

Conservation Reserve Fund Application

Winooski River Floodplain Forest Parcel



Submitted by: Richmond Land Trust

Date: July 3, 2025

Project Summary

Richmond Land Trust (RLT) is seeking a grant of \$7,500 from the Conservation Reserve Fund to support the acquisition and conservation of an 11.2-acre parcel of land on the north side of the Winooski River just east of Richmond Village. (See attached map.) The property is located in the floodway of the Winooski River and is entirely wooded. The parcel is classified as a Silver Maple – Ostrich Fern Riverine Floodplain Forest, a natural community type that was once abundant along the moderate gradient sections of most of Vermont's major rivers, but is now uncommon. Because of their fertile alluvial soils, most of these floodplain forests have been converted to agricultural use over the past two centuries. This parcel and several other floodplain forest parcels in Richmond already protected by Richmond Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy are some of the best remaining examples of intact floodplain forest in Vermont.

Parcel Description

Floodplain forests are special communities, as this passage from *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland* describes:

“Entering a mature Silver Maple – Ostrich Fern Floodplain Forest can be awe-inspiring. Towering silver maples with pillar like trunks and arching crowns up to 100 feet high create the impression of a cathedral interior. The near lack of shrubs adds an open, airy quality, but this cathedral is full of life. The rich, alluvial soils produce a luxuriant growth of ostrich fern and other herbaceous species that may reach shoulder or head height.” (From *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland – A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont*, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy, 2000)

In addition to the luxurious vegetation, floodplain forests also provide habitat for several species of migratory birds, as well as important habitat for river otter, mink, muskrat, and beaver. Areas of floodplain forests that hold water after regular spring flooding also provide important breeding areas for several species of amphibians, including American toad, wood frog, spring peeper, spotted salamander, and blue-spotted salamander.

The parcel is mapped as a wetland by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and is listed as a Highest Priority Natural Community by the Vermont Conservation Design, a tool used by ANR to identify locations of ecological priority.

The parcel is typical of the floodplain forest type described above, with towering Silver Maple and Cottonwood trees and an understory of Ostrich Fern and other herbaceous species. See photos below for more detail.

The parcel will be accessible from the Winooski River and will provide a scenic backdrop for the many paddlers and tubers who use the river throughout the summer months.

RLT will own and pay property taxes on the parcel.

Project Significance – General Criteria

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

1. *Contributes toward the acquisition or permanent protection of natural, agricultural or historical resources in and of importance to Richmond.*
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.*
3. *Will help the Town of Richmond meet natural resources and planning goals identified in the Richmond Town Plan or other representative community forum.*
4. *Will protect, enhance and provide public access to a natural resource or recreation area.*
5. *Is directed at threatened resources.*
6. *Expands an existing, protected resource, including those that benefit not only Richmond but also neighboring communities and those beyond.*
7. *Attracts and leverages funds from other sources.*

Project Significance – Specific Criteria

In addition to the General Criteria above, the project supports the following specific criteria for natural resource protection listed in the Conservation Reserve Fund Policy:

Natural Resources Protection Criteria

1. *Preserves river, stream, and wetland quality.*
3. *Provides a naturally vegetated buffer zone around or between significant wetlands, streams or rivers, and human activities.*
4. *Preserves or restores biodiversity by providing areas for wildlife to live, feed and reproduce.*
6. *Maintains woodlands, meadows or pastures.*
7. *Supports low- or no-cost outdoor recreational activities, such as fishing, hiking, skiing, hunting, swimming, canoeing, etc.*
8. *Preserves outstanding scenic views or is scenic itself.*

Project Partners

RLT has applied to the The Nature Conservancy (Vermont office) for support from the Vermont Biodiversity Protection Fund.

Project Timetable

RLT has signed a Purchase and Sale Contract with the owners of the 11.2 acre parcel, James Garris and Michael Hampton. The Contract specifies a closing date no later than August 31, 2025, however the owners have requested that closing take place earlier, by August 15.

