

**Writing the Land:  
Northeast**

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## Foreword

Let's be honest: Writing the land is impossible. The land writes itself, sings the song of itself in languages older than words, in creak and croak and thunderclap, in wail of loonsong, murmur of leaf rustle, insect hum, wolf howl. The languages of people, various and rich but so new in the pageant of life, are wholly inadequate to capture the land's music.

But . . . attempting to write the land is noble. And delightful. Perhaps even essential. To add our compositions, imperfect and incomplete as they may be, to the land's great symphony, joining our human song to the chorus of voices helps us make sense of our place and purpose in the diversity of life.

Our moment in time, with its entwined crisis of climate chaos and ecological unraveling offers up a continuous mix of horrors, current and anticipated, to contemplate. The land, however, despite its sufferings, offers daily an antidote to despair. What better way to avoid forethought of grief than to greet one's wild cousins, hemlock and moose, and acknowledge the wind, moon, and sun? To be cheered by flower, waved at by leaf, sung to by warbler—these daily blessings ground us.

In a spirit of reciprocity, many of us work to safeguard the ground that grounds us. This work, in our culture, has come to be known as “conservation,” a term encompassing a wide array of actions with legal and ethical foundations, and which can permanently protect specific places. The parks and wilderness areas we treasure, the undammed rivers, the natural habitats supporting wildlife, the scenic vistas of unmarred country . . . where such beauty and wildness remain it is generally not because the forces of development haven't yet arrived but because people who loved the land used their own wild and precious lives resisting those forces. And were successful.

In America's fractious body politic, the land trust movement is remarkably nonpolitical, bipartisan, even hopeful. It's a vanishingly rare area of civic life that attracts people from across the political spectrum, whose interests range from conserving local farms and timberlands to setting aside great swaths of the planet from human domination and letting nature *rewild*—that is to say, *heal*, places degraded by human

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exploitation. The commonality within this broad movement is devotion to the land.

If expanding the number of people who feel this devotion and express it through conservation efforts is crucial to a beautiful future for humanity and all our relations on Earth (and I do believe it is), how might that come to pass? How will we win hearts and minds to the righteous cause of wildness? Surely the land's intrinsic beauty and wild life—and human interpreters of these attributes—will play central roles in rewilding ourselves, a fundamental task if we are to regain responsible citizenship in the biotic community.

In this urgent work of interpretation, celebration, and reconnection we have much to learn from land lovers of various kinds—amateur naturalists, formally trained ecologists, community elders, organic farmers, low-impact loggers, wilderness champions. And *poets*.

Yes, poets, the concise storytellers, armed with visions. The voices of courage that sometimes, when the stars and words align, perform the shaman's task, guiding us to look beyond surfaces and tap our individual sense of wonder. Thanks always to these guides who see our fellow members in the land community and recognize them as family. Who in the favor of their poetry remind us that Earth returns our love.

———*Tom Butler, Senior Fellow, Northeast Wilderness Trust  
Summer 2021, foothills of Vermont's Green Mountains*

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## Introduction

*Into My Own*  
by Robert Frost

*One of my wishes is that those dark trees,  
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze  
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,  
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.  
I should not be withheld but that some day  
Into their vastness I should steal away,  
Fearless of ever finding open land,  
Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand.  
I do not see why I should e'er turn back,  
Or those should not set forth upon my track  
To overtake me, who should miss me here  
And long to know if still I held them dear.  
They would not find me changed from him they knew—  
Only more sure of all I thought was true.*

Before Writing the Land, there was Thinking the Land. Enjoyable, but not quite efficacious. In my off-grid cottage in a mature hemlock forest in Northfield, Massachusetts for years I contemplated the land. And as I walked those acres with Robert Frost, feeling his cadences in my hiking feet, I knew that words and land wrote each other. And it occurred to me, that in this way land contributes to its own protection; that land speaks, and that Nature poets are trained to hear those voices.

So what does it matter, this conversation, asked the activist in me? In a time when land needs all the help it can get just to survive, how can poets help the land that we love protect itself? The answer is through land trusts. Land Trusts are the protectors of land with boots, GPS, a force of volunteers and even—if needed—lawyers, land trusts defend land against the highway, the strip mall, industrial agriculture that depletes, and the thoughtless clearcut. And simultaneously open land to plants, creatures, and often, poets.

