

# Fall 2024



# Newsletter

*Conserving the Heart of Maine since 2004*

## View from the Chair

**By Tom Aversa, SRLT Board Chair**

As we approach the end of 2024 it's a good time to reflect back on SRLT's successes during the past year. Cheryl Daigle was promoted to Executive Director to spearhead efforts to increase membership and our supporter base and allow further land conservation while educating residents about the importance of the wild and working lands that make up our watershed. Content for several kiosk preserves was refurbished which along with new signage throughout the watershed has added to the Trust's visibility. We have also been achieving this goal with a busy slate of events and programs including hikes, workshops, paddles and talks focusing on a diverse array of topics including invasive plants, grassland management, woodlot improvement, birdwatching, surveying and fishing to name a few. Preserves usage continues to increase

as they become regular destinations for those with an affinity for the outdoors. Dedicated volunteers maintain trails with new loops being made available at Freedom Forest and Richardson. At the latter, grasslands contaminated with PFAS still provide habitat for grassland residents like Bobolinks and a site for research, recreation and education despite a lack of active agriculture. We are also in the process of adding another preserve in south Unity thanks to the generosity of it's current landowners!

The financial position of the Trust continues to improve even after expenses associated with staffing. Thanks to Cheryl's diligence, we have been awarded grants from various foundations and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service. After six plus years without staff, this allows important work such as updating forest management plans with a goal to implement recommendations including invasive plant management and

habitat improvement. Other news has included acquiring our first office space in six years at the MOFGA annex in Thorndike.

Seeds during 2024 have been planted, but for these plans to come to fruition we need the continued support of our volunteers and donations from supporters. Although no longer "all-volunteer" we remain heavily reliant on our dedicated crew. Please consider joining the cause of preserving our rural landscape. In the words of Joni Mitchell "you don't know what you got 'til it's gone". ***Your continued support allows SRLT to do good work. Please make a generous contribution when you receive this newsletter!***

Our work is only possible with your help. Allow us to provide opportunities for everyone to enjoy the "heart of Maine" in the Sebasticook River watershed. It's an easy way to make a difference.

## Adventures On the Water

**By Cheryl Daigle, Executive Director**

Experiencing the Sebasticook River watershed from the water is a special experience. What better way to explore and consider how our waterways connect us? In mid-May, SRLT and Midcoast Conservancy led a small group out on the Sebasticook River below the Benton Falls Dam during the 2024 migration of

alewife to their spawning habitat in lakes and ponds upstream of the dam. It was astonishing to see the many thousands of river herring swimming below the surface of the water as we paddled. Even more astonishing was the many dozens of Bald Eagles that we spotted along the way. They were either wheeling in circles above us

waiting for their next opportunity to dive down to fish, or nestled in pines along the shoreline after they fed.

SRLT was involved early on during the Alewife Restoration Initiative that connected China Lake to alewives returning to the Sebasticook River,

*continued on page 2*

**Sebasticook Regional Land Trust is a membership-supported conservation association working to conserve and restore the lands and waters of the Sebasticook River Watershed in Central Maine. We focus on land conservation, habitat restoration and environmental education.**





info@sebasticookrlt.org

## BOARD MEMBERS

**Tom Aversa**, Chair  
and acting Secretary

**Ellen Batchelder**, Treasurer

**Adrianna Bessenaire**

**Tyler C. Hadyniak**

**Doug Miller**

**Jonathan Milne**

**Dana Ward**, Vice-Chair

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Cheryl Daigle**

Since 2004, we've worked with many businesses and organizations to conserve the wild and working landscape of the Sebasticook River Watershed...

## Thank You!

AgAllies • Avian Haven • Bar Harbor Bank & Trust • Biodiversity Research Institute • Benton Grange Colby College - Chace Community Forum • Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative • Kennebec Woodland Partnership • Hills to Sea Trail Coalition • LightHawk • Longroad Energy • Lakeview Lumber • Maine Audubon • Maine Farmland Trust • Maine Land Trust Network • Maine Rivers • Midcoast Conservancy • Momentum Conservation • Morton - Kelly Charitable Trust • Newport Cultural Center • North Star Adventures LLC • Outland Farm Brewery • Penobscot County Conservation Association • Quimby Family Foundation • The American Chestnut Foundation • The Cornell Lab of Ornithology • The Ecology Learning Center • The Nature Conservancy • Town of Unity • Two Trees Forestry • RSU 3 • RSU 19 • Unity Public Library • Unity Barn Raisers • Villageside Farm

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## *Adventures, continued from page 1*

and we took a short detour into Outlet Stream, a significant tributary, watching with wonder at the alewife swimming upstream to spawn in the lake. For over 230 years, alewife were blocked from accessing China Lake until the project completion in 2022 - you can learn more about that successful project on the Maine Rivers website: [mainerivers.org/project/chinalake-alewife-restoration-initiative](http://mainerivers.org/project/chinalake-alewife-restoration-initiative). We can experience the beauty of this migration each spring, and communities along the river reap the economic and cultural benefits as well. We will explore these watershed connections more in the next year.

