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Leadership Transition at Williamstown Rural Lands

Local land trust hires a new executive director

Williamstown, MA: Williamstown Rural Lands (WRL) is pleased to announce that Robin Sears, PhD has been selected as its new Executive Director.

Dr. Sears is an interdisciplinary scientist whose previous work at the intersections of forests and people, farming and forestry, and science and policy positions her well to lead WRL. An explorer and curious global citizen, Dr. Sears has spent much time engaged in field research in rural and wild areas such as the Amazon, the Andes, and the Himalaya. In recognition of her professional accomplishment and experiences in international expeditions, Dr. Sears was recently elected to the Society of Woman Geographers.

Dr. Sears is a New England native, growing up in Leverett and completing her Bachelor of Science in botany from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. After two decades working in the international sphere, Dr. Sears returned to the Pioneer Valley in 2016 as Visiting Professor of Forestry at Hampshire College. She deepened her connection to our local landscape during a Charles Bullard Fellowship at the Harvard Forest in 2018, after which she put down roots in Williamstown.

“I am thrilled to join the community of land stewards here at home after focusing for decades on forest management in the tropics. I look forward to working with Williamstown residents, farmers, and community members to steward the rich natural and cultural assets around us for all to enjoy now and in the future.”

Every time she walks through forests and farmland, Dr. Sears draws on the practical knowledge gained both from her extensive field experience and master’s degree in forestry from the Yale School for the Environment and doctorate in ecology from Columbia University.

“I mark trees in my mind when I walk around these forests – as future timber, critical wildlife resource, or to be thinned – and consider the full suite of ecosystem services our fields and forests provide.”

While at Columbia University Dr. Sears contributed to country-level strategic planning on achieving the Millennium Development Goal 7 on Environmental Sustainability. She shifted to international education and from 2007-2014 as chief academic officer of the School for Field Studies (SFS), which afforded her the opportunity to work with faculty and community leaders in disparate regions of the world. She was privileged to lead the team in establishing the SFS program in Bhutan, where she maintains close contacts.

Dr. Sears is currently a Research Affiliate at the Center for International Research and Forestry (CIFOR) and represents North America as a core member of the Forest Ecosystems Specialist Group of IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. She plans to leverage those and other links to tie Williamstown Rural Lands to the global community.

“We are excited to bring someone with Robin’s experience and interests to Rural Lands. Her knowledge, understanding of the local Williamstown area and her warmth and excitement will make her a great new leader,” said WRL President Greg Islan.

Dr. Sears will be working diligently with the WRL staff and board and with community members in the coming months to prepare for a strategic planning process in the fall. You will undoubtedly enjoy interacting with her at Sheep Hill, on the trails, and at the upcoming Sheep-to-Shawl event on May 7.

Williamstown Rural Lands is a non-profit, member-supported land conservation trust founded in 1986 and dedicated to preserving the rural New England character of Williamstown and the surrounding area. Its headquarters are at the historic farm at Sheep Hill, 671 Cold Spring Road in Williamstown. Information about the organization, its properties, programs, and upcoming events is available on our website: <http://rurallands.org>.

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