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Through this partnership, Thinking the Land became Writing the Land, which in this pilot year was comprised of 11 land trusts and 36 separate lands, and has since evolved to include over 100 poets with almost 50 land trusts and other partners for next year. I am so grateful to these poets, and our collaborators for hearing the voices that surround us, and for their faith in the project to spread the word to others. Writing the Land participants are honored to be doing essential work for our lands. By pairing poets with protected lands, we offer ourselves as a conduit for the land to speak, to sing, to cry out, to comfort.

Just as each poem is an individual's interpretation of the voices they hear, each land trust's chapter reflects their unique approach to the work of land protection. Together they tell a story about a different journey than the one our mainstream culture is on—a journey to explore, preserve, and nurture the dream of a vastness into which we can lose—and find—ourselves.

—6/16/21  
*L. McLoughlin*  
*Hemlock House*  
*Northfield, MA*

NB. “Into My Own” by Robert Frost is now in the public domain. It was originally published in *A Boy's Will* (Henry Holt, 1915)

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NORTHEAST



WILDERNESS  
TRUST

# NORTHEAST WILDERNESS TRUST

## New England & New York

At Northeast Wilderness Trust, we do conservation differently. We are the only regional land trust that can promise every acre we protect today will be an old-growth forest of tomorrow.

In the Northeastern United States, places where nature can evolve and thrive without human interference are rare. But together, we can change this. On lands protected by the Wilderness Trust, plants and animals, fungi and insects, water and soil are all free to be exactly as they are. Wild nature belongs in this corner of the world and it offers benefits to people unmatched by human-dominated lands.

- Eagle Mountain Wilderness Preserve-Sylvia Karman
- Alder Stream Wilderness Preserve-David Crews
- Muddy Pond Wilderness Preserve-Kathy Kremins
- Binney Hill Wilderness Preserve-Rachelle Parker



**Peregrine Falcon at Eagle Mountain by Brendan Wiltse**

## Eagle Mountain Wilderness Preserve

*Eagle Mountain Wilderness is in the northern foothills of the Adirondacks, a geologically young mountain range at five to ten million years old. The preserve is part of the ancestral land of the Kanien'kehá:ka—or the Mohawk nation. I hiked into Eagle Mountain Wilderness for the first time in October 2020 along the remnants of an old logging road reminding me of the history of the land and our relationship with it. Eagle Mountain Wilderness has much to offer about that relationship and how we can restore it. Since then I have had the good fortune to return to the preserve. The following poems represent my attempt to reflect on what wilderness can share when I pay attention.*

*-Sylvia Karman, 6/23/21*

### Hiking Eagle Mountain Wilderness

by Sylvia Karman

*Imagine walking through a richly inhabited world  
of Birch people, Bear people, Rock people...*

*-Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass*

By what name do the trees know us?

They speak in balsam scents, their breezy brogues swish & creak,  
birch & maple crowns cast sunlight coins that wink

my name along the logging road long surrendered  
to pioneers whose seeds tag my sleeves & the wolfish drape  
of my shepherd mix's tail—they mark us chance in motion

& settle on a giant's fist of till near a pond where the shepherd spies a  
beaver

*Tsianì:to le castor der Biber Castor canadensis*

whose gaze returns our marvel before he turns to ripples, water covers  
him sleek in sleek reflecting

the mountain—her south facing ice-plucked cliffs shelter raptor  
nations—she extends her wild  
lap to the winged & mineraled, the rooted & roaming, to any called to  
wonder & become  
possibility.

*The following two poems are written in a Japanese poetry form known as tanka which typically consists of 31 syllables: the first and third lines have five syllables each, and the other lines each have seven syllables.-SK*

Northern Flicker (Yellow Shafted) Meets Cooper's Hawks  
by Sylvia Karman

Gold feathers, coal tips  
fanned at birch roots, offering.  
Hawk shadows cross paths.  
A breeze lifts the retrices  
of those in flight, in service.



One Myotis Lucifugus  
by Sylvia Karman

Lone mouse-eared brown bat  
skirrs dusk, feeding on echoes.  
Absence chases her.  
Beneath her mammalian wings  
trail cauldrons of white-nosed ghosts.



