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## Bull Creek Headwaters Protection

<b>Application Date</b>	5/30/2024		
<b>Applying Organization</b>	Bull Creek Common Lands	<b>Grant Type</b>	Member Directed
<b>Requested Amount</b>	\$49,805.00	<b>Project Name</b>	Bull Creek Headwaters Protection
<b>Contact Name</b>	Hannah Regier	<b>Project Location (State or Territory)</b>	VT
<b>Contact Title</b>	Board Chair	<b>Project State/Province</b>	VT
<b>Contact Email Address</b>	hello@bullcreekcommonlands.org	<b>Project Multiple Locations</b>	
<b>Notes</b>		<b>Status</b>	Submitted
		<b>Created By</b>	Debra Clarke, 5/30/2024, 3:25 PM

### Organization Details

<b>Organization Name</b>	Bull Creek Common Lands	<b>Annual Operating Budget</b>	\$75,425.00
<b>Applying Contact</b>	Debra Clarke	<b>Tax Status/Organization Type</b>	501c3 Organization
<b>Staff Size</b>	0	<b>Main Phone</b>	650-892-2174
<b>Total Membership</b>	0	<b>Website Address</b>	https://www.bullcreekcommonlands.org
<b>BIPOC-led</b>	Yes	<b>Address</b>	60 Herring Hill Road Athens, Vermont 05143 United States
<b>C-Suite Staff</b>	25% of the board		

### Proposal Questions

<b>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</b>	<p>Bull Creek Common Lands (BCCL) is a community-based group that started meeting in 2020 to protect local land. We became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in June 2021.</p> <p>BCCL's mission is to protect land in and adjacent to the Bull Creek and Grassy Brook watersheds of southern Vermont and support public access to the land.</p> <p>Additional focuses and outcomes of our conservation work are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefit the innate ecological value of</li> </ul>	<b>2. Final Success</b>	<p>Success for the Bull Creek Headwaters project is to acquire 230 acres of land by the fall of 2025, protecting approximately 15 acres of headwater wetlands; 4,000 feet of the upper Bull Creek; a .5 mile trail corridor connecting two existing public right-of-ways; and over 200 acres of varied forest habitats and ecosystems.</p>
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the land, specifically forest resiliency and biodiversity

- Enhance the community's vitality by encouraging access to land for community-defined purposes
- Enhance the community's climate resilience and mitigate the effects of climate change
- Conserve natural, cultural, historic, and agricultural landscapes

Our first project, completed in August 2023, was the creation of a 36 acre community forest along the Bull Creek in Athens, VT.

BCCL has a working board and is actively evolving our capacity in collaboration with three other regional land trusts.

### 3. Location Details

The Bull Creek Headwaters project comprises two parcels of land: 188 acres that is currently being held by an interim conservation buyer and 43.2 acres that will be donated by an abutting landowner. BCCL is also working towards conserving a third parcel contiguous with the first two. The land is situated at the headwaters of the Bull Creek and contains wetlands and small streams that flow easterly together to become the creek.

The Bull Creek is a major tributary of the Saxtons River, which flows directly into the Connecticut River. This remote area of the southern Vermont foothills has relatively unfragmented forests and provides important wildlife connectivity between the Green Mountains of Vermont and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. The local communities have been experiencing escalating flood events in the last decades and protecting these higher elevation wetlands and the land around them will help mitigate flood events as well as protect the water quality throughout the downstream watershed. The land we want to conserve is under pressure from development and poor logging practices: The larger parcel was purchased by a private conservation buyer after it had about 30% of the timber taken off of it, but before it could be sold to a developer. BCCL has already received NRCS funding to restore the eroded forestry roads, support forest regeneration, and control small populations of invasive plants. Landscape and conservation highlights:

- Part of a connected landscape, 100% within Vermont Conservation Design Highest Priority Interior Forest Block and Highest Priority Connected Forest Block, and in the vicinity of the recently conserved Lily Pond Highlands
- Scores very high on The Nature

### 4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our major conservation partners on this project are The Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) who will co-hold a perpetual conservation easement on the land once we have purchased it in fee. Our overall timeline has been organized in relation to their schedules and staff capacity. The objective is for VHCB to be a major funder (~60%) of the project. Our plan is to apply for their grant funds in October 2024, which, if awarded, will lead to a closing in fall 2025.

Additionally, we have partnered with the current landowners. The private conservation buyer has secured 188 acres for three years while we raise the funds to purchase it ourselves. This strategy made the project possible, but is also incurring additional holding costs (property taxes and transfer tax) that we are obligated to reimburse when we close. The adjacent landowner who is generously donating the additional 43 acres is not only expanding the acres of headwaters protected, but is also providing significant matching leverage to the project.

#### Project timeline:

May 2023 - 188 acre property came on the market. Project was discussed with VLT and VHCB.  
 June 2023 - BCCL facilitated an interim conservation purchase of the 188 acre lot and secured a 3-year purchase option.  
 January 2024 - An abutting landowner committed to donating 43 acres of their land to the project.  
 January 2024 - NRCS cost share grant application initiated for restoration work  
 February 2024 – Feasibility Grant applied for from VHCB for due diligence activities  
 March 2024 - Feasibility grant awarded and survey of the donated parcel was

