



Mahoosuc Land Trust News



www.mahoosuc.org

Conserving the Mahoosuc Region since 1989

Winter 2019

The Future of Our “Landscape of Superlatives” Belongs To You

By Kirk Siegel, Executive Director

Since its inception in 1989, MLT’s success can be traced to scores of individuals believing that the ecology, culture and character of the Mahoosuc Region is worth conserving. And your belief, as we begin our 4th decade, is more important than it ever was.

In the 1980s, the area experienced an increase in residential and commercial development. Local citizens realized that no group existed to ensure that the region’s most precious mountaintops, swimming holes, farmland, and trails would be around for the 21st century. The creation of Mahoosuc Land Trust by a small number of dedicated advocates provided a means for interested landowners to set aside their land forever. The first two properties were on the Androscoggin: 35-acre Kendall Island and the Eva Schools canoe landing started one effort to showcase the improved water quality and beauty of the river corridor. Conservation easements on two additional properties, the Scruton Family’s tree farm in Upton and Buster and Ginny Williamson’s well-managed woodlot in Newry, launched a vision: find the sweet spot where landowners can promote recreation, natural habitat, and ecological richness, counterbalancing growing rates of development and land fragmentation.

But what about treasured properties that were listed for sale but wouldn’t be donated? In 1997 you answered the call and raised \$60,000 for MLT to buy the Gateway Preserve, safeguarding the scenic entry into Bethel Village. Again, in 2007, you responded to the threat of development on Rumford Whitecap by raising \$490,000 and protecting 750 acres.

Being bold has not meant going it alone. State agencies, nonprofits, towns, and other friends have been right there with us. For example, The Nature Conservancy assigned two conservation easements to MLT in 1995 and 2012 totaling 4663 acres, and in 2012 TNC deeded Step Falls Preserve to MLT, entrusting us with the task of managing one of western Maine’s most popular swimming areas.

Nearly 30 years later, the original need has only grown, as climate change and the fragmentation of western Maine’s globally important forest threaten what noted Maine ecologist Janet McMahon calls a “landscape of superlatives.”

Mahoosuc Land Trust is at a crossroads. We are now poised to refine our strategic conservation plan and to use the talents and resources of our members, supporters, communities and partner organizations to create the future we wish to see. With your help, we can inspire and equip the conservationists of tomorrow to mold the ecological and recreational future of the region and advance to a conservation movement for the Mahoosuc Region, that we will be proud to leave as our legacy to future generations. *We look forward to partnering with you on this important undertaking!*



“Study after study highlights the region’s significance—with its globally significant alpine and montane forest ecosystems embedded within the largest area of contiguous forest in the eastern United States; as part of the largest remaining block of unfragmented forest in the Atlantic Flyway; as the last stronghold for brook trout in the United States; as the link between marten and lynx populations in the United States and Canada. . .” Janet McMahon, Diversity, Continuity and Resilience –

The Ecological Values of the Western Maine Mountains.

Rumford Whitecap Mountain, A Preserve For All

MLT member Jo Elliott tele skiing



We often use the term “preserve” to emphasize the permanence of our conservation work: that the special places Mahoosuc Land Trust acquires are virtually always held to be enjoyed for future generations as open space. Permanent conservation, however, does allow for new, compatible uses.

Rumford Whitecap Mountain Preserve has grown both in size, with the addition of the Ellis River and other properties, and in the variety of uses. Thousands of visitors have come to Whitecap to enjoy bountiful blueberry picking, hiking or backcountry skiing. It is more than a piece of land, it is a cultural touchstone for residents and visitors alike, with generations of families returning to experience the mountain. MLT member and Maine Ski Hall of Famer, Leon Akers, tells about his first hike up the mountain in about 1935--*today his son and granddaughter enjoy it.*

Whitecap’s passionate users and advocates--and its statewide ecological significance--have powered MLT’s three separate acquisitions over the course of 11 years to create a corridor from the Ellis River to the summit encompassing 1100 acres and to conserve and maintain this iconic landscape.