Project Budget

Total expenses for acquisition of the parcel and associated costs are anticipated to be \$21,700. Richmond Land Trust will contribute \$5,700 in direct and in-kind funding toward the project (see project budget below). RLT has applied to The Nature Conservancy's Vermont Biodiversity Protection Fund for a grant of \$7,500. The Nature Conservancy has indicated that it is likely to support the project. The Nature Conservancy owns several similar parcels

of land in the vicinity and supports the conservation of the Garris-Hampton parcel and the biodiversity it protects.

Long-Term Plans

Richmond Land Trust will own and manage the property for natural resource protection and public access. RLT has an active Stewardship Committee, which oversees the organization's land and conservation easements held on private land. The budget for the project includes a contribution to RLT's stewardship endowment to support long-term management. This stewardship endowment is a dedicated fund maintained by RLT to support annual maintenance, stewardship activities, and, if necessary, legal costs associated with stewardship.

Organizational Information

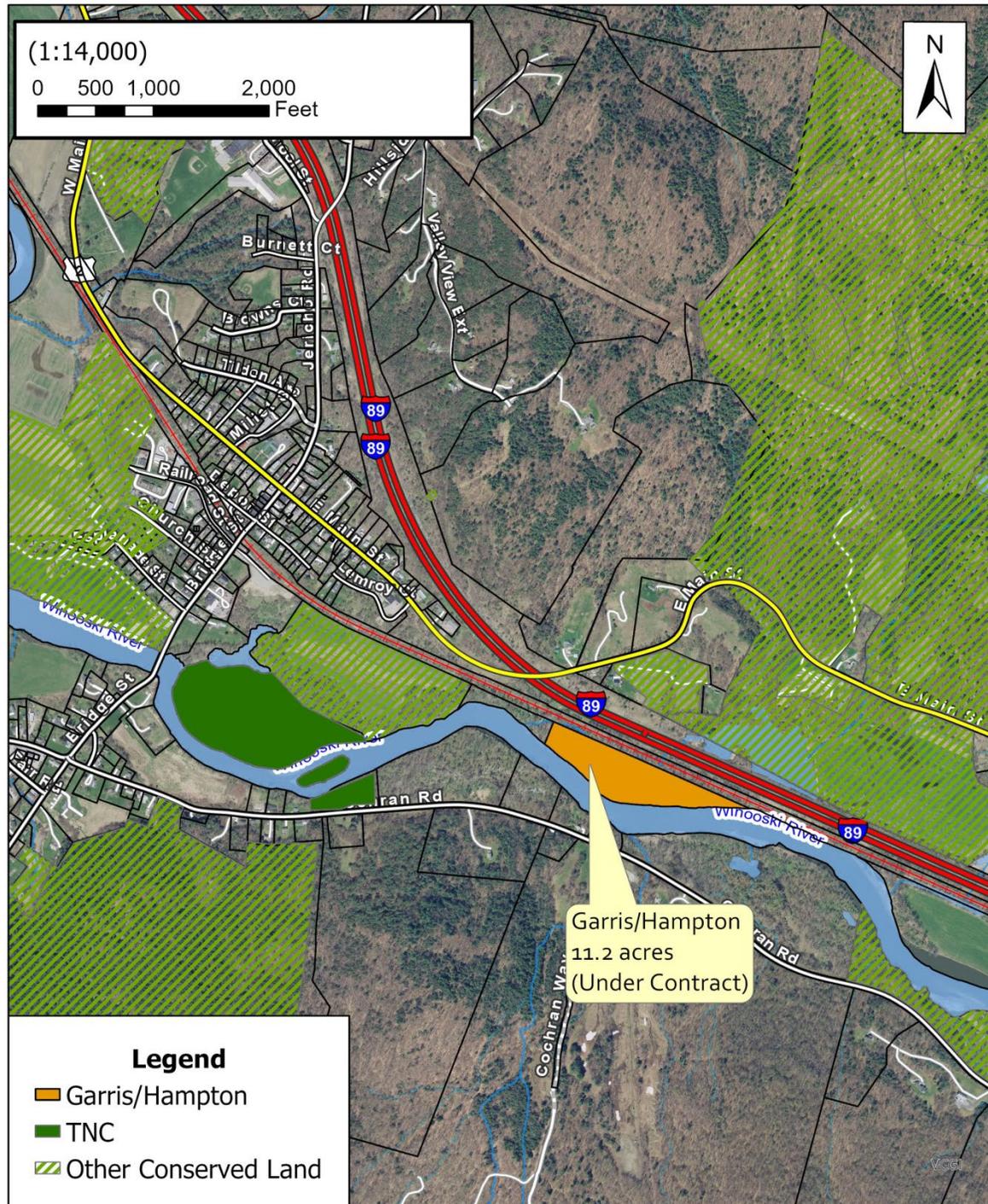
The Richmond Land Trust (RLT) is a non-profit, all-volunteer land conservation and community service organization founded by a group of Richmond residents in 1987. RLT's mission is "to preserve the rural character and quality of life in Richmond, Vermont, and its surrounding communities through land conservation, historic preservation, land stewardship, and community service and education." Since 1987 RLT has conserved approximately 1,200 acres of land through direct acquisition or conservation easement. RLT pays property taxes on all the land it owns. RLT's most recent project, the Gillett Pond Natural Area and dam replacement, protected 102 acres including Gillett Pond and restored recreational access to the pond by replacing the failed dam at the pond's outlet.