Later in the summer and further north, paddling aficionado and Pittsfield resident Bill Cunningham led a group of SRLT members and local residents to explore the peaceful waters of the river from the Peltoma Bridge boat launch. The shoreline is remarkably undeveloped for miles, and it's a great place to explore the variety of plants that grow along the river's edge, bird watch, and look for other signs of wildlife. A side trip down Farnham Brook took us deep into a small tributary that left us all appreciating the wetlands that feed the brook and the wildness that remains in our unique part of the world. We followed the trip with a meet-up at Outland Farm Brewery in Pittsfield for a delicious meal and Maine-brewed beer. We appreciate their support as one of our newest Business Sponsors!

Pleasant Lake offered the next perfect location for a waterbased adventure. In September, board chair Tom

Aversa and I led a group on a paddling trip along the shoreline of SRLT's Pleasant Lake Preserve (above). We stopped to talk about the history of forest management, highlighting the mixed age forest stands that resulted from a timber harvest eleven years ago that followed Maine Audubon's Forestry for Maine Birds guidelines. On most field trips we keep a tally of birds seen or heard, such as the Belted Kingfisher, Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jay, Raven, American Crow, Mallard, several unidentified ducks flying over head, and a juvenile American Eagle seen while stopped alongside the woodland shore.

Back on the water, we spotted a Sandhill Crane flying over the marsh, saw several Great Blue Heron, and an adult and juvenile Common Loon. Board chair Tom Aversa's bird list was far more comprehensive. He heard Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and several warblers (Tom typically uploads his bird lists on our field trips to ebird - you can find an example from this trip here: [ebird.org/checklist/S195438822](http://ebird.org/checklist/S195438822)).

We are planning to spend more time on or near the lakes, ponds, and waterways in the Sebasticook River watershed next year, and will be highlighting the myriad ways our communities are connected across the landscape. Keep an eye out for updates on program offerings, and we hope to see you out on our preserves or on a future paddling trip! Check out our upcoming programs at [sebasticookrlt.org/events-news](http://sebasticookrlt.org/events-news).





## Reflections on the Pleasant Lake Preserve

Kent Hewitt and his son Scott Rimm-Hewitt make an annual sojourn to their property in Stetson and to the 150-acre Pleasant Lake Preserve, which Hewitt donated to the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust in 2010. Volunteer land steward Jeff Guesman walks the trails with them, sharing stories and providing updates on the latest stewardship activities and visitor use. This past August, Kent and Scott shared some reflections on the preserve and their visits with Jeff shortly after their visit.

*During explorations about the state of Maine in 1964, I came upon a "Land For Sale" sign on Lakins Road, Stetson. Contacting the owner, and walking the 350 undeveloped acres seduced me into purchasing this pristine property. Half of the property is an island on Pleasant Lake (connected to the shore by a causeway). The lake is clean, offering great boating, fishing, and scenic outlooks. Subsequently, I made periodic trips to Stetson, enjoying camping, the solitude, and even snowmobiling. In 2010, I donated half of the property (100-acre island "The Cape" plus 50 acres of adjacent wetland "The Logan") to the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT). As much as I had come to enjoy "The Cape"*

*and "The Logan" before 2010, my love and enjoyment have just rocketed skyward following SRLT's ownership and stewardship (thanks, Jeff). It is gratifying beyond measure to know that other people now enjoy the rich assets of PLP all thanks to SRLT.*

-Kent Hewitt, Pleasant Lake Preserve

*On Wednesday, August 14th, I joined my dad Kent Hewitt and SRLT member & steward Jeff Guesman for a trek across the Pleasant Lake Preserve (PLP). We immediately noticed huge improvements in regard to trail maintenance as all of the trail signs (which Jeff made) had been cleaned from weathering and a kiosk at the trail head included a QR code that linked to the PLP trail map. Once across the causeway and onto the PLP island ("The Cape"), one could feel a sense of freedom and peace from the outside world. All trails on the island were in great condition and the evenly placed picnic tables donated by local boy scouts at overlooks along the shoreline offered great places to sit down and enjoy the view. Many thanks go to Jeff for taking the time to guide us and for continuing to improve the preserve.*