A hearty round of thanks to the 20 bakers who lent their culinary skills to Mahoosuc Land Trust’s first ever “Pie Palooza” fundraiser. Twenty pies, four cheesecakes and one apple crisp were sold to residents and visitors looking to add a sweet treat to their holiday tables. Did you miss out? Don’t despair, we are planning on this sweet fundraiser every year.

While MLT takes a deep breath to contemplate possible future expansions of the Preserve, it is an opportune time to consider new uses. Two initiatives embody this:

The first is a grant through the Land for Maine’s Future Fund for the design and creation of an adaptive trail from East Andover Road to the Ellis River. A small parking lot, a trail route over a relatively level surface, and a picnic area near a nice little sandy beach on the Ellis will allow access without rigorous hiking. Working with Fred Bailey Trail Design, and consulting with partner organizations like Maine Adaptive Sports & Recreation, we will create a universally accessible trail, recognizing that mountain climbing is not for everyone and that there is a demand for low-barrier access to natural beauty.

The second initiative is a joint project with Granite Backcountry Alliance (GBA) to explore the creation of designated glade skiing areas. Whitecap’s popularity for backcountry skiing has increased over the years, and MLT must be proactive in protecting the critical habitat and fragile vegetative cover by guiding users to appropriate areas. GBA currently manages five glade zones and three maintenance projects on existing backcountry trails, from the North Country of NH to the Mt. Washington Valley and Evans Notch. GBA promotes safety and ecological awareness, emphasizing a respect for the land and its owners. Unlike some of the sprawling alpine ski resort glades, these are created by thinning hobblebush, saplings and other underbrush less than 3 inches in diameter--to create just enough open space to ski between the trees. GBA’s work incorporates professional glade design, sustainable forestry methods, and principles of MLT. Careful planning will be critical before MLT approves the designation of any glade area.

Whatever your abilities and interests, we look forward to seeing you on the trails, summer or winter!





The southern tip of the east field at Valentine Farm.

Planning for the Future at Valentine Farm

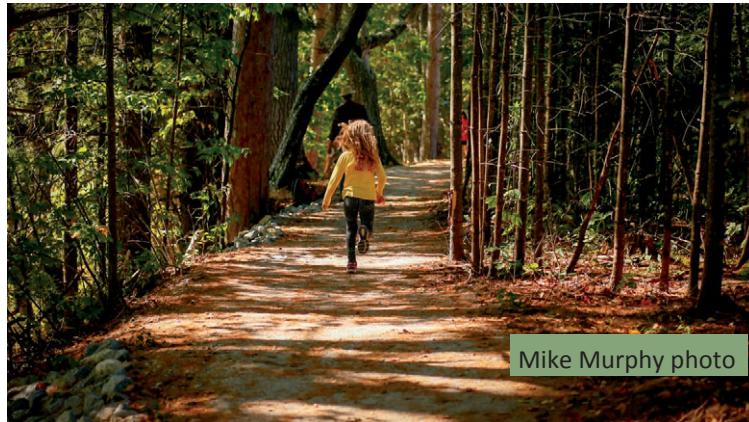
Valentine Farm, 150 acres on the North Road in Bethel, is just one of our many properties. Its location is central to the expanse of publicly accessible land stretching from the Bethel Pathway to MLT's McCoy-Chapman Forest in Gilead and Newry. With meeting and office space, restrooms and parking, it can serve as a gateway to conservation properties like the Bethel Community Forest, Bingham Forest and MLT's other preserves.

Drawing on extensive interviews with members of our communities, a planning committee has worked with landscape architects, Richardson & Associates, to create a vision and

plan for Valentine Farm. After hours of lively discussion about unique roles Valentine Farm could play in conservation education that capitalize on its location and physical attributes, a list of short- and long-term enhancements was created:

- Observation platforms along the trail that extend above the water
- A three-season pavilion for concerts, talks and demonstrations
- Entrance and parking lot improvements
- An accessible trail to encircle the lower field
- The lower field converted to bird and wildlife habitat
- Expanded kiosks, signage, and interpretive panels
- Improved entryway into the office
- Courtyard sitting area
- A building that someday could house regional conservation and education needs

It is an ambitious plan that will push MLT to continue to evolve into the land trust you want and need to handle the challenges of the future. We are excited about the possibilities of Valentine Farm and look forward to sharing the final plan with you.



