Defense) and other conservation partners on the ACUB program. Their partnership with the U.S. Army is critical to the preservation of the longleaf pine and preserving military readiness.

- Staff: 27 FTE, including 5 FTE with the ACUB conservation program
- georgiaalabamalandtrust.org

Kansas Land Trust — KS

Kansas Land Trust partnered with the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program to provide the landowners an alternative to development that would have negatively affected Fort Riley’s radar system. This native tallgrass prairie ranch is located in the “Heart of the Flint Hills” just southwest of the Konza Prairie Preserve.

- Staff: 1 FTE, 2 interns
- klt.org



Fishing and Trails

Western Reserve Land Conservancy – OH

The Sporting Circle, sponsored by the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, provides exceptional sporting experiences and expanded opportunity events for hunters and anglers throughout the region.

The Sporting Circle partners with local veterans and hosts them on waterfowl and other hunts. After a morning hunt with staff member Alex Czayka, local veteran Blane Bellas remarked, “I definitely appreciated the opportunity to hunt, and it feels great that organizations like the Land Conservancy are helping veterans this way. A lot of time folks like me are overwhelmed with appreciation right when we get back from combat, but then time goes by and it’s like it (our service) never happened. It’s great to see that we are still appreciated a decade later. I will definitely be doing more duck hunting.”

- Partners: Local veterans
- Staff: 42 FTE | 3 FTE primary staff, 3 FTE development staff
- wrlandconservancy.org



Land Conservancy of West Michigan* — MI

Responding to the community’s lack of recreational opportunities for people with disabilities, the Conservancy explored an idea with the Disability Network West Michigan.

“This was a unique project—different from other Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) trail projects—because we got the veterans involved in designing the trail so that it met their needs,” says Vaughn Maatman, former director of the Conservancy. “We were engaging with folks who had a whole different perspective than we had ever thought about before, a perspective that included accommodating ambulatory challenges, vision impairments and families with children in strollers.”

- Partners: Department of Parks and Recreation, Disability Network West Michigan, Disabled American Veterans Chapter 11
- Staff: 8.75 FTE
- naturenearby.org

Possible Partners

Your land trust may be able to partner with, or support, existing veterans groups in your area using land and water to change lives. Check out your region and explore how you can join forces.

Heroes to Hives

Heroes to Hives is a unique program through Michigan State University Extension that seeks to address financial and personal wellness of veterans through professional training and community development centered around beekeeping. Veterans leave the program with a broad depth of beekeeping knowledge, as well as personal and professional relationships that open up new opportunities and ensure long-term peer support.

heroestohives.com



Homegrown By Heroes

Founded by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in January 2013, the Homegrown By Heroes label has been administered nationally by Farmer Veteran Coalition since Veterans Day of that same year. Since then, the program has expanded to include more than 1,100 members in all 50 states plus Puerto Rico.

farmvetco.org/hbh



Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc. is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities including education and outings.

It is much more than a fly-fishing experience. For many participants, the socialization and camaraderie of the program activities are just as important. Core activities include fly tying, rod building, casting and outings. The organization relies on multiple partners and volunteers.

projecthealingwaters.org



“You all saved my life. And I don’t say that lightly. This program has turned my life around and I want to be part of life again. I found hope on the river.”

— Veteran participant, Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing

Heroic Food

Heroic Food prepares and trains military veterans for careers in sustainable farming, agricultural trades and food entrepreneurship with a robust, veteran-supportive environment.

heroicfood.org



Veterans Healing Farm

Veterans Healing Farm in North Carolina helps empower veterans reintegrating into civilian life by growing produce, raising farm animals and conducting seminars on holistic health and sustainability.

veteranshealingfarm.org



Veterans to Farmers – Colorado

This nonprofit helps turn protectors into providers by assisting veterans to assimilate effectively, productively, and permanently into private citizenry through agricultural training and education. Veteran classmates work alongside each other, learning new skills and experiencing the grounding effects of the farm.

veteranstofarmers.org



Wounded Warrior Project

Wounded Warrior Project provides a variety of veterans programs and services to help veterans meet their unique challenges and achieve their individual goals and offers a network of community partners and affiliates to help.

woundedwarriorproject.org



Veteran Healing Farm

Six Tips for Working with Veterans

- 1. Talk to local veterans as well as veterans organizations in your community.** Consider local, regional or national programs that might be applicable.
- 2. Keep an open mind to the possibilities.** Consider job opportunities, conservation training and leadership roles.
- 3. Get to know the families of veterans.** Develop an understanding of what issues they care about, what talents that they can bring and the challenges they are facing.

Brainstorm together about how conservation might help and inspire veterans as well as the community as a whole; share examples of what other conservation groups are doing.
- 4. Identify possible partner organizations or teams that could work together,** with or without civilians, to undertake a project or program. What outcome is important to them?
- 5. Evaluate the lands and waters in your region.** Identify areas that could be conserved, enhanced or created to provide meaningful access close to home so veterans feel a part of the community and experience the special places that bring joy to others.
- 6. Provide opportunities for veterans to use their skills.** Consider how they might share them to teach and inspire others. When unsure about what might be of interest, ask and listen.

Interested in other tips, examples, and suggestions?

Go to the Land Trust Alliance's website at www.lta.org/community-conservation

Do you have a program or project to spotlight? Email communityconservation@lta.org

“Veterans return from war and find a lot of healing from spending time outdoors.”

— Rick Hegdahl, Vet Voice Foundation Pacific Northwest 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