-Scott Rimm-Hewitt, Pleasant Lake Preserve

## There are Many Ways to Give

**to Support SRLT in Conserving and Stewarding Land in the Sebasticook River Watershed**

### Online

[www.sebasticookrlt.org/membership](http://www.sebasticookrlt.org/membership)

### By Check

Write a check to: Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT)

Return in the provided envelope to:  
PO Box 184, Unity, ME 04988

If you would like to dedicate your donation to stewardship, please indicate that in the check memo line.

### From Your Annual RMD

Make a QCD (Qualified Charitable Deduction) from your traditional IRA's RMD (Required Minimum Deduction). The advantage of a QCD is that you do not pay taxes on your donation.

1. Contact the financial institution holding the traditional IRA account you want to use for the donation before you take your RMD.
2. Specify: Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT) and the amount you wish to give.

**Note:** QCDs must be taken directly from your traditional IRA account by the institution holding the account. Some institutions, like Vanguard, send the processed check(s) to you for mailing. Other institutions, like Fidelity, send QCD checks directly to the address you specify. Therefore, make sure your name and any specific instructions for the gift are included when you complete the QCD paperwork.

**Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT) EIN: 20-2644192 is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and all donations are fully tax-deductible**



Photo by Jeff Guesman



# Stewardship Update

## Stewardship Committee Co-chairs Doug Miller and Ron Waldron

We had quite a bit of clean up from the windy winter storms. Many of our preserves suffered blowdowns that crossed our trails and impacted access. We worked through the winter and early spring to address these issues. The preserve stewards have been maintaining their properties as needed, mowing, clearing, cleaning and fixing. All of our preserves are fully accessible.

In May, we worked with the Unity Ecology Learning Center students to make some improvements to the Rines Preserve. The students planted evergreen trees along the western entrance border and elderberry bushes donated by Waldo County SWCD around the parking area and kiosk area. We also accomplished controlling some unauthorized ATV access points.

A new updated kiosk panel was also installed at the Connor Mill Trail this past summer with support from the Town of

Unity and the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund. A small group of volunteers rebuilt one of the bridges on the far loop trail, and we are planning additional bridge repair in 2025. The metal bridge across Bacon Brook will be removed by November 1 this year, but the shorter loop trail along Sandy Stream that begins at the kiosk is open year-round.

June's workday consisted of installing Kestrel nesting boxes at the Richardson Memorial Preserve. Two boxes were installed, one at the top of the hill near the field entrance and the second down in the front lower field near Stevens Road. Mike Oberlander designed, constructed and donated the two boxes. The field trails have been mowed to improve access. The larger fields have been bush-hogged after the Bobolink fledging to keep the grasslands available for these birds.

Richardson Memorial Preserve was the focus for our July workday. We re-blazed trail markers that were faded or lost due to the blowdowns. Some trail clearing and

an updated kiosk were accomplished this summer as well.

At the Freedom Forest we gathered for our August workday. We cut a new loop trail with an ardent team of workers. Blazing of other trails were also completed. Our September workday was moved to October 6, and we focused on updating trail markers and general trail maintenance at Moulton's Mill Preserve and clearing the trail that runs along Twenty-five Mile Stream between the two kiosks.

We appreciate the volunteers who help mow our trails and fields at Moulton's Mill Preserve and Rines Wetlands and Wildlife Preserve – a special thank you goes out to Bill Allen and Barry Stoodley!

**Please consider joining us for a fun morning with others who enjoy working in the woods.** Our workdays are usually the last Sunday of the month. We announce our workday locations, time and activity on our webpage at [sebasticookrlt.org](http://sebasticookrlt.org) and on Instagram and Facebook.



Top (L-R): A work crew replacing a bridge at the Connor Mill Trail; USFWS biologist Hannah Mullally and volunteer Frank Hayman check out features in a new side trail at Cambridge Woodlands Preserve. Volunteer Barry Stoodley mowing a trail at the Moulton's Mill Preserve; Mike Oberlander, Tom Aversa, Dan Hill and Ron Waldron set up new kestrel boxes (built by Mike) at the Richardson Preserve. Middle: Ecology Learning Center students help plant shrubs and trees at Rines Preserve; volunteers install the new maps and frame at the Connor Mill Trail kiosk. Bottom: the above bridge almost complete; new kestrel box at Richardson; Cheryl Daigle updates trail marks; Jonathan Milne, Ron Waldron, and Adri Bessenaire discussing trail work at Freedom Forest Preserve.