Mike Murphy photo

Volunteer Spotlight—Katie Stuart

Tell us about your childhood.

I grew up in an outdoorsy family. We lived on the Niagara River, had a summer place in Canada on the shore of Lake Erie, and made annual family visits to Whiteface Intervale in the White Mountains to property that has been in my extended family since 1920. I don't think I quite appreciated how important and soul-satisfying being outdoors and in nature was to my quality of life when I was growing up, but it is essential to me now and one of the many reasons I am passionate about conservation.

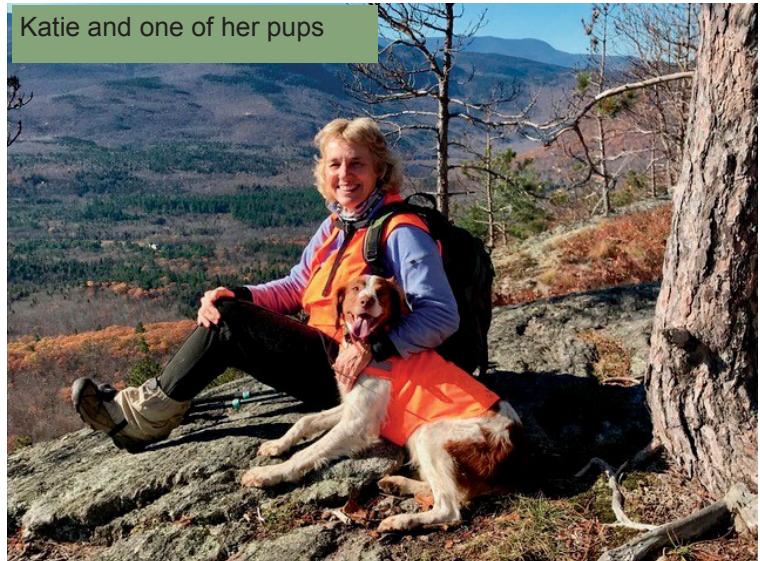
How did you end up working for the Forest Service?

I majored in Natural Resources after a life-changing course in forestry and then went on to get a Master's degree in Forestry from Michigan State. After graduation, forestry jobs were few and far between so I worked a medley of jobs in forestry before joining the US Forest Service. I truly enjoyed my agency career as a forester, working in rural, diverse and beautiful places across the country, much of my career in the west. I have many wonderful memories of hiking and conducting stand exams in extremely remote areas, riding by horseback in wilderness, working as a "ground-pounder" fire fighter in some "hot" situations, and managing and flying in big and small helicopters for project work and wildfires from Alaska to Florida. After a 36-year forestry career, living in states from Maine to Oregon and in between, I'm glad to call Shelburne, New Hampshire, my home and feel lucky to have the Mahoosucs in my back yard.

How did you connect with MLT?

I first learned about MLT when the Land Trust shared the Forest Service office in Bethel before the Valentine Farm became its permanent home. Gradually, I met other volunteers and supporters, and I love the mission of MLT to inspire people here to care about clean waters, abundant wildlife, and healthy forests and farms. One of my greatest joys as a ranger was working to conserve lands, and now I love to help on local and regional scales, in both Maine and New Hampshire. Currently, I serve on the Shelburne Trails Club Board of Directors, the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions Board of Directors, the Shelburne Conservation Commission, the Mahoosuc Land Trust Stewardship and Lands Committees, and I write the quarterly newsletter for the American Wildlife Conservation Foundation.

Katie and one of her pups



How did you get involved with conservation easements?

A few years ago, I was privileged to help friend and neighbor Betty Werner on her conservation easement for the Crow Mountain Farm in Shelburne, NH, that's held by MLT. After she passed away, a friend and co-worker at the Forest Service, Gail Wigler, and I decided together we would purchase the farm and carry on her vision, caretaking the farmhouse and the 220+ acres that went with it. It's been a labor of love, and it's a rare day when one of us is not out there hiking, skiing, or snowshoeing, or working on the 1804 farm house, which we rent out.

