

Conserving the Heart of Maine since 2004

View from the Chair

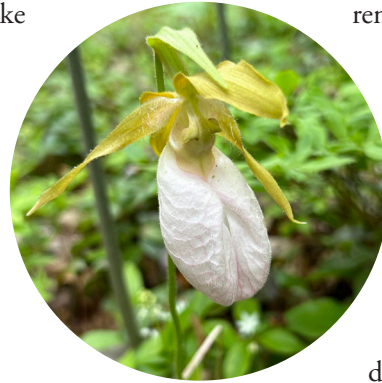
By Dana Ward, SRLT Board Chair

We have continued to make progress the past six months thanks to the dedication of our volunteers. We are in the process of protecting more forest land, our trails keep improving thanks to our stewards, and our educational program continues to connect our neighbors to the natural world. Community spirit and a shared sense of responsibility make all this possible.

Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do, from trail maintenance, to educational events, and to keeping our lands accessible, safe, and thriving. Your contributions

demonstrate that conservation is not just about land—it's about people coming together to nurture it. If you've ever wondered how to make a tangible difference, volunteering with SRLT is one way to help secure our community's future.

Among health advocates, "forest bathing" has become a bit of a buzz word recently. Walking slowly, noticing the sights, the sounds, and smells of the forest, and letting the rhythms of the woods calm your mind



can significantly reduce stress and enhance well-being. Our preserves offer the perfect setting for this restorative practice, reminding us that protecting land isn't just about wildlife—it's about human renewal too.

In the months ahead, I invite everyone to explore our trails, participate in volunteer activities, and take a moment to breathe deeply amidst the beauty of our forests. Together, let's continue to safeguard the natural treasure that is the Sebasticook River watershed.

Welcoming Research on SRLT Conservation Lands

By Tom Aversa

Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT) considers contributing to scientific research a major goal. Many of the world's problems can be tackled by following the science and adhering to policies which create a better environment. Much has been learned, but our world still presents many mysteries. Sound scientific research is always needed. At its most basic, SRLT contributes by submitting field observations from our watershed via citizen science

initiatives such as Audubon's Christmas Bird count, eBird and iNaturalist. These databases have now accrued observations into the billions. All this data is revealing critical aspects of the earth's diverse biota and demonstrating how our changing climate is affecting their status and distribution. Additionally, behavioral and reproductive information collected and submitted by citizen scientists helps inform land managers how to best conserve critical declining species. In recent years, SRLT's contributions to scientific research have expanded with growing interest in wildlife behavior and habitat use as well as with efforts to understand the long-term environmental impacts of soil contamination by PFAS.

Continued on page 4



Savannah Sparrows are among the grassland-dependent birds that nest at Richardson Memorial Preserve. Photo by Tom Aversa.

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@sebasticookrllt.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cheryl Daigle

Design and layout by

ebb studio

Photos by Cheryl Daigle unless otherwise designated

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 • Belfast Veterinary Hospital • Bar Harbor Bank & Trust
- Biodiversity Research Institute • Benton Grange • Casella Organics
- Colby College - Chace Community Forum • Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative
- Davis Conservation Fund • Edwards Brothers Shop & Save • Friends of Lake Winnecook
- Hills to Sea Trail Coalition • John Sage Foundation • Kennebec Timber Framing
- Kennebec Woodland Partnership • LightHawk • Longroad Energy • Lakeview Lumber • Mac’s Hardware
- Maine Audubon • Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife/Beginning with Habitat
- Maine Farmland Trust • Maine Land Trust Network • Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund • Maine Rivers
- Maine Yoga Adventures • 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
- RSU 3 • RSU 19 • Stone Tree Farm & Cidery • The American Chestnut Foundation
- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology • The Ecology Learning Center • The Farnsworth Fund
- The Nature Conservancy • Town of Unity • Two Trees Forestry
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service • Unity Barn Raisers • Unity Forge
- Unity Public Library • Villageside Farm • Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District



Spring Feast (of Words)

By Cheryl Daigle , Executive Director

By the time this reaches your mailboxes, it will be full-on spring, trees and shrubs leafed out but still carrying that fresh, new look of the season. The early spring wildflowers – bloodroot, trout lily, trillium – may be past blooming, but we can look forward to lady slipper’s, meadow rue, false Solomon’s seal, and perhaps the wood anemone will linger. Vernal pools will be full of life, wood frog tadpoles feeding on plant materials and algae, spotted salamander and blue spotted salamander larvae feeding on invertebrates and, as they grow, whatever they can fit in their mouths, including tadpoles and other salamander larvae! Other wildlife are drawn to these pools to feed on the amphibian larvae, including the larval and adult forms of damselflies, dragonflies, and predacious diving beetles, wood turtles, raccoons, snakes,

owls, and wading birds. It’s a true feast! Yet, enough wood frogs and salamanders survive to leave the pools as juveniles, return to their woodland home to grow into adults and renew this life cycle next spring, often at the very same vernal pool. SRLT’s Freedom Forest Preserve on North Palermo Road in Freedom is a great place to see vernal pools throughout the spring and summer. This magical woodland is also the focus of a chapter in *Writing the Land: Pathways*, part of a series of anthologies edited by Lis McLoughlin that match land trusts with poets across the country. Our chapter includes two poems by poet Stuart Kestenbaum inspired by walking the preserve trails. We are delighted to have Stuart’s participation - he is the author of six collections of poetry and was Maine’s poet laureate from 2016 to 2020. You can read more about Freedom Forest and other Community Lands at sebasticookrllt.org (or join us on Saturday, June 6 for a nature walk and birdwatching at Freedom Forest with board member Tom Aversa!).

FOLLOW US!





It is extremely valuable to hear from our community members as we plan our land management activities, conservation projects, and educational programs. In fall of 2025, we conducted a survey of community members through our e-news and social media apps. We received 45 responses. Below you will find an excerpt from the report. Thank you to all who participated!

TOP 4 REASONS TO ENJOY SRLT LANDS

Walking or Hiking

Nature Connection

Wildlife Observation

Birdwatching

TOP 4 PLACES TO VISIT

Connor Mill Trail

Pleasant Lake Preserve

Richardson Memorial Preserve

Clark Road Wildlife Preserve

TOP 4 PREFERRED PROGRAM TOPICS

Wildlife Ecology and Management

Historic Features on Conserved Lands

Botany

Wildlands and Biodiversity

WHAT COULD SRLT SERVICE AREA LOOK LIKE IN 25 YEARS?

“It has to start with a shift in the so-called “focus area” that should include the watershed as a whole. Given the bulk of the headwaters of the river itself lies north of I-95 to include Sebasticook Lake, Pleasant Lake, Great Moose Lake, Lake Wassookeag and Indian Pond, SRLT’s service (focus) area should include a better distribution of conserved properties throughout the watershed.”

“Conserve more land: wildlands, woodlands, and agricultural lands. Local communities appreciate and are invested in stewarding these lands.”



“Significant staff working with the community of volunteers to allow people to enjoy the out doors in the watershed. Improved trail maintenance and signage. Monthly outings, education and outreach.”

“I’d like to see more connected properties with longer trail walk options, and connectivity for wildlife. I’d love to see a stronger, stable SRLT with the resources to make land purchases.”

“I would love more signage around PFAS contamination and possible remediation efforts. I would like to see more of an effort put into stream connectivity for fish migration (alewife restoration efforts and dam removal).”



SRLT’s MOST IMPORTANT ROLE

“Giving people the opportunity to get away, explore new and beautiful places, and connect with each other and the beauty around them”

“Wild and working land conservation with a focus on biodiversity”

“Making trails and conserved lakes, along with nature in its various forms accessible to the community and ensuring its access to future generations.”



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

“We would love to see easier access to lakes, rivers, streams, bogs, for low-impact non-motorized recreational water craft -- kayaks and canoes -- that does not require portage or difficult carry-in access as we are senior citizens -- paddling is very popular among seniors -- who have physical limitations and cannot manage long carries.”

“Projects to control invasive species in the forests and waterways are extremely important to me.”

Photos left to right from top: Sandy Stream shoreline at Connor Mill Trail, Black-and-white Warbler by Tom Aversa, eastern milk snake, wood anemone, and adventurers at Pleasant Lake Preserve.



Host Site for PFAS Research

Our 630,000-acre service area includes significant agricultural land affected by PFAS contaminated sludge. Providing a site for research on the environmental impacts of PFAS benefits our entire community. When high levels of PFAS (aka forever chemicals) contamination were discovered in 2020 at Richardson Memorial Preserve in fields used for agriculture, we realized that we had to cease food production and forego the lease income. The preserve has always been designated a wildlife preserve with grassland birds a conservation priority; the fields are now managed entirely for wildlife rather than making them complete casualties of the PFAS-contaminated sludge that was spread over 30 years ago. Impacts of PFAS on wildlife are not well understood, but interest in studies aimed at human and wildlife health have been increasing along with awareness of this environmental issue.

With Richardson Preserve's focus shifting from agriculture and wildlife to research and wildlife, the site offers opportunity for long-term studies on PFAS' effect on wildlife and potential mitigation steps. Richardson now hosts a suite of studies focused on PFAS. Wildlife Health Biologist Tegwyn Taylor and the team at Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (MIF&W) harvest and test deer, turkey and other wildlife to assess PFAS levels in their flesh. These results contribute to setting advisories for human consumption in the region. University of Maine (UMO) researchers Diane Kopec and Matt Chatfield collect plants and fungus to better understand

PFAS effects on humans and wildlife such as turtles. Ellen Mallory from UMaine Cooperative Extension and Caleb Goossen from Maine Organic Farmers and Growers (MOFGA) are examining the role that PFAS precursor compounds in soil play in increasing plant uptake and accumulation of PFOS, a key PFAS of concern. If funded, