

Conservation Reserve Fund Application

Richmond Land Trust

April 26, 2024

Project Description

The Richmond Land Trust (RLT) owns the permanently conserved Willis Hill Preserve, located off of Route 2 in Richmond. Bordering the western edge of the Willis Hill Preserve is Donahue Brook, which runs from the culvert under Interstate 89 on the north edge of the property, through the Willis Hill Preserve, and then under a culvert under Route 2 and to the Winooski River, using a well-established historic channel.

In July of 2023 a torrential downpour in Richmond resulted in a large quantity of material left over from the earlier I89 culvert reconstruction being washed down into a shallower area of Donahue Brook. This caused the Brook to jump the established bank and flood much of the lower meadow of Willis Hill. Water continues to flow through this breach and across the Willis Hill meadow and under a secondary culvert under Route 2 into the Farr Farm. This has created three long-term consequences.

- 1) The sledding hill and some of the trails on Willis Hill, primary recreational uses for which the preserve was created, are now very limited due to the flooded area at the base of the hill. This area was historically dry and usable.
- 2) The flooded area now drains through a second culvert further east on Route 2, permanently flooding a portion of the Farr Family Farm fields and rendering them unusable.
- 3) There is no natural or established channel from this now flooded area to the Winooski and as a consequence the flooded area also threatens the railroad embankment and tracks.

The RLT has been working with representatives of the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Department of Environmental Conservation, as well as the non-profit Friends of the Winooski (FOW) and the Farr family, on possible remedies to the problem. The State has agreed that the work done for the culvert reconstruction is a likely consequential cause of the brook re-routing. The State will support the RLT re-establishing the historic Donahue Brook channel and outflow pattern, if supported by an engineering study and reconstruction design prepared by a qualified engineering firm.

The Friends of the Winooski has offered to match funding for such a study up to \$10,000 (or up to a total engineering study cost of \$20,000). The RLT and FOW have been in contact with Fitzgerald Environmental Associates and received a preliminary quote for a more limited study which indicates \$20,000 will be sufficient for such a full study. Consequently, the RLT asks for funding from the Town of Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund of up to \$10,000, to be used on a matching basis for a Donahue Brook engineering and design study.

This request is for engineering only, not for the actual work to complete this project. There is a chance that engineering will indicate that Donahue Brook cannot or should not be re-established in its historic channel..

Project Significance

Willis Hill is a popular and highly used recreational resource in Richmond. The prominent sledding hill is well used and has become an important community resource, offering free public sledding of a larger scale and wider appeal than the small hill at the Round Church. In addition, Willis Hill is crisscrossed with trails and is used every year by teachers and students at Richmond Elementary School and Camel's Hump Middle School for recreation and for educational scientific and natural studies and exercises.

Of equal importance is the effect this flooding is having on the Farr Family Farm. The flooding has rendered six or more acres unusable, resulting in the loss of valuable farm land and crops, and economic loss to the Farr family. Doing this work would support the agricultural community in Richmond.

This request meets the following Conservation Reserve Fund Guidelines:

Overall:

"Promote working farms and forest by keeping lands in private hands and preserving traditional land uses, such as family farming."

"Permanently preserve public access to land valued for ... affordable outdoor recreation, as appropriate for each individual parcel and its setting."

General Criteria

A.2. "Permanently preserving... recreational values... including the preservation of significant natural, agricultural and historic resources."

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

A.5. "Is directed at threatened resources."

A.7. "Attracts and leverages funds from other sources."

Natural Resources Protection Criteria

B.1. "Preserves river, stream and wetland quality."

B.6. "Maintains woodlands, meadows or pastures."

B.7. "Supports low or no-cost outdoor recreational activities."

Agricultural Resources Protection Criteria

C.2. "Contiguous to a working farm, and contributing to the protection of a significant area of open agricultural land for family farming or forestry."

C.3. "Has the potential to bring inactive farmland back into economically and ecologically sustainable production..."

Project Schedule

Engineering will be completed this spring or summer. The actual work to complete the projects would happen in late 2024 or early 2025.

Project Partners

The RLT is partnering with the Friends of the Winooski on the cost of the engineering study and will continue to do so in the future on actual completion of the project if so warranted. We are also collaborating with the State of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources on the design, management and permitting of this project.

Financial Information

The RLT has received a quote for \$10,000 for an earlier more limited scope of work from Fitzgerald Environmental Associates. To access additional project completion funds and for full State support, that scope of work will need to be expanded to encompass not only the subject project area, but an assessment of the greater watershed feeding Donahue Brook.

Long Term Plans

The subject property is already permanently protected by a conservation easement held jointly by the RLT and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Contact Information

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