



BCT Stewardship Journal: December 2025

Katie's Thoughts from the Trail The Work of a Land Steward in the "Quiet" Season

On my daily commute to the Hay Conservation Center, I pass summer homes with the shades drawn, marsh grasses that have faded to straw, and roads that are rather empty with only the year-rounders commuting to work. At this time of year, I am often asked what I actually do as a steward of the land if the land is asleep? Surely, I must be slowing down as well, right? Quite the opposite, I say. This is the time of year when the deeper work of conservation is most visible, and land stewards are as busy as ever!

While it may not be readily apparent, the land is still alive. Goldenrod stalks shelter overwintering insects deep within their stems. Meadow soils, exposed after the first hard frosts and fall mows, are busy storing carbon and nutrients that will fuel next year's growth. Migratory birds have moved on, but resident species of birds are actively adapting daily with shifting diets, conserving energy, and relying on intact habitats to make it through the cold months. This is the season that reminds us why land protection matters beyond what we can easily see. Conservation is often celebrated in spring blooms and summer abundance, but the "slow" season reveals the true resilience of the land and furthermore, the stewardship efforts required to sustain it.

I'm often struck by how much more detailed the landscape becomes in the winter. Now is the time to pay closer attention to what is happening on the ground. Without leaves on the trees, we notice structure: the shape of the land, the flow of water, the placement of vegetation. Most of all, we notice a critical component of a land steward's job: encroachments. With just the bare bones of the earth visible, oversteps on conservation land become readily apparent. Discarded vegetation piles that don't belong, out of place hunt stands, and illegal clearing all stick out like sore thumbs. What am I up to over the winter? Monitoring the land, marking the boundaries, and resolving encroachments. I really do get my steps in at this time of year!



ACC Member Evie LeDuc monitoring a snowy trail in December to identify where new trail markers should be installed

In addition to monitoring and documenting out in the field, winter is a time of planning and reflecting on the past year's successes and lessons learned. We review management plans, evaluate the outcomes of meadow restorations and invasive species control, and prepare for the work ahead. Now is the time to make decisions regarding mowing schedules, trail maintenance, and identifying and preparing for future strategic restoration projects.

Stewardship is seasonal, but I wouldn't say there is a slow season. Even when the landscape appears at rest, the land is still working, and so are land stewards! Caring for the land doesn't stop when the visitors leave, it carries on all year long.