AGRARIAN TRUST

Agrarian  
Trust

Nationwide

Agrarian Trust's mission is to support land access for next generation farmers. We need to chart the way forward. We need to hold our precious farmland in a trust for its best uses: sustainable food production and collective, ecological stewardship. We must also help the incoming organic leadership build on the legacy of our organic elders, many of whom have been farming for more than 30 years, and keep organic land in production. We need to support the stakeholders engaged in complex land succession, with all the accounting, estate planning, retirement planning and legal and technical assistance that is necessary. We need a national conversation that leads to action and traction for sustainable farming at the foundation of a new, just and equitable economy. Finally, we need community-centered Agrarian Commons to create democratic ownership, tenure, and equity rooted in the land, individualized to place, and connected across the country.

- Liberation Farm-David Crews
- Vernon Family Farm-Jessica Purdy
- Normanton Farm-Mary Brancaccio
- Brookford Farm-Megan Collins
- Bread and Butter Farm-Dan Close

*Agrarian Trust* believes that conservation is done by and for people and that people eat, hold culture, and deserve justice, and that all of these things are connected.

*The protected versus unprotected farms all depends upon whose perspective is centered. A farm protected through a conservation easement may be protected against extraction and development, but not be protected for agriculture or for farmers. At the same time, a farm held in a community land trust, Agrarian Commons, or community-centered shared commons might be protected for the farmer and for agriculture, but not for conservation or environmental purposes.*

*Land trust work to conserve land is done because we as humans also destroy, degrade, commoditize, and extract from land. Too often, we align with this destructive, colonizing relationship with land because we have suppressed, devalued, or exterminated Indigenous and regional foodways and agrarian and Indigenous culture, and because we lack frameworks, constructs, and agreements tied to land justice.*

*Land conservation by land trusts is a positive action to address a negative system, yet it need not align with the systems that got us to this present-day situation. Our human existence on the earth likely cannot withstand another century of the systems we presently operate within. Indigenous and regional foodways, agrarian and Indigenous Culture, and communities tied to land have deep wisdom and practical knowledge that must guide a cultural transformation.*

*We seek a renewed adaptation of ancient systems and ancient relationships to the land.*

### **Liberation Farm**

*On the morning of October 24, 2020 I had the privilege to meet Mubidin Libah, of the Somali Bantu Community Association, at the site of what would become (in the following year) the new Bantu community farm. The Agrarian Trust has helped Mubidin and the Bantu Association find this new land in the foothills of Wales, Maine—what is also Abenaki ancestral land. Mubidin graciously spent a few hours with me that morning talking and walking the land, and the following poem comes from our time together. It is dedicated to the spirit and will of the Somali Bantu Community Association as well as the good work of Agrarian Trust.*

*--David Crews, May, 2021*



*Valley Community  
Land Trust*

# Valley Community Land Trust

## Franklin County, MA

### **Valley Community Land Trust**

-Poet: Paul Richmond

The Valley Community Land Trust (VCLT) is based in Franklin County Massachusetts. VCLT owns land that it leases to home-owner lessees, whose rights to use the land and own their homes are governed by 99 year leases.



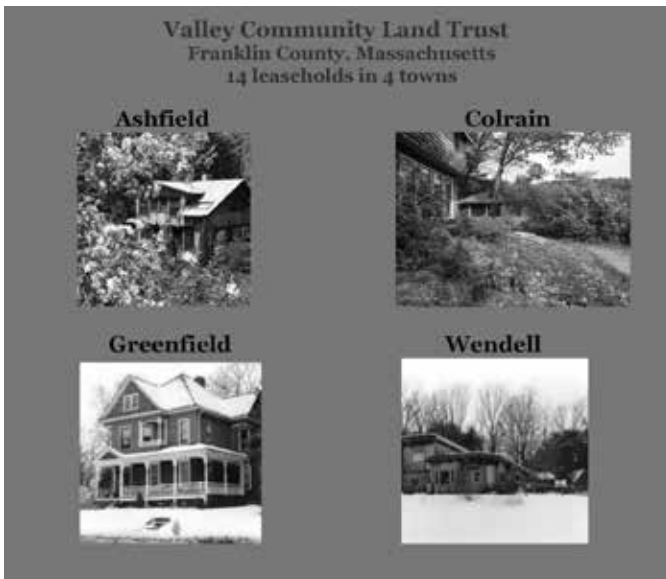
VCLT acquired most of its current land at a time when it was a pioneer in the area's land conservation efforts. Most of the land was originally funded by several large donations.



