

# Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund Application

## Swimming Hole Steward Program



Submitted by: Richmond Land Trust

Date: March 6, 2020

## **Project Description**

Richmond Land Trust (RLT) is seeking a grant of \$1,500 from the Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund (CRF) to support costs associated with the Swimming Hole Steward Program for summer 2020. In partnership with the Vermont River Conservancy, the Program will provide on-site management and oversight for three swimming holes in Richmond and Bolton: Bolton Potholes on Joiner Brook in Bolton (owned by VRC) and Huntington Gorge and Lower Huntington Gorge on the Huntington River in Richmond (owned by RLT).

A Steward will be hired to work 30 hours per week for the 12 - week summer season (June – August). The Steward’s responsibilities will include the following:

- Visit each assigned swimming hole on a regular basis
- Reinforce the regulations at each swimming hole
- Provide important information about safety issues such as the danger of swimming in swift waters with unpredictable currents, particularly after thunderstorms or major rain events
- Educate users about the natural history, geology, and river ecology of swimming holes, helping to develop place-based relationships
- Gather statistics about visitor use that can be used to improve future management strategies
- Promote a Leave-No-Trace culture of responsible stewardship at swimming holes
- Perform stewardship tasks such as sign and trail maintenance and litter control
- Coordinate a public information program about safety and appropriate use of swimming holes, using local publications, Front Porch Forum, swimming hole websites, and social media

## **Project Significance – General Criteria**

The project meets the General Criteria of the Conservation Reserve Fund in the following ways:

- 1. Contributes toward the acquisition or permanent protection of natural, agricultural or historical resources in and of importance to Richmond.*

Huntington Gorge (the Gorge) was conserved in 2018, in part with a grant from the CRF. The Gorge is now owned by RLT and a permanent conservation easement is held by VRC and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). The Lower Gorge was conserved in 1995 and is owned by RLT, with a conservation easement held by Vermont Land Trust and VHCB. These properties on Dugway Road are two of the most popular swimming holes in Richmond, with visitors coming from throughout Chittenden County and other parts of Vermont. While the sites are conserved for future generations, managing the sites well is critical to insuring that their significant natural and historic resources are permanently protected, particularly given the high visitor use each site experiences.

The Swimming Hole Steward Program is designed to provide hands-on management and oversight for these areas to insure that they retain their natural and historic integrity.

- 2. Will yield a clear, sustainable benefit to Richmond residents in the form of permanently preserving or improving water quality, wildlife, recreational, historic, cultural, scenic, or environmental values, including the preservation of significant natural, agricultural and historic resources.*

The recreational, historic, scenic, and environmental values of the Gorge have been well documented and are described in detail in the Management Plan adopted by VRC and RLT at the time the Gorge was conserved. (The Plan was provided to the Conservation Commission for comment when it was developed, but for convenience and for the benefit of new Commission members it can be found [here](#).) One of the central management strategies in the Plan is the development of a Swimming Hole Steward Program. A pilot Swimming Hole Steward Program was initiated last summer (2019) as part of VRC's existing Summer Stewardship Intern position. The Program will be expanded this summer (2020) by hiring a dedicated Swimming Hole Steward. The Steward will work in collaboration with the RLT's Huntington Gorge Steward Committee to help achieve the goals of the Management Plan, which will provide positive benefits for the recreational, historic, scenic, and environmental values of the Gorge and Lower Gorge.

- 3. Will help the Town of Richmond meet natural resources and planning goals identified in the Richmond Town Plan or other representative community forum.*

The Swimming Hole Steward Program supports a number of natural resources and planning goals identified in the 2018 Richmond Town Plan. The Program will "wisely steward our natural and working lands, ensuring the beauty and health of our landscapes." (Plan Vision statement) The Program will also "support and create outdoor recreation opportunities that are available to the public." (Community Development Goals 3 and 4) In addition, the Program will "maintain Richmond's rural character and scenic beauty and help to protect priority natural areas in order to maintain the health and function of those areas and their ecosystem services." (Natural Resources Goals 1 and 3)

- 4. Will protect, enhance and provide public access to a natural resource or recreation area.*

The Conservation Easements protecting the Gorge and Lower Gorge guarantee that the properties will be available to the public for all type of non-commercial, non-motorized, dispersed recreational and educational activities in perpetuity. The Swimming Hole Steward Program will enhance this public access by reinforcing the regulations at each swimming hole, provide important information about safety issues, educating users about the natural history, geology, and river ecology of swimming holes, and promoting a Leave-No-Trace culture of responsible stewardship at swimming holes. The Steward will also perform stewardship tasks such as sign and trail maintenance and litter control.

