

# 2025

A Century of Excellence



STEEP ROCK  
ASSOCIATION



## STRATEGIC PLAN

Photo by Peary Stafford





Photo by Peary Stafford

# Welcome

BRIAN HAGENBUCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
THOMAS RICKART, PRESIDENT

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. As we approach a century since our founding, we respect and appreciate the vision of our founders and work of our predecessors, whose contributions to protecting these forested hills, pastoral landscapes, and scenic rivers have shaped and defined our sense of place.

In our 2025 Strategic Plan, SRA builds upon our strong foundation within the context of a rapidly changing world. Facing insidious threats such as the climate crisis, invasive species, environmental indifference, and development pressure, the need for open space, recreation, and working lands is imperative for sustaining the future of the human condition and natural world.

In response, SRA's actions will strategically protect conservation priorities, critical habitats, and biodiversity. Our four preserves will offer everyone the opportunity to hike, exercise, and appreciate nature's beauty. Our programs will engage participants in our area's history and ecology, as well as collect scientific data to inform our management decisions.

SRA emphasizes teamwork among staff, trustees, volunteers, and supporters as we work toward our mission and vision. And partnerships with the Town of Washington, neighboring land trusts, and others will offer a broader vision to enhance the joy of living, working, and recreating in northwest Connecticut.

In 2025, we hope you will join us as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Steep Rock Association. Thanks for your support and see you on our trails.



# Mission

Steep Rock Association 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.

# Vision

Steep Rock Association envisions a Washington, CT, where conserved lands, healthy ecosystems, and a biologically rich natural world thrive in harmony with a vibrant, engaged, diverse, and supportive community that is ecologically, culturally, and economically sustainable.



# Strategic Priorities

SRA has an ambitious agenda with four key priorities that will guide our work stewarding lands and waters sustainably for the enjoyment of future generations in perpetuity.

## PRESERVING LAND & WATER

Protect and preserve critical habitats, rare and threatened species, riparian corridors, and strategic properties with high conservation value.

## STEWARDING NATURAL & HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Implement best management practices and scientific approaches to sustain our lands for biological diversity, passive recreation, and agricultural productivity.

## ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY

Increase public appreciation and knowledge of the environment through outreach and education on the region's ecological, cultural, recreational, and historical significance.

## SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE

Maintain excellence as a nationally-accredited land trust through effective operational and fiscal management and successful collaborative partnerships.



Photo by Deborah Laffon



Photo by Mike Ciapponi



Photo by Peary Stafford

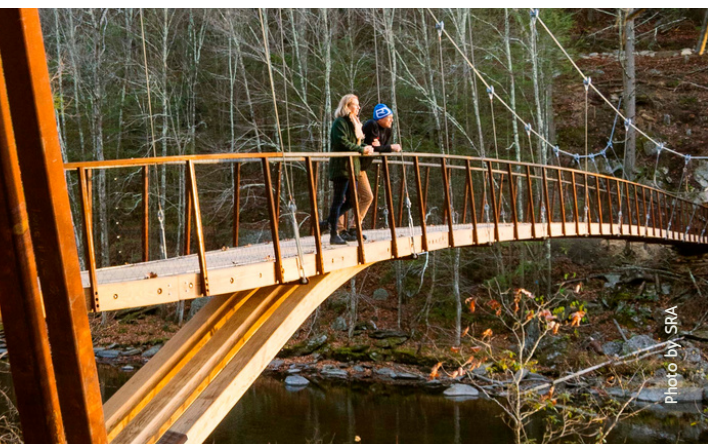


Photo by SRA



# Preserving Land & Water

## Goals

- Develop and employ science-based approaches to town- and region-wide land use preservation, emphasizing intact forests, riparian corridors, and working lands.
- Protect the three watersheds and multiple riparian corridors within SRA properties to improve water quality, enhance biological diversity, and increase passive recreation.

To protect critically important lands and waters in perpetuity, SRA builds collaborative partnerships on a regional scale to preserve forests, fields, rivers, wetlands, and working lands.

- Enhance outreach efforts to the greater Washington community and key stakeholders regarding SRA's preservation efforts.
- Ensure all property documentation as well as title work related to SRA properties complies with local and state regulations and Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices.



Photo by Peary Stafford



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# Stewarding Natural & Historical Resources

SRA employs Best Management Practices and scientific data to steward the lands and waters entrusted to us for passive recreation, the protection of biological diversity, and support for sustainable agriculture.

## Goals

- Maximize biological and ecological diversity by implementing conservation initiatives, reducing potential threats, and supporting agricultural productivity.
- Maintain and improve SRA property infrastructure (trails, bridges, boardwalks, etc.) to provide safe, inclusive, and accessible passive recreation.
- Enhance SRA's volunteer program to expand participation and engagement in addressing stewardship and other organizational needs.
- Complete development of the "Steep Rock Campus at Macricostas Preserve" on Christian Street.



Photo by Clark Gifford



Photo by SRA



Photo by BK Stafford





Photo by Denise Arturi

# Engaging Our Community

SRA champions biological and human diversity. All are welcome at our preserves, events, and programs, regardless of demographics, identity, economic status, cultural beliefs, or political persuasion.

## Goals

- Actively engage the Washington community and visitors to our preserves in experiential opportunities that enhance their connection to SRA and raise environmental awareness, appreciation, and knowledge.
- Organize and publicize a variety of giving events across all donor ranges to increase our donor base and strategic giving.
- Develop and implement appropriate tools to reach SRA's various constituencies and new audiences through targeted outreach via social media, virtual and hybrid programs, and efforts to engage our visitors.



Photo by SRA



# Sustaining Excellence

## Goals

- Achieve reaccreditation with the Land Trust Alliance in 2022.
- Adequately fund the annual and capital budgets to support the objectives of the five-year Strategic Plan and annual operating plans.
- Ensure an active Board of Trustees that is representative of the Washington community with respect to demographics, socioeconomic status, residency, qualifications, and skill sets and consists of individuals who make significant contributions to the organization.
- Ensure that SRA's by-laws and other operational documents are accurate, up to date, and conform with appropriate best management practices.





# History

In 1889, architect Ehrick Rossiter, a graduate of The Gunnery, was about to break ground on his country house when he discovered that the wooded hillside in his view was slated for clearcutting. He bought the land and saved forever the 186 acres that is now the heart of Steep Rock Preserve. Rossiter built carriage roads and river crossings and invited fellow townspeople to enjoy the wild beauty of this section of the Shepaug River Valley.

In 1925, to ensure its preservation, he donated the land to a group of trustees, who founded the Trust for Reservations. These trustees later purchased the 100- acre parcel known as the Clam Shell, thus preserving the view from the “Steep Rock” and all the land underneath.

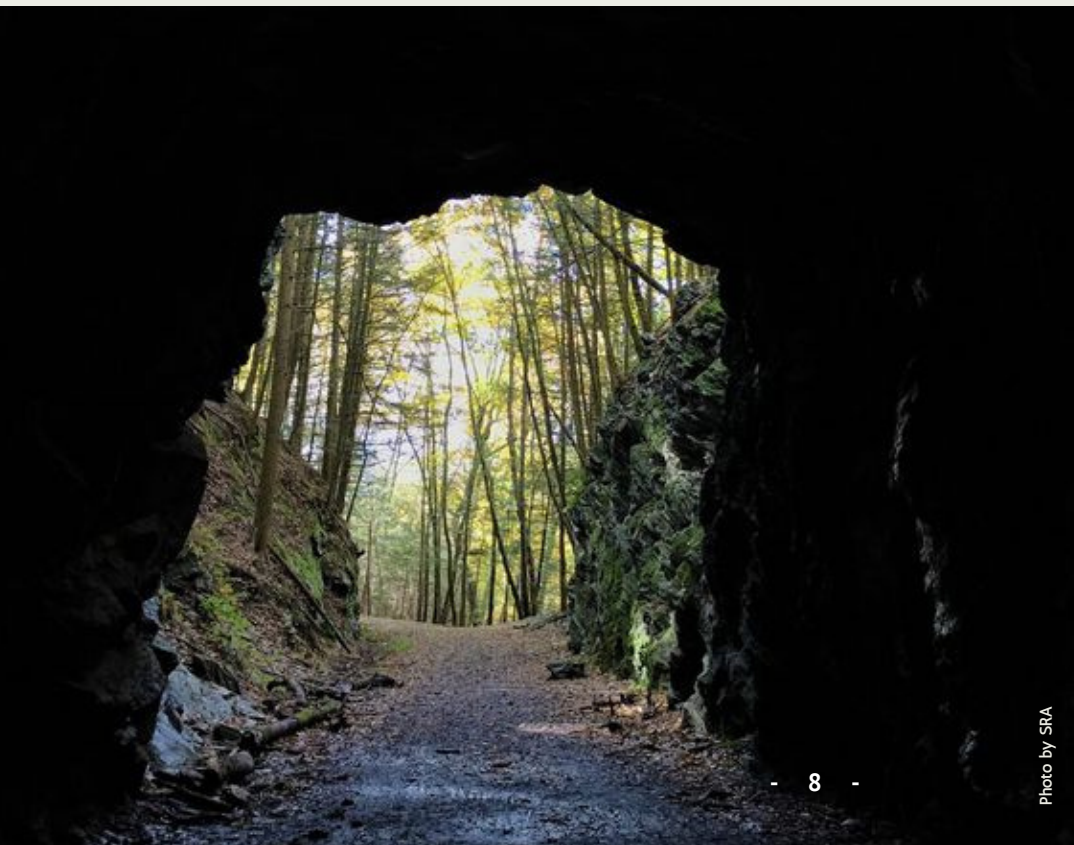
In 1961, the Trustees established Steep Rock Association as a land trust. By then Steep Rock Preserve had grown to 582 acres. The Hidden Valley Preserve was created in 1961 when

Trustee Adrian Van Sinderen and his wife Jean donated their 650-acre recreational property.

During the 1980's SRA hired its first Executive Director and began to accept conservation easements and non-contiguous parcels of land. New bridges were built along the Shepaug River to give access to the preserves.

In 2000, a new era of collaboration began when the Town of Washington, the State of Connecticut, Steep Rock supporters, and the Macricostas family came together to purchase the 238-acre Meeker Swamp, now known as Macricostas Preserve.

In 2018, SRA acquired our fourth preserve open to the public, the 52-acre Johnson Farm Preserve, with support from state and federal grants and private donors. SRA now protects over 21% of the Town and manages 2,600 acres of fee-owned land and nearly 2,700 acres of conservation easements on private property.





# Steep Rock Facts

## LAND PROTECTED

- 21% of Town of Washington (5,300 acres)
- 2,604 acres across 26 SRA preserves
- 2,690 acres across 108 conservation easements stewarded by SRA
- 4 nature preserves open to the public: Steep Rock, Hidden Valley, Macricostas, Johnson Farm

## CRITICAL ECOLOGICAL HABITATS

- 960 acres (36.8% of SRA total holdings)
- 175 acres of old growth forest
- 70 acres of floodplain forest
- 7.75 miles of the Shepaug River
- 33 rare or endangered species

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 3,300+ pounds of organic produce per year grown and distributed by Judea Garden to food pantries and residents in need
- 185+ volunteers
- 2,000+ volunteer hours annually
- 12-20 educational programs per year
- Annual Community Picnic – September

## RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 46.75 miles of hiking trails
- 21 miles of equestrian trails
- 6.7 miles of bicycling trails
- 3 primitive campsites in Steep Rock Preserve
- 3.2 miles of public fishing on the Shepaug River

## OPERATING BUDGET

- \$600,000 annually
- 98% of funding from donations by supporters
- 650+ donors/supporters
- Staff (4 full-time, 2 part-time, 6+ interns)



Photo by Peary Stafford



Photo by Denise Avritt



Photo by SRA





Photo by Nicole Frappier

# Get Involved

## VOLUNTEER

We wouldn't be where we are today without the contributions of volunteers. Join us as we work to keep Steep Rock Association a treasure for generations to come. Help needed with:

- trail monitoring & work parties
- Judea Garden
- photography
- citizen science projects data collection
- guided hikes
- nature preserve monitoring
- office help

## DONATE

Steep Rock Association is a non-profit organization supported by your donations. There are many ways to give, including:

- financial contributions
- creating a fundraiser for SRA
- goods and services
- equipment
- land
- legacy gifts

For more information, contact SRA at (860) 868-9131 or [info@steeprockassoc.org](mailto:info@steeprockassoc.org)



*Stay informed via social media & email*



*Future Home of the Steep Rock  
Campus at Macricostas Preserve*



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