Crow Mountain Farm is connected with a string of conservation easements from First Mountain (an MLT easement) owned by fellow MLT members Larry Ely and Ginger Lawson, to the Millbrook easement with the popular Mt. Crag trail, to the 800+ acre Philbrook easement with multiple trails, to Crow Mountain Farm which hosts the White Trail from Philbrook to the Crow's Nest. The fortuitous connection of these conservation easements was one of the motivating factors for the Shelburne Trail Club (STC) to re-open historic trails in the valley. While still small and growing, the STC has connected the hiking community, and it wouldn't have been possible without these easement lands. Conserving land and enjoying nature in the Mahoosucs are some of my passions, and I hope to share in community efforts that conserve land, an essential in an increasingly complex and changing world.

When I'm not volunteering for MLT and other conservation organizations, I enjoy spending time with my husband, Tim Buxton, and 3 pups, hiking, skiing, traveling, photographing, gardening and any activity on or in a lake, stream or pond.

Volunteer Energy Bringing McCoy-Chapman Forest to Life

MLT's latest preserve is a stunning 493-acre property in Gilead, Bethel, and Newry acquired in April from the family of Geneva "Ginnie" McCoy. The land gets the imagination running: pedestrian trails along almost a mile of Androscoggin River frontage, existing snowmobile access through the property, clear waters and cascades to explore on four distinct branches of Chapman Brook, and walking and skiing trails that will link to the Bingham Forest and the future Bethel Community Forest through partnerships with Mahoosuc Pathways and others. It was clear from the start that this should not be a place to be set aside and ignored--it should thoughtfully be made available to the public.



The property stretches from the Androscoggin to 1600' in elevation on the Riley Township line. Mark Szeliga photo

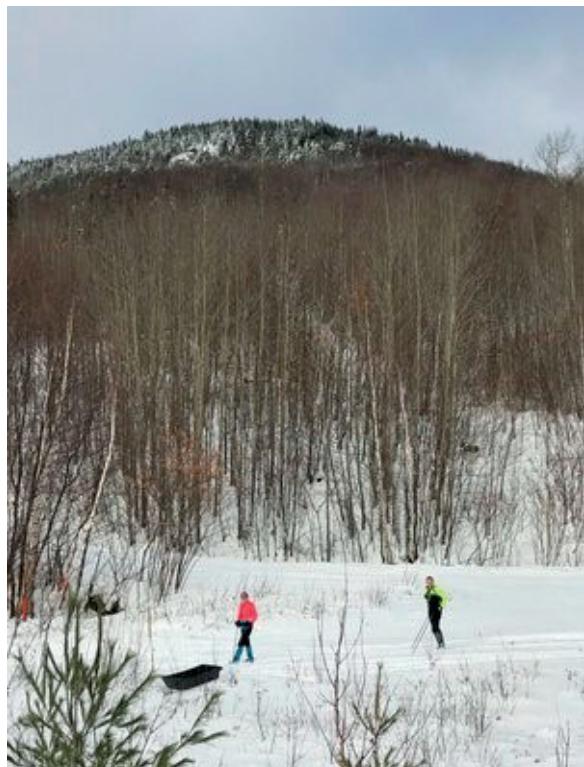


Volunteers: forester, Bob Withrow and biologist, Ken Hotopp

Community input and assistance have been energetic. Since last June, roughly 20 volunteers have been meeting and exploring the property. With backgrounds in forestry, trail design, ecology, recreation, and land management, these folks have flagged trail routes, volunteered their excavators, tractors, and chain saws to begin to open up access, posted signage, led walking tours, taken photos, and offered GIS and mapping skills. They have set minnow traps in Chapman Brook to assess fish species diversity and have assessed how streams and ecologically sensitive areas should be buffered from future recreational use and timber harvesting. The collected information is being incorporated into a management plan to guide the future use of the property. Already, visits this

past summer and the ecological inventory done by the Maine Natural Areas Program reveal a lot to catalog: wild brook trout habitat, a variety of forest types and some big tree specimens of white pine, white ash, sugar maple, northern red oak, and eastern hemlock. There is sign of extensive bear habitat, an active otter den and bald eagle nest. There are occurrences of Northern Spring Salamander and rare pubescent sedge both Species of Special Concern in Maine. All of these data will be important factors as a management plan is developed, which will include limited timber harvesting on some of the property and which carefully protects habitat, supports recreational goals, improves forest health, and demonstrates model forestry to the public.

Make sure to explore the property (a small parking area is plowed this winter), and contact us if you would like to know more or get involved. A 2.25-mile trail created by volunteers--including Region 9 forestry students and the Gould Academy Outing Club--climbs across the property and onto the Gray Birch Land Invest, LLC parcel adjacent to the Bingham Forest. This trail has already been used by scores of hikers, skiers, and snowshoers. A trail map is available at www.mahoosuc.org, which also lists dates for guided tours of the property.



Planning and Planting for Pollinators



Gardeners are action-oriented people. We want to use our skills to make the world a better place. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, in response to the gloomy news of global insect and bird declines, many homeowners have

installed pollinator-friendly gardens. Mahoosuc Land Trust is doing its part as well. Last year big-hearted volunteers established a “nursery” of 1000+ plants at Valentine Farm waiting for the warm soils of spring to transplant into the proper garden. We have learned a lot about what makes a successful pollinator garden and are sharing these elements with you in the hope that you are inspired to create your own pollinator oasis. You could even register your garden in the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge -

<http://millionpollinatorgardens.org/>

THE FOUR ELEMENTS

1) Food. Plant flowers of different bloom periods, colors and structure. A study from University of CA at Berkeley found that a garden with 8 or more species of flowers attracts significantly more bees. Another, yet to be published, study found that including woody plants increased pollinator visits.

- *Diversity Matters. Try to have a minimum of 3-5 types of flowers in bloom from May through October. Check out the plant recommendations from the Rehan Lab at UNH. www.nativebeesofnewengland.com/bees-and-flowers.html*
- *Plant in clumps or drifts. Clustering three or more plants of the same type together makes it easier for pollinators to find and requires less energy moving from blossom to blossom.*
- *Provide host plants. Host plants feed immature stages of some moths and butterflies. The caterpillars in turn are food for birds. For a short list of host plants and what species each supports, go to <https://1001pollinatorgardens.org/foodforpollinators/>.*



2) Water. Bees and other insects need a source of water close to their food and nest sites. If you do not have a nearby stream or pond, you can easily craft a safe pollinator waterer: staple wine corks to a heavy duty mesh, fill a pan with water and float the mesh on the surface.



3) Nesting Sites. The majority of bees are solitary and nest in the ground or in cavities. Leave undisturbed areas throughout the garden to attract ground dwellers. Also, don't cut back flowers until the spring. Bees will find their way into hollow stems through existing holes or wounds and lay their eggs in the hollow center, creating separate brood chambers for each egg. Or, for a creative option, buy or create a bee hotel.



4) A pesticide-free landscape. Many gardeners don't use pesticides of any sort in their gardens. However, sometimes the plants we purchase have been treated with insecticides that are able to harm pollinators long after application. To learn more, go to :<https://xerces.org/wings-archive/neonicotinoids-in-your-garden/>

To learn more about pollinator gardens, or to help plant and maintain the pollinator garden at Valentine Farm, sign up for the 3-part Creating A Pollinator Garden workshop, Mondays, April 8-22 from 5:30-7:00. For more information contact Barbara 207-824-3806, barbara@mahoosuc.org
Stay up-to-date on all our events at mahoosuc.org/events-calendar/

Multiply Your Impact with the Stifler Family Foundation 20/20 Challenge

You may know Larry Stifler and Mary McFadden, seasonal residents of Albany Township, as the force behind the Maine Mineral and Gem Museum in Bethel. Through the Stifler Family Foundation, they are also generous Mahoosuc Land Trust members and supporters. We are honored to announce that the Foundation has generously offered a \$20,000 Challenge to us. The purpose of the challenge is to increase land trust membership and contributions to our operating funds to create greater programming and land conservation capacity.