RLT has conserved several additional parcels of land along the Winooski and Huntington Rivers, including the Warren and Ruth Beeken Rivershore Preserve, the Safford-Brown Preserve, the Huntington River Preserve (Triple Buckets and Huntington Gorge). These preserves are used extensively by the public for dispersed recreation, education, and riparian access to these rivers.

Project Budget

<u>Expense</u>	<u>Source of Funds</u>	
Acquisition	Richmond CRF	\$ 7,500
	The Nature Conservancy	\$ 7,500
Mapping/Documentation	RLT (in-kind)	\$ 2,500
Stewardship	RLT	\$ 2,000
Title Insurance/Closing Costs	RLT (in-kind)	\$ 1,500
Recording Fees	RLT	<u>\$ 700</u>
	TOTAL	\$ 21,700

Proposed Acquisition
Winooski River Floodplain Forest Parcel
Richmond



Photos



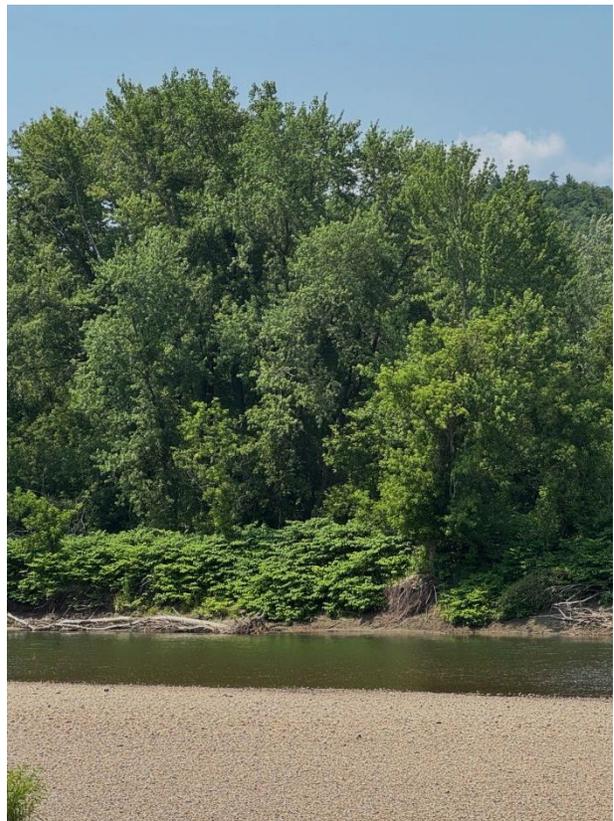
Towering Cottonwood and Silver Maple Trees



Ostrich Fern understory



View of the Winooski River from parcel



View of parcel from across the river