



WOLCOTT WATERSHED PROJECT SITE Image of field in Wolcott Vermont © TNC

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NEWSROOM

# Water Quality, Flood Resiliency, and Climate Resiliency Improved for Nature & People Through a Partner Conservation Project in Wolcott

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The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, is proud to announce the completion of a four-year partner project along a section of the

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landscape.

“Investments in nature always yield multiple cost-effective benefits for both our natural and human communities. The Wolcott project is a great example of how we can work together to restore the health of our waterways, while supporting wildlife, and making our communities more climate resilient,” says Heather Furman, Vermont state director of The Nature Conservancy. “In this time of biodiversity decline and increased climate change impacts, we need to see even greater investments in these nature-based solutions to address our 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental challenges.”

### Water Quality and Flood Resiliency Investments

As Vermont adapts to more extreme weather events that cause both flooding and drought, restoration of floodplains, rivers and wetlands and protection of river corridors play an even more critical role in maintaining preferable habitat conditions for fish and wildlife, absorbing floodwaters, filtering waters, and storing carbon.

At the Wolcott site, an undersized, decommissioned bridge and its abutments were removed that were impeding the flow of water and gravel and creating detrimental river instability. Removing the constriction will lead to a reduction of nutrient and sediment downstream. An adjacent wetland was restored by redirecting a previously diverted stream back through the floodplain. Trees and vegetation will be planted next spring throughout the floodplain where a future forest will thrive, helping filter and absorb excess water and nutrients through natural processes and provide cover for wildlife. These restoration tactics will support improved water quality, increased flood resiliency, and improved habitat for a suite of species, including pollinators, birds, fish and wildlife.

### Wildlife Movement

Science shows that species are moving 11 miles north and 30 feet in elevation each decade in a changing climate. Most roads and bridges did not account for the natural environment when they were built and can cause obstacles for wildlife to meet their needs for food and

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Vermont.

The Wolcott site came onto the team’s radar as a potential restoration site after a multi-year trail camera project found ample evidence of wildlife in the vicinity of Rt 15 but with relatively little movement underneath the road. The wildlife movement data informed the creation of a “wildlife shelf” under the Route 15 bridge to foster the movement of bear, moose and other animals under this busy stretch of road in hopes of reducing roadkill and maintaining wildlife populations. To achieve real progress on wildlife movement at this specific site, all the conservation dimensions of the project were important.

“Working to address multiple values at the Wild Branch site was critical to its success. Use of the wildlife shelf depends on the success of the floodplain restoration. And addressing the need to remove the bridge was critical to that effort. Therefore, each piece is interconnected and together provides a fantastic conservation outcome with many benefits,” stated Jens Hilke, conservation planner and wildlife biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Access to the property is adjacent to the new Lamoille Valley Rail Trail that is scheduled to be completed in 2022.

This project was made possible due to the support of the following funding partners: The Canaday Charitable Family Trust and Watersheds United Vermont’s Department of Environmental Conservation Design and Implementation Block Grant

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