As Mahoosuc Land Trust supporters, you can **increase** the impact of your donation:

- Any **increased** donation by a current Summit Society member over his or her 2018 giving will be matched on a 2-to-1 basis. For example, if you contributed \$1000 in 2018 and increased your 2019 annual giving by \$750, the Stifler Family Foundation would double the \$750 with a \$1500 matching gift.
- Any **new** Summit members (donation of \$1000 or more) will be matched on a 2-to-1 basis.
- All **new or increased** contributions to MLT's operations/annual fund will be matched on a 1-to-1 basis. For example, a new membership of \$100 would create a match of \$100. An individual or business that gave \$200 in 2018 and increases her giving to \$500 in 2019, would create a match of \$300.

We would love to have you join us in this challenge and make a contribution that will qualify for a match. We would love to meet the challenge and celebrate this accomplishment with you, in August, at our annual meeting.

Harvesting on MLT Forests: Why, When, and How

How Mahoosuc Land Trust cares for its properties is a complex undertaking. Our stewardship planning must reflect the values of our mission and our Strategic Plan, which includes a goal to conserve lands that “support sustainable, economically productive use.” As MLT’s conservation land base grows, instances where limited timber harvesting is appropriate will occur.

Consistent with the 2016 Ellis River Conservation Area management plan, areas off of East Andover Road will be harvested this winter. Supervised by Sherm Small, an experienced forester with extensive experience working with conservation lands, the harvest will meet the overriding purpose of improving forest health. Each tree to be harvested will be marked by the forester, with diseased and poorly-formed trees at the top level of priority for removal.

Importantly, individual trees that exhibit signs of wildlife usage or cavities that provide a wildlife benefit will be designated as wildlife trees and remain in the residual stand, regardless of their health.

A multitude of protections are in place, from ensuring the long-term productivity of forest soils to minimizing visual impacts. Special care will be taken to protect habitat of the rare wood turtle and important plant communities.

The harvest work will also be coordinated with the layout of an adaptive trail to the Ellis River, a small parking lot, and a picnic area (see related story page 2).

Future forest stands will see a number of improvements: 1) a higher percentage of healthy, vigorous trees in a spacing that will allow for enhanced growth of the residual stand; 2) removal of the most at risk trees, giving the rest of the stand an opportunity to grow; 3) removing the diseased trees and rougher, multi-topped trees so that the residual stand will consist of trees with straighter boles and healthy crowns.

MLT aspires to do exemplary work and constantly strives to better understand the resources we are entrusted with. Members and supporters with backgrounds or strong interests in conservation, biology, and forestry should talk to us about possible volunteer opportunities.



2016 tree boring along the Ellis River
with Maine Natural Areas Program

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**February and March Events You Won't Want to Miss**(for full details, changes and cancellations visit www.mahoosuc.org/events-calendar/)**What****Where****When**

Snowshoe tours at McCoy-Chapman Forest Carpool from Valentine Farm 1:45 pm (12:45 p.m. on Feb. 10)
(9:45 a.m. on Feb. 20) Sunday 2/3, 2/17, 2/24, 2-4 p.m.
Sunday 2/10, 1-4 p.m.
Wednesday 2/20, 10:00 a.m.

Date Night at Valentine Farm 162 North Road, Bethel Valentine's Day, February 14th
5:30-7:00 p.m.

Granite Backcountry Film Festival The Gem Theater
23 Cross Street, Bethel Saturday, February 16th
6:00 p.m. social hour
7:00 p.m. films

Great Maine Outdoor Weekend Valentine Farm, 162 North Road,
Bethel Sunday, February 17th
2:00-4:00 p.m.

Owl Prowl at Valentine Farm 162 North Road, Bethel Saturday, February 23rd
7:00-8:30 p.m.

First Mtn. Hike and Potluck Lunch Shelburne Town Office, 74 Village Rd, Shelburne, NH Saturday, March 9th, 10:30-1:00
Group size limited to 16

Where Have the Meadowlarks Gone? Shelburne Town Office, 74 Village Rd, Shelburne, NH Wednesday, March 13th, 7-8:30 p.m.

Better for Birds, Preventing Window Strikes MLT's Valentine Farm, 162 North Road, Bethel Saturday, March 16th, 2:30-4:00 p.m.



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