

CSC Project Report – 2020

Date Report submitted: November 20, 2020

Project Title: Host a TerraCorps Member to Assist Land Trusts with Stewardship Project oversight: Rhode Island Land Trust Council

Goal: Host a TerraCorps member (when the program begins in Rhode Island in August 2020) to help land trusts establish systems for monitoring the properties they protect. Specifically, the TerraCorps member will help 12-15 land trusts complete the heavy lift of putting property and conservation easement boundaries for their protected properties in Esri - GIS system. The TerraCorps member will also coach land trust leaders on the use of the Esri app the Council is developing for monitoring their protected properties. This project:

- Builds on prior projects the CSC has funded to establish systems that help land trusts improve stewardship of the properties they protect. It also builds on the RI Land Trust Council's (Council) land trust excellence initiatives to help land trusts develop and implement programs to monitor their properties.
- Addresses one of the fundamental stewardship challenges for land trusts and their consultants: knowing where their property boundaries and easement boundaries are in the field so that they can prepare baseline documents and monitor the properties they are protecting.
- Is a systems scale initiative that will benefit many land trusts and improve the collective stewardship capability for protected lands in Rhode Island.
- Enables many smaller land trusts to benefit from the TerraCorps program starting in Rhode Island - including land trusts without the financial and organizational capacity to host a TerraCorps member.
- Employs the increase in organizational capacity made possible by federal funding for TerraCorps to implement systems changes.

Brief Description: Rhode Island Land Trust Council has been working with TerraCorps - a specialized AmeriCorps program for land trusts - to help TerraCorps expand from Massachusetts into Rhode Island starting in August 2020. The Council will host a TerraCorps member in 2020 with skills to help land trusts around the state establish their account on Esri ARC - GIS system using the Council's group license. The TerraCorps member will help these land trusts delineate and upload boundaries for the properties they own and conservation easements they hold. The TerraCorps member will then coach land trust leaders on how to use "bad Elf" GPS device and an iPad and the Esri app that is being developed as a CSC project for monitoring protected properties.

Work on a 2019 CSC grant-funded project led Esri to donate a group GIS license to the Council with the ability for each land trust to have their own log in. The Council, in partnership with Peter August and Greg Bonyngge at the URI Environmental Data Center, also developed an app that works with Esri so that land trust leaders can use an iPad in the field to find their property boundaries and monitor their properties. The Council had an intern from the 2019 CSC funded project working on this app. The Council's intern worked with 3 land trusts in Fall 2019 through July 2020 as a pilot to delineate and upload property boundaries into the Esri system so that we could test the app. The CSC funded Intern Project also enabled the Council to acquire a Bad Elf GPS receiver and iPad in 2019 for use by land trusts to find property boundaries in the field and monitor their properties. These tools would be used by the TerraCorps member for this project.

The COVID-19 pandemic precluded the Intern from using the App and working with land trust leaders in the pilot land trusts to test the App in 2020.

The Council partnered with Audubon Society of RI (ASRI) on this project. ASRI also wants to get property boundaries in Esri's on line ARC GIS platform so that Audubon staff and volunteers can use the app for monitoring their properties. Due to COVID this project was modified in several ways. First, the TerraCorps member serving with the Council has not been working from ASRI's office and using ASRI computer as originally planned. Instead, the Council acquired a laptop and monitor that enabled the TerraCorps member serving with the Council to work remotely from home or in the Council's office in Providence where there are good systems in place for COVID safety. Second, ASRI decided to develop their own Esri ARC GIS system instead of using one of the licenses available through the Council's system. Third, because the two TerraCorps Members are not working in the same office as originally planned, it has been more difficult for synergies to take place. Opportunities still exist for collaborating on training volunteers from both ASRI and land trusts if training can take place with COVID.

Accomplishments: The accomplishments of this project are:

- A workshop was held at the 2020 Land & Water Conservation Summit showcasing the ESRI GIS system and promoting the opportunities it provides for land trusts. The Council recruited land trusts to participate in this project.
- RI Land Trust Council partnered with Audubon Society of RI (ASRI) to apply for and host a TerraCorps Member beginning in August 2020 to help land trusts with stewardship. (ASRI and the Council applied for 2 TerraCorps Members for this stewardship project one serving with the Council and one serving with ASRI.)
- The 2 TerraCorps Members were trained together by virtual workshops in early September with a week of training by Greg Bonyng (URI Environmental Data Center), Aimee Mandeville (URI Extension) on the Esri ARC GIS and app, and Carol Trocki (Consultant with the Council helping land trusts with monitoring programs) on obtaining property boundary information, comparing information from different sources and developing the best available boundary information for conservation lands and conservation easements. Carol continues to provide coaching as needed for the two TerraCorps Members on property boundary information.
- The TerraCorps member serving with the Council has been helping land trusts delineate and upload the boundaries for the properties and conservation easements they protect into the Council's Esri ARC GIS system. To date, they have worked with 5 land trusts on this project (Barrington, Charlestown, Coventry, North Smithfield, South Kingstown). This builds on the work done by the intern earlier in 2020 for Narrow River Land Trust, Richmond Land Conservation Trust and Warren Land Trust. The TerraCorps Member has also helped Narragansett Land Trust with a related stewardship project. In addition, he has prepared trail maps for several properties. This project is creating more enthusiasm and engaging some land trusts that do not have strong stewardship systems and were not anticipated to be interested or involved. It is helping increase land trust stewardship interest and capacity beyond what was anticipated by the project.

- Plans are underway for the TerraCorps members serving with ASRI and the Council to test the App and then to train volunteers to use the App. This has been delayed due to COVID and a backlog of work at URI that has delayed preparation of the systems necessary for use of the App in the field. The workshop will be a small group of people due to COVID safety issues.

Budget: CSC Awarded a grant of \$2,000 for this project to the Council for this project. In addition, the Council rolled over an additional \$1,000 from a 2019 grant for the TerraCorps project. These funds were used to pay the consultant for training and coaching the project intern and TerraCorps members on property delineation and uploading in the ESRI GIS system. \$3,000 has been fully allocated for the Consultant for this project.

Match:

University of Rhode Island is contributing in-kind support setting up and maintaining the ESRI GIS ARC-GIS software and training the intern and 2 TerraCorps members on use of Esri ARCGIS.

ESRI has donated the GIS license for the Council's and land trusts' use of the software - a \$64,000 value

\$2,200 in kind for computer purchase when TerraCorps member needed to be able to work remotely and not in ASRI office.

The Council has provided in kind Executive Director's time for training and project supervision for the TerraCorps Member serving with the Council and helping land trusts with property boundaries - value over \$3,700.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the CSC support the continuation of this project that helps land trusts implement improved stewardship at the systems and capacity building level.

The TerraCorps Member serving with the Council is helping many land trusts get their property and conservation easement boundaries in Esri Arc GIS for the properties they are conserving so that they have better systems in place for monitoring conservation lands. When the TerraCorps Member is done in July 2021, there will be the need to help additional land trusts with this work that don't have their own capacity. The Council is currently surveying land trusts to document the need for this assistance. Beyond the initial assistance, all volunteer land trusts will need continuing training and assistance with use of the Esri ArcGIS and the App for monitoring their properties.

Further, the Council is researching and exploring the opportunities for recruiting and training volunteers to help land trusts with stewardship. The Council's ARC GIS system and App will be important systems to support that initiative. We also believe that RIDEM may be able to adapt and implement these systems for stewardship of their properties.