# 2024 Annual Meeting

Unity Community Center, 32 School St., Unity, ME  
Thursday, November 7, 5:30 PM

Please join us!

We look forward to gathering together to celebrate the past year's accomplishments, honor our 2024 Volunteer of the Year and share appreciation for all of our volunteers. We'll learn from our speaker about the cultural and ecological importance of brown ash trees in our region, and look ahead to the future.

Come and vote on our new slate of Board of Directors.



**RSVP here:** [sebasticookrli.org/events/sebasticook-regional-land-trust-annual-meeting](https://sebasticookrli.org/events/sebasticook-regional-land-trust-annual-meeting)  
Or visit our website for more information.



## KEYNOTE SPEAKER: **Tyler Everett**

### **Partnering in Preservation: Lessons from the Ash Protection Collaboration Across Wabanakik**

Tyler will present updates on the Ash Protection Collaboration Across Wabanakik (APCAW) and its partner organizations and Tribal Nations, focusing on efforts to safeguard ash trees in the Wabanakik forests. His talk will highlight key insights from the recent "Future of Brown Ash Meeting" held at the University of Maine on October 8th and 9th. Tyler will use a preservation value framework to demonstrate how diverse partners can unite to protect species in peril like the ash trees. His presentation will also weave in themes of progress in cultural access, land return, and co-stewardship, illustrating how these elements intersect with the challenges posed to the culturally significant brown ash trees by the emerald ash borer.

Tyler is a citizen of Mi'kmaq Nation and a PhD student in the School of Forest Resources at the University of Maine. His research prioritizes methodologies that result in Tribal-led science and his current research focuses on the impacts of emerald ash borer (EAB) on Tribal ash resources and identifying innovative management and mitigation strategies for this forest health issue that Tribal Nation partners support and have interest in better understanding.

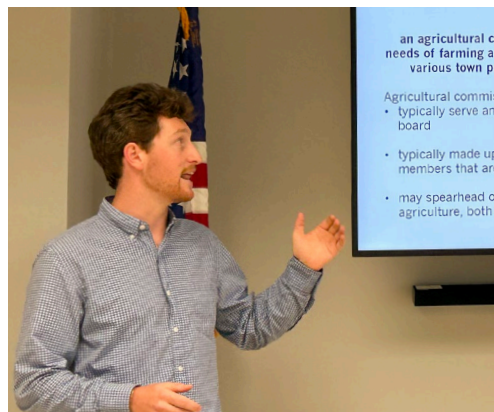




## Community Outreach Update

SRLT's outreach programs continue to attract a wide variety of community members from throughout the watershed. We've been pleased to see an increase in program participants from town planning committees and conservation commissions – our hope is that participants will bring what they learn to enhance management of their own properties or to inform the greater community. Our recent evening programs included a talk by Thatcher Carter (below) representing Maine Farmland Trust on the role of towns in cultivating Maine's agricultural future and a presentation on the history of the Maine Warden Service by retired game warden and historian Dave Georgia, Jr.

With support from a Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund grant this past year, we completed new posters and updated maps



for some of our kiosks and added skill-building programs to expand our stewardship-related programming. We've offered programs focused on invasive species management, conservation easements as a land protection tool, woodlands management for wildlife, and trail building. SRLT collaborated with Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District in a workshop at Moulton's Mill Preserve to learn about invasive plants, how they spread, and how their presence influences the health of the diverse natural habitats found in the Sebasticook River watershed. Led by Hunter Manley of Legacy Woodlot Services, the workshop also informed participants about ways to manage these species to minimize their impacts, including identifying them early and planning for treatment. The workshop ended with some hands-on work to cut and pull invasive non-native bush honeysuckle (above) on site to demonstrate best practices – thank you to all who participated and lent a helping hand!

In October, Erin Amadon of Town 4 Trails Services, LLC, led a trail building workshop at a

property in Unity that is in the process of being conserved (below). The trail will connect with the Hills to Sea Trail, and we learned about the Eight Principles of Sustainable Trail Design and practiced building a bench trail along a slope to minimize the impacts of heavy rain events. Several SRLT volunteers were joined by staff and volunteers from Hills to Sea Trail Coalition and Coastal Mountains Land Trust. The workshop was supported





by funding from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund.

In collaboration with Maine Woodland Owners (MWO), we offered a walk at the Cambridge Woodlands Preserve led by USFWS biologist Hannah Mullally with an emphasis on woodlands management that benefits birds and other wildlife. Our management of Cambridge Preserve was then featured in the October issue of Maine Woodland Owner's newsletter. Director Cheryl Daigle participated in a chainsaw safety workshop in July offered by MWO and Blue Hill Heritage Trust, and has been practicing her new chainsaw skills on SRLT trails ever since (below)! She highly recommends the workshop – keep an eye on our e-news and events page in 2025 as we hope to host a workshop with MWO on one of our own conservation properties.



The grassland bird conservation and management programs offered at the Richardson Memorial Preserve (right) and at Albion Bread Farm, where SRLT holds a conservation easement, highlighted the many threats Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrow and other grassland birds must contend with during their breeding season. We shared ways that landowners can get involved, including timing their mowing of fields until after young Bobolink have fledged. AgAllies is a significant partner in our work to protect grassland birds: Laura Suomi-Lecker co-led one of the workshops, and she and Jennifer Brockway assisted with the creation of an interpretive sign funded by Cornell's Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative that



will be placed at the Richardson Memorial Preserve later this fall. Watch for more skill-building programs in 2025 – we are looking to expand our volunteer base, but also believe that offering more workshops will both help SRLT meet our land maintenance needs and build a community of land stewards throughout the region.

## Maine Master Naturalist Program

In early October, director Cheryl Daigle completed the 2024 Maine Master Naturalist Program (MMNP). The mission of the Maine Master Naturalist Program is to train people to be volunteer naturalists who will enrich nature education in Maine. In a year-long course, MMNP teaches participants to volunteer for organizations around the state and inspire all kinds of audiences about Maine's natural world. You can learn more about MMNP and future courses on their website at [mainemasternaturalist.org](http://mainemasternaturalist.org). Maine Master Naturalists are available to volunteer for nature education across Maine - if you are planning an event, please reach out on the MMNP website Contact page to see if a naturalist is available. Val Watson, also a recent graduate, will be leading two upcoming events for SRLT: a stream ecology exploration along Sandy Stream and a midwinter Night Sky and Owl walk.



Top photo by Karen Johnson: During the MMNP course, Cheryl Daigle spots a Brown-hooded owl caterpillar (*Cucullia convexpennis*), shown in Cheryl's photo (oval above). To the right is a page from Cheryl's MMNP journal.







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Scaly vase (*Turbinellus floccosus*), also known as shaggy chanterelle, photo by board member and land steward Adri Bessenaire

Remember to **JOIN** or **RENEW** your membership!  
It takes a community to protect the places we love and  
all the creatures that depend on them.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Nov 3, 10am–12pm**  
**Autumn Stream Ecology Along Sandy Stream**

Val Watson, Maine Master Naturalist, at the Connor Mill Trail in Unity.

**Nov 7, 5:30–7:30pm**  
**SRLT Annual Meeting**

Keynote presentation by Tyler Everett, at the Unity Community Center, 32 School St., Unity ME.

**Feb 22 (raindate Mar 1), 5:30–7:30pm**

**Night Sky and Owl Walk**

Val Watson, Maine Master Naturalist, at the Richardson Memorial Preserve in Unity.

**Mar 19, 5–6:30pm**  
**American Kestrel Conservation and Community Science**

Evan Jackson, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Raptor Program.

**Apr 26, 9am–12pm**  
**Vernal Pool Walk at Freedom Forest Preserve**

Learn about the fascinating lives of amphibians that rely on vernal pools to complete their life cycle and check out our new trail loop at Freedom Forest.

**May 10, 7–10am**  
**World Migratory Bird Day 2024**

Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day by joining Sebasticook Regional Land Trust for our annual walk through the Unity wetlands along the raised esker at the Rines Wetlands and Wildlife Preserve.

**RSVP at**  
**[SebasticookRLT.org](https://sebasticookrlt.org)**

Follow us on social media and check our website for more 2025 events: we are planning programs on the spring alewife run, paddling the Sebasticook River, nature journaling and more!



**2025 Christmas Bird Count**

Participate in the annual CBC tally of individuals of all bird species found during one 24-hour period from midnight to midnight within a 15-mile diameter circle. SRLT hosts two CBC's coordinated by Tom Aversa. Sign-up required on our website – the earlier the better for planning purposes!

**Dec 14**

Unity Christmas Bird Count

**Dec 21**

Hartland Christmas Bird Count

**Volunteer Work Days Last Sunday of the Month | Visit our Website for Updates!**