



YEAR IN REVIEW

Steep Rock Association 2021





Nestled in the Litchfield Hills, Steep Rock Association (SRA) embraces the bucolic charm, rural character, vibrant culture, timeless quality, and wonderful community of Washington, CT.

SRA is a nationally accredited land trust whose mission is to conserve ecologically and historically significant landscapes and riparian corridors in and around Washington, CT, and to enhance the community's connection to nature through outreach, education, and passive recreation.

Our strategic priorities are:

- Preserving Land and Water
- Stewarding Natural and Historical Resources
- Engaging Our Community
- Sustaining Excellence



Preserving Land & Water

HILLSIDE FARM

An 86-acre mosaic of farmland, meadow, and forest bisected by Sprain Brook is now a SRA nature preserve that preserves critical habitat, riparian corridors, and working land. (right)

THREE LITTLE BEARS FARM LLC CONSERVATION EASEMENT

A 25-acre tract of early successional habitat and wetland was conserved through an easement agreement that ensures the protection of historic features, viability of its wildlife habitat, and preservation of water quality in Walker Brook and the Shepaug River. (bottom)



Stewarding Natural & Historical Resources

INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

In 2021, staff and volunteers worked to eliminate invasive plants on nearly 50 acres of land across our preserves. Some areas have been replanted with native species that will offer invaluable resources for wildlife.

Top: Volunteers clearing barberry in Steep Rock Preserve

Bottom: Five acres of invasive plants suppressed across 14 acres of wet meadow in Macricostas Preserve, promoting native species in this critical habitat, including a recently documented state-listed plant. This multi-year capital project was completed in 2020.





BEFORE



DURING



AFTER

Shepaug Riverbank Restoration

In a multi-year capital project initiated in 2020, the eroded bank at the SR2 Campsite has been fully restored. Native species were transplanted, live staked, and seeded to revegetate the work site, and we are incredibly pleased with the product's resiliency, having remained completely intact through this year's severe floods.

Trail Projects & Infrastructure

With nearly 47 miles of trails and numerous bridges and other amenities, SRA's infrastructure requires constant maintenance and upkeep to keep our trails open, safe, and accessible.

Left: Stair construction at SR3 Campsite Outhouse

Right: Hauser Bridge steps and bridge decking replacement



REBUILT STEPS TO HAUSER BRIDGE



Eagle Scout Project

Ronan McKay, a 16-year-old Eagle Scout candidate with Troop 65, worked with Steep Rock Trails and Preserves Manager Mike Giapponi to rebuild an old, deteriorating bridge at the SRI campsite in Steep Rock Preserve. The new bridge is a substantial improvement, with railings on either side and an earth and stone ramp to improve accessibility.

Ronan stated, "You guys were great to work with and I loved that you cared about my project just as much as me."





Responding to the Climate Crisis

Over the past two years, Steep Rock preserves and Connecticut have been struck with a number of devastating storms. As the climate crisis worsens and the incidence of major storms increases, the demands for trail maintenance are also increasing.

To ensure that our trails weather these storms, SRA relies heavily on volunteer efforts. In the last fiscal year alone, volunteers contributed over 700 hours to the monitoring, maintenance, and expansion of our trails system. Moving forward, SRA hopes to continue to expand that number, building our stewardship capacity today to meet the challenges of tomorrow.



Year of the Kestrel

2021 has been an incredible year for our small falcon of special concern, the American kestrel. We banded 5 chicks raised in one of our nest boxes, marking the 6th consecutive year a breeding pair has successfully reproduced in Steep Rock Preserve!

Nest site availability is often a limiting factor in their preferred open country, and with the acquisition of Johnson Farm Preserve, SRA identified an opportunity to expand its kestrel conservation efforts. With assistance from Art Gingert, project leader for Audubon's American Kestrel Nest Box Program, we installed a state-of-the-science nest box that we are confident will serve kestrels in Connecticut for many years into the future.



Steep Rock Citizen Science Projects

SRA's Citizen Science Program aids our investigations, engages the public in research, and promotes conservation across boundaries. In the past year, five studies have been performed with the help of 56 conservation-minded community members to better understand how threatened species utilize our preserves and assess the success of habitat enhancement projects.

MIDWINTER EAGLE SURVEY

18.7 miles of the Shepaug River surveyed - 4 adult and 4 immature bald eagles

NESTWATCH

182 box checks performed in Macricostas Preserve - 14 nest attempts, 12 fledged eastern bluebirds and 47 fledged tree swallows, 3 pest invasions

"I find the experience rather humbling. You watch the birds from the beginning, building their nests and before you know, there are young, and then they are off. The parental dedication is wonderful to witness firsthand."

"I get way more from it than I give. Observing the changes in the boxes each week has made me more aware of what goes on in my own backyard. I've learned so much and will always marvel at the feather-cupped nest cover that the tree swallow's make! Who knew?"



Steep Rock Citizen Science Projects

BRONSON FIELD POLLINATOR MEADOW SITE ASSESSMENT

The results of 66 pollinator transect surveys performed by volunteers in Hidden Valley Preserve revealed 2,764 hymenopterans, 387 lepidopterans, 226 coleopterans – 35 photos documenting seasonal growth and 55 photos documenting flora phenology.

"I absolutely loved this experience. There was something so peaceful about slowing down in order to make note of EVERYTHING around you. Such a connection with that beautiful place for an hour or so."

"Volunteering at the pollinator meadow last summer was an amazing learning experience as I had never spent much time observing pollinators at work. Now I know what busy as a bee really means."





Judea Garden

GROWING IN AND FOR OUR COMMUNITY

2021 Season

Produced: 3,700 lbs of vegetables

Collected: 500 lbs of apples from local farms

Distributed: 4,200 lbs of produce to neighbors in need





Engaging Our Community

Although the Covid-19 pandemic continues, Steep Rock was excited that our Washington community returned to some “normalcy” with all the appropriate precautions.

We participated in several community events including **Earth Day, Community Block Party, Spring Hill Arts Gathering, Harvest Festival, and Holiday in the Depot.**

In addition, our traditional activities returned, including SRA’s annual **Community Picnic.**

Let’s hope for even more events to engage our community next year!



Nature Programming for Our Community

SRA offers an array of outreach programs to enhance people's connection to nature and highlight the uniqueness of our preserves. In collaboration with ASAP!, we especially excelled at impacting youth this year, bringing 64 students in Grades 3-6 from the Children's Community School in Waterbury and 12 children in Grades K-5 out to Macricostas Preserve for outdoor workshops with educational components.

Clockwise from top: Metamorphosis with ASAP, Wondrous Wildflowers of HV, Winter Critters, CT Trails Day, and Bee Brook's Busy Beavers.





Emphasizing Health and Wellness

Steep Rock's Outreach Committee launched two new health and wellness events this year:

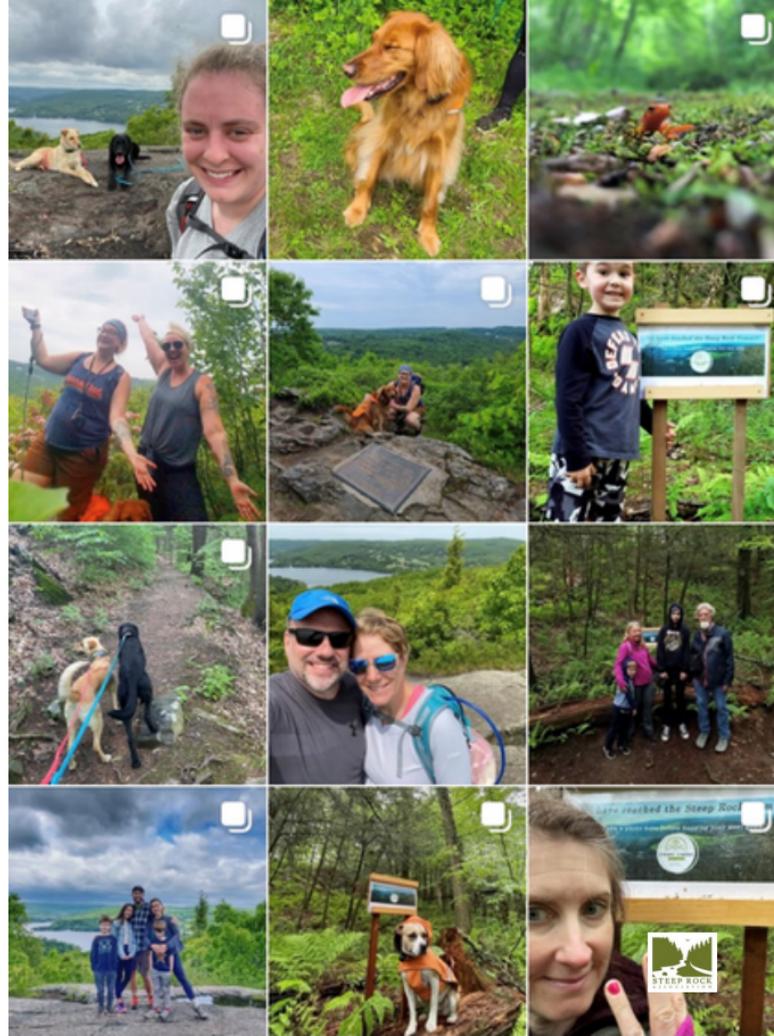
3 PEAKS IN 3 WEEKS CHALLENGE

This event challenged visitors to climb our three highest peaks in each preserve in late spring. Over 150 visitors registered and took selfies.

ROSSITER RUN 5K

As part of Harvest Festival Weekend, we had 80 runners register and race out-and-back on Tunnel Road.

"We had a great time meeting the challenge. In 50 years of living here I'd never been to the Pinnacle at Hidden Valley. Three beautiful hikes on three beautiful days in three beautiful preserves."



Celebrating Success: Johnson Farm Preserve Opening

Over 40 people, including representatives from SRA, CT Land Conservation Council, Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative, state and federal agencies, State Representatives Cindy Harrison and Maria Horn, CT Farmland Trust, other local land trusts, Washington residents, and Steep Rock Trustees, supporters, and volunteers gathered on a spectacular October day for the grand opening of Johnson Farm Preserve.





Sustaining Excellence

- Completion and Publication of 2021-2025 Strategic Plan
- Completion and Submission of LTA Reaccreditation Application
- Operational documents reviewed, updated, and approved
- Successful renovation and Move-In to Steep Rock House
- Judea Garden "Friend of the Green" Award
- Aquarion Environmental Champion Award
- Over \$900,000 in Annual Campaign Funds in FY21
- Almost \$600,000 donated toward Steep Rock Campus
- Onboarded two new staff members





BRIAN HAGENBUCH
Executive Director



DENISE ARTURI
Judea Garden Head Gardener
& Volunteer Coordinator



MIKE GIAPPONI
Trails and Preserves Manager



RORY LARSON
Conservation Science Manager



JOHANNA MACHES
Office Manager



MONICA ROBERTO
Development Specialist



Staff & New Steep Rock Headquarters



thank you

WE ARE INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SUPPORT.
THANK YOU FOR BEING SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART
OF STEEP ROCK'S CONSERVATION TEAM.

[> 2021
GRATITUDE REPORT](#)



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