VCLT's lessees are mostly those who have self-financed and often self-built their homes, or, over time, have bought those homes from previous lessees. Usually, this occurs without financial assistance from the VCLT beyond the provision of the land. The organization is currently financed entirely through its lease fees and occasional small donations; and conducts its administration primarily with volunteer labor from the lessees themselves.



VCLT lessees and other members are united by a belief that since land is not the creation of human effort, it is fundamentally unjust for individuals to profit from the buying and selling of land. By holding a stock of land in trusteeship, never again to be bought and sold, we seek to add a measure of equability to the imbalances that challenge our world.



Valley Community Land Trust  
by Paul Richmond

Has a long history  
Of having a political consciousness  
Anti War  
Self Reliance  
Back to the land  
Economic justice  
Women's rights  
Anti Racist  
Core value  
No One Owns Land



You are leasing a piece of the earth  
While you are here  
A place to live  
Being a steward  
On the land  
In the beginning  
There were hippie handshakes  
Statements of values  
By-laws and meetings  
VCLT was incorporated in 1977  
Over 200 acres of land in Franklin County, MA.  
Taken off the market  
The land provides homes for more than 50 people  
Homes with  
Gardens  
Woods  
Orchards  
Open fields  
And cottage industries  
Sustaining an organization for the last 44 years  
Isn't all parties and potlucks  
More of a roller coaster  
Of ups and downs  
Individuals and group energy  
In a dance with our daily lives  
And our commitment  
To the VCLT  
By signing a lease  
A number of the original members have died  
Others have moved on  
New younger members  
Taking care of the land  
That the earth is not for sale  
We come into this world  
And along with all the other creatures who are here  
Finding our way to be sustainable  
Taking care of the land for future generations  
The land is not for sale

## Land Trusts

### Agrarian Trust

#### Nationwide

Agrarian Trust's mission is to support land access for next generation farmers. We need to chart the way forward. We need to hold our precious farmland in a trust for its best uses: sustainable food production and collective, ecological stewardship. We must also help the incoming organic leadership build on the legacy of our organic elders, many who have been farming for more than 30 years, and keep organic land in production. We need to support the stakeholders engaged in complex land succession, with all the accounting, estate planning, retirement planning and legal and technical assistance that is necessary. We need a national conversation that leads to action and traction for sustainable farming at the foundation of a new, just and equitable economy. Finally, we need community centered Agrarian Commons to create democratic ownership, tenure, and equity rooted in the land, individualized to place, and connected across the country.

### Kennebec Estuary Land Trust

#### Bath, Maine

The Kennebec Estuary Land Trust is committed to conserving land and wildlife habitat of the Lower Kennebec and Sheepscot River estuaries. We are a volunteer-driven, donor-supported organization serving the communities of Arrowsic, Bath, Bowdoinham, Dresden, West Bath, Georgetown, Richmond, Westport Island and Woolwich. An estuary is a partially enclosed body of water along the coast where freshwater from rivers and streams meet and mix with salt water from the ocean. Estuaries and the lands surrounding them are places of transition from land to sea, providing important refuge for wildlife to feed, roam, and thrive. The Kennebec River contributes an average of six billion gallons of water to the Gulf of Maine per day, making its influence on the state's water quality and overall ecological health significant. KELT maintains twelve preserves for public enjoyment and has protected 4,100+ acres of land since our founding in 1989. Learn more by visiting [www.kennebecestuary.org](http://www.kennebecestuary.org) or calling (207) 442-8400.

## Monadnock Community Land Trust

Wilton, New Hampshire

The mission of the Monadnock Community Land Trust is to hold land in trust for the larger community. We promote ecologically responsible use of that land and offer possibilities for affordable housing for low to moderate income families. Our intention is to protect the environment, promote the health and vitality of local communities, and promote diversity by offering access to land.

## Monadnock Conservancy

Keene, New Hampshire

As a land trust for southwestern New Hampshire, our mission is to work with communities and landowners to conserve the natural resources, wild and working lands, rural character, and scenic beauty of the Monadnock region. We care for our conservation lands, and we engage people in ways that strengthen their communities and their connections to the land. To support our work, please visit our website to sign up for our monthly e-newsletter and make a donation today:

[www.MonadnockConservancy.org](http://www.MonadnockConservancy.org)

## Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust

Athol, Massachusetts

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust benefits the environment, the economy, and future generations by protecting significant agricultural, natural, and scenic lands and encouraging land stewardship in northern and central Massachusetts. The core strength of Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust is our focus on collaboration to achieve significant land protection projects while actively stewarding the conservation areas we own. Our effectiveness is a function of our creative, innovative approach and responsiveness to the diverse conservation ethics held by the landowners of our region.

## New England Forestry Foundation

Littleton, Massachusetts

A hike through a New Hampshire forest in the fall; a Vermont barn made from locally milled trees; and the clear, clean waters of a Maine river—these are just a few of the many gifts that New England’s forests offer. Across the region, forests help reduce climate change by removing carbon dioxide from the air, while also providing local jobs, timber, wildlife habitat, clean air and water, and recreational opportunities. These benefits support a vibrant and thriving region, and New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) works to protect forests and their benefits for future generations. Through the application of its core expertise in conserving forestland and advancing Exemplary Forestry, NEFF ultimately aims to help the people of New England to sustain their way of life, protect forest wildlife habitat and ecosystem services, and mitigate and adapt to climate change. NEFF owns and manages more than 38,000 acres of woodlands across New England, and protects an additional 1.1 million acres through conservation easements.

## New Hampshire Audubon

Concord, New Hampshire

The mission at NH Audubon is to protect New Hampshire’s natural environment for wildlife and for people. Founded in 1914 with an original focus on protecting and restoring migratory bird populations decimated by hunting and collection in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, today’s NH Audubon provides: environmental education programs throughout the state, statewide conservation research and wildlife monitoring, protection of nearly 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat in 39 sanctuaries, and environmental public policy and science-based advocacy.

## Northeast Wilderness Trust

New England & New York

The lands protected by Northeast Wilderness Trust offer wild nature the freedom to flourish. On forever-wild landscapes, people take a step back and natural processes unfold freely. The 41,000+ acres of wildlands safeguarded by Northeast Wilderness Trust are places where native species can thrive and evolve. They offer resilience in the face of climate change, so that plants, animals, and fungi can move and adapt in response to rapidly changing environmental conditions. In essence, wilderness is self-willed land—the root of the word meaning “will-of-the-land.” A wild place is free from human control, with natural processes directing the ebb and flow of life.

## Southeast Land Trust

Exeter, New Hampshire

The Southeast Land Trust (SELT) conserves and stewards land for the benefit of people and nature in New Hampshire. SELT serves 52 towns and cities of Rockingham and Strafford counties and has conserved tens of thousands of acres since 1980, including nature preserves, hiking trails, farmland, and scenic vistas. SELT relies on its annual contributing members, committed Board of Directors, and talented staff and volunteers to keep advancing critical conservation initiatives in our region.

## Upper Valley Land Trust

Hanover, New Hampshire

At Upper Valley Land Trust we provide conservation leadership, tools and expertise to permanently protect the working farms, forested ridges, wildlife habitat, water resources, trails and scenic landscapes that surround residential areas and commercial centers and make the Upper Valley a truly special place to live. We work with local conservation commissions and volunteer groups to identify and prioritize land conservation opportunities. We provide technical assistance

and conservation solutions for landowners. We steward permanent agreements that conserve key properties forever. UFLT focuses its mission in 45 Vermont and New Hampshire towns in the upper Connecticut River Valley.

## Valley Community Land Trust

Greenfield, Massachusetts

Valley Community Land Trust (VCLT) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that holds title to land, considering it neither as private nor public property, but as a sacred resource to be held in trust for present and future generations. Since 1977, when VCLT was incorporated, we have acquired through donations and purchase, over 200 acres of land in Franklin County, MA. This land has provided homes for more than 50 people and provided a base for agriculture, forestry and various cottage industries.



**Afterword**

*Writing the Land would never have come into being without the wonderful poets who contributed their craft to the project. Below is a poem created from the collective thoughts of some of the Writing the Land poets about the work they have accomplished, written while they were doing it.*

*Thank You Writing the Land Poets!*



Voices of Writing The Land: A Zuihitsu  
by Rachelle Parker

1.

(an island) over the frozen pond  
in the woods outside,  
both out of doors and out of our norms.

Rounded, and finite  
It's got the tiniest little gardens of ground cover, lichen, mosses.

2.

When I was only a few weeks old my parents put me outside in a bassinet for my naps, even in the winter. Now, in my 92 year I still find my solace, my spirit, my soul, my words in the forest with beeches, oaks, violets and coltsfoot.

3.

Each limb of my body grows  
branches to touch  
Ancestors

of woodlands, sky seekers, root pillars,  
 Wisdom keepers  
 Leaf children of the forest floor  
 Create awareness and meld  
 Interwoven, yielding, strength, flourishing, precious flesh, bones,  
 root, stones.

Vibrant habitat,  
 silent, whirling,  
 chaotic, womb,  
 breathing marsh, red maple, frog, redwing blackbird, mud, rushes  
 and the dawn of each day.

4.

wondering,  
 will i find myself  
 again  
 with each step, leaving behind when and if

Invited into the tiniest universes, the shadows  
 guide me.

as time slips into the now  
 mystical. eternal.  
 blessed synchronicity

5.

Discovering

Waiting  
 snow have patience

ME!

Looking forward



To discovering my land  
 Honor speaks without words.  
 Awe.  
 Stillness is essential.  
 Fun.

Children run  
 between the trees, hop from stone to stone.  
 Shinrin-yoku, forest bathing for the mind and body.  
 Sit on a large stone and listen.  
 a red tailed Hawk, its voice a high squawk  
 The leaves of maples and beech are not open yet.  
 There is a rustle

6.

The stone lifts from my chest, there's a burbling  
 my veins, my lungs fill with the tang  
 of tree resin, of loam, of flowering plants, birthscents  
 and deathscents

dancing together peace, oasis of calm.

Healed

Good soil, good sweat.  
 A blessing during the pandemic  
 keeping with the seasons.  
 My surroundings.

7.

Looking forward  
 this northernmost section of native Pine Barrens, my life  
 Massachusetts  
 a necessary link

be flora and fauna, Muddy Pond imagine connections across the states of ecology, of psychology, of history, of ethics, of science, of religion. inside and outside simultaneously.

I am...

the past and the present with an eye on the future. Witness. Participant. Glimpses.

The pond through the trees, partially frozen, stunning  
blue

Whispering to the pond on my walk around it “I hear the silence of late winter in your stillness with promises of spring sounds hovering below your surface.”

My blank canvas, filled with anticipation

what will form before me

Creation

In May, Muddy Pond exploded  
with color and sounds and smells

Mother Nature’s profound,  
flourishing,  
rewild,  
dormant,  
curious,  
blue,  
green,  
dry  
non-binary,  
processes and  
epiphanies

**Poets who contributed to the Zuihitsu**

Anonymous

Mary Brancaccio

Ann B. Day

Alice B. Fogel

Kathy Kremins

Jesse Lovasco

Rachelle Parker

Margaret R. Sáraco

Heather Wheeler

# Writing the Land: 2021



Made with Google My Maps

## Map Legend



**Agrarian Trust**



**Kennebec Estuary Land Trust**



**Monadnock Community Land Trust**



**Monadnock Conservancy**



**Mount Grace Conservation Land Trust**



**New England Forestry Foundation**



**New Hampshire Audubon**



**Northeast Wilderness Trust**



**Southeastern Land Trust**



**Upper Valley Land Trust**



**Valley Community Land Trust**

## Writing the Land, NatureCulture, and Honoring Nature

To find out more about the Writing the Land project:

<https://www.writingtheland.org>

To find out more about NatureCulture:

<https://www.nature-culture.net>

Purchase our previous book *Honoring Nature: An Anthology of Authors & Artists Festival Writers* from your local bookstore or [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org) or contact the publisher direct at [paul@humanerrorpublishing.com](mailto:paul@humanerrorpublishing.com)



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