Another important responsibility of the Swimming Hole Steward is to gather statistics about visitor use that can be used to inform management decisions and improve future management strategies. Attached is the user survey developed last summer by the VRC Stewardship Intern. This survey will be reviewed and revised as necessary for use by this summer's Swimming Hole Steward. Last

summer VRC also developed an online survey for the Bolton Potholes to gather more in depth information about visitors:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScKnLyTCbcW6FvJNdjVwmn9PAPOsfxMK5gcIGgCUGc-0CmYuw/viewform>

A similar survey for Huntington Gorge and the Lower Gorge could be developed for both online and in person use at the two sites.

#### *7. Attracts and leverages funds from other sources.*

The proposed budget for the Swimming Hole Steward Program is \$6,500, which includes administrative costs, the Steward's stipend, and expenses. (See Proposed Budget below.) RLT has committed \$1,500 and VRC has committed to providing in kind administrative support. The remainder of the budget would come from grants and fundraising, including a grant from the CRF. If awarded, the CRF grant would be leveraged more than 3 to 1 by other sources.

### **Project Significance – Specific Criteria**

In addition to the General Criteria above, the project supports Natural Resources and Historic Resources Criteria, including preserving river, stream, and wetland quality; supporting low- or no-cost outdoor recreational activities, such as fishing, hiking, skiing, hunting, swimming, canoeing; preserving outstanding scenic views; and defining and maintaining a special landscape setting.

### **Project Schedule**

Recruitment for the Swimming Hole Steward will begin in April 2020. The Steward will be hired for the 12- week summer season (June – August 2020).

### **Project Partners**

Richmond Land Trust and Vermont River Conservancy are partnering to develop and manage the Swimming Hole Steward Program. VRC will provide administrative support, including hiring and direct supervision of the steward, payroll processing, and equipment.

### **Organizational Information**

The Richmond Land Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization founded by a group of Richmond residents in 1987. RLT's mission is "to preserve the rural character and quality of life in Richmond, Vermont, and its surrounding communities through land conservation, historic preservation, land stewardship, and community service and education." Since 1987, RLT has protected more than 800 acres of land through direct acquisition or conservation easement, including Owl's Head Blueberry Farm, Willis Hill, Bombardier Meadow, Warren and Ruth Beeken Rivershore, the West Monitor Barn, and the Gorge and Lower Gorge. These properties are used extensively by the public for access to local agriculture, dispersed recreation, education, and riparian access to the Huntington and Winooski Rivers.

The Vermont River Conservancy is a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to permanently conserve and protect special lands along Vermont's waters. VRC protects public access to popular swimming holes, breathtaking gorges and waterfalls, fishing and boating accesses, and paddlers' trails for future generations to enjoy. VRC also conserves open river corridors and floodplains to ensure a river's ability to meander, while improving wildlife habitat, bank stability, water quality and Vermont's overall flood resiliency. Since 1995, working in cooperation with state and federal agencies, municipalities, conservation organizations, and willing landowners, VRC has permanently conserved 75 parcels of land covering 1,915 acres of shore lands, with over 44 miles of water frontage.

**Proposed Budget**

Administration (hiring, payroll, supervision) - VRC (In Kind)	\$1,500
Steward Stipend and Expenses	
- 12 weeks x 30 hrs/week = 360 hrs x \$12.50/hr (Plus FICA)	<u>\$5,000</u>
TOTAL	\$6,500

Potential Sources of Funding`

VRC (In Kind support), RLT (\$1,500 committed), Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund, Other Grants, Fundraising

**Huntington Gorge – Information Survey**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Day of week: \_\_\_\_\_ Surveyor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	10-11am	11-noon	noon-1pm	1-2pm	2-3pm	4-5pm	5-6pm
Weather							
Temperature							
Dogs on-leash							
Dogs off-leash							
VT cars							
Out-of-State cars							
People Tally (once an hour, walk HG property and tally # of people rapidly and approximately)							

Weather choices = Sunny    Partly Sunny    Partly Cloudy    Cloudy    Rainy

**Daily Trash Tally:**

cans	glass bottles	diapers	cigarettes	food wrappers	plastic bags	needles

other:

**Describe Any Incidents or Anecdotes: (use other side as needed)**