

The Fund for North Bennington, Inc.
Summary of Stewardship Activities 2024

Resilience Project. We completed our third year of work controlling invasive plants, fostering native plant biodiversity and building climate resilience. As described in more detail at <https://northbennington.org/resilience>, millions of cubic feet of seed-producing invasives were mulched or removed in prior years. In 2024, we tackled re-sprouts with the very low-dose herbicide application recommended by numerous conservation agencies. (The application rate is barely 5 percent of what Vermont farmers use to prepare a field for corn.)

This fall, we are planting native trees and shrubs to replace the invasive hedgerows. The natives will provide food and nesting sites (unlike the invasives) and help re-establish wildlife corridors between forested areas. These stems will initially be shielded by tree guards. Few saplings otherwise survive nibbling by deer and voles.

In future years, our plan focuses less on control of invasives and more on enriching the health and fertility of our soils and the biodiversity of our forests. We hope to establish a blight-resistant chestnut grove. New plantings are also scheduled for our land near Lake Paran in what was previously a 13-acre, impenetrable thicket of honeysuckle. Some of the costs of this work are being underwritten by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS's forester told us the Resilience Project was "a great demonstration of how to encourage an emerging biodiverse forest and wetland."

Agriculture. We signed new leases this year with our two long-time agricultural partners – Landview Farms and David Lively. Next year we will also be working with Three Dozing Dogs Farm of Shaftsbury. All agricultural fields will now be managed for cool-season grasses. No more corn! There will be minimal or no application of commercial fertilizer. No herbicides will be allowed. The endangered grassland bird nesting area will continue to be seasonally protected. For more about the bird project, visit <https://northbennington.org/birds/>.

Collaboration. We continue to collaborate with the Village School, the McCullough Library, Friends of Hiland Hall Garden, Paran Recreations and Bennington College – each partner benefiting from and contributing to the health of the conserved acreage in its own way.

The Left Bank. We completed the transition to a highly efficient HVAC system, and with help from a new tenant, we renovated the "basement" office this year. A summer work-study student at Bennington College helped us reorganize and inventory the archive of historic materials housed in one of the former bank vaults. Rhonda Ratray continues to curate wonderful exhibits in "The Lobby." The family of the late Mary Kohler generously donated *A Vermont Life*, a large pyrographic and watercolor work by Matthew Perry. We will exhibit it at The Left Bank.

Trail work. We met this fall with a project supervisor from the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) to discuss trail upgrades in wet areas. These are located south of The Mile-Around Woods, along the eastern shore of Lake Paran, and on a section of The Robert Frost Trail. We have worked in prior years with VYCC crews of young Vermonters. The feasibility of doing this work in 2025 will depend principally on funding. We expect to seek grant support, but donations from the public will be crucial to success.