Conservancy's climate resiliency mapping tool

- 7 acre beaver wetland
- 8 acre wooded hemlock-hardwood swamp
- Several smaller wetlands, vernal pools, seeps and rivulets
- Hemlock and northern hardwood forests and talus slope woodlands
- Hilltop community of juniper flanked by dry oak - hornbeam forest
- Varied terrain including ledge outcrops, steep slopes and shallow ravines
- Rich biodiversity of plants, birds and mammals
- Contains a remote early settler's cellar hole and stone walls enclosing historic pastures
- Hiking trail potential along a legal town trail and continuing on a ROW through adjacent land to come out on an old town road in the next town

contracted  
 April 2024 - NRCS cost share grant awarded  
 –Now–  
 May 2024 - May 2025 - Apply to up to 10 additional foundation grant applications (OSI, TNC, Fields Pond, Wharton, Davis, Mascoma Bank, Windham Foundation, Lintilac, Canaday).  
 June - November 2024 - First year of NRCS restoration work to be performed.  
 August 2024 - Appraisals to be completed for both properties.  
 October 2024 - VHCB funding application to be submitted.  
 December 2024 - VHCB notification.  
 January 2025 - July 2025 - VLT and VHCB easement drafting, baseline documentation and title clearing work.  
 August 2025 - BCCL public fundraising campaign.  
 September 2025 - CLOSING

**Economic and Recreational Impact**  
 The area has very few retail businesses, but is a year round tourist destination with many rentals and vacation homes. Conserving this land is part of preserving the quintessential Vermont landscape and will create some off-the-beaten-path opportunities to explore. Through the NRCS restoration project, we are able to pay local excavating and forest management contractors to work on the land. The headwaters land is well known by local hikers, naturalists and hunters, who will continue to enjoy and share the land with friends and family. The health and well-being of the local community will be positively impacted by clean water, flood resiliency, and ongoing public access to wildlands.

Recreationally, this project will create a new trail system between the towns of Athens and Townshend. In Athens, the land borders a legal town trail, on the bed of a 19th century town road. Currently, the town trail dead ends at a large beaver wetland. After the purchase of this land, we plan to build a trail that bypasses the wetland and connects to an old town road in Townshend, giving outdoor adventurers several new loop routes. The BCCL board has not yet received input on the types of use that the trail could support, but the location and long distance lends itself to horseback riding and mountain biking as well as hiking, snowshoeing and backcountry skiing. No motorized vehicles will be allowed except emergency and accessibility vehicles. The creation and stewardship of the trail could be an opportunity to collaborate with local outdoor businesses and clubs and recruit new volunteers.

**5. Key Decision Makers** BCCL doesn't have any major opposition on this project, having already secured

**6. Elevate Voices** We ARE grassroots citizen action! And we are extremely aware of the need to

contracts on both parcels of land. Through our walks, media outreach and targeted conversations, we will continue to work to build broad support in the local community for grass-roots land conservation and stewardship. We also engage with regional partner organizations to connect this land to wider planning and conservation efforts.

work towards understanding, compromise and common ground within our community.

Athens, the town where BCCL is based, is very small, low income, and lacking local land use regulation. The land here is vulnerable to unsustainable extraction, development, and widespread off-road vehicle use. Our community-based group is elevating the voices of those who want to protect the place we inhabit and improve our relationship with the land. The BCCL board is made up of local residents of varying backgrounds, ages and socioeconomic statuses.

We host monthly community walks in the conserved community forest, where we share about the land and chat with and listen to our neighbors. We can't ignore the different cultures present in the community around outdoor recreation and land use, and not everyone shows up for the community events. In the next year, we hope to hire an outside facilitator to lead a forum to solicit input from people we are currently not hearing from.

Our conservation and community building efforts have resulted in the teacher of the third and fourth grade class at the local elementary school bringing her students to the community forest once a month for nature-based education, play, and mental health support throughout the school year.

While there is a general lack of racial and ethnic diversity in Vermont, we have made efforts to engage with the individuals and communities we know. We reached out to the local, state-recognized Abenaki tribe and incorporated their comments in our land management plan. Board members know people involved with BIPOC and LGBTQ+ organizations around the county and we plan to have conversations to see if there might be areas where we can support their work and/or collaborate on programming.

**7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes**

- 350 acres of perpetually protected Bull Creek headwaters land
- Reduction in soil erosion on three miles of forestry trails
- Three new board members
- \$100,000 in management reserves
- Full compliance with the Land Trust Alliance's first four standards (in preparation for LTA accreditation within five years)

**8. Evaluate Your Progress**

Project progress and budgets are tracked in a project plan spreadsheet and reviewed at committee and board meetings. Organizational achievements/issues are discussed at board meetings; then, at our annual board retreat, we evaluate how the past year has unfolded, and make adjustments and plans for the coming year. The qualitative feedback of how our organization is received in the community is especially important to how we proceed with the work we're doing.

**9. TCA Funding Plan**

Funding from The Conservation Alliance will go toward "Project Support" budget

**10. JEDI Efforts and Impact**

The words "Common Lands" in the name of our organization speaks to our vision

line items for the acquisition and conservation of 230 acres of land. The expenses we are asking you to support are critical to the success of the project and the ongoing management of the land. These are items that we need matching funds for and/or other foundations have restrictions on funding.

The specific expenses are: Management Reserve fund at 15% of the total project budget, Holding Fees incurred during the three years of interim ownership, the Vermont Land Trust's project management time, our overhead and fundraising expenses.

of public access to the land for everyone. We aspire to be welcoming and open to all people, perspectives and abilities.

Our board is 3/4 female and 1/4 Black. Our board recruitment criteria includes diversity. Our project selection criteria includes equity access. We have a non-discrimination policy written into our bylaws. While we do make decisions by voting, we work towards and usually achieve consensus.

Our programming appeals to people with many different interests around interacting with nature, from species identification to nature meditation. We have begun plans to build an ADA accessible section of trail in the community forest, although the project is on hold currently while we work on this headwaters acquisition.

We also include the more-than-human inhabitants of our community when we consider how our conservation efforts can bring about justice and healing.

**11. Confidential Items**

The Conservation Alliance has permission to share this proposal, in its entirety, with member company employees.

**Other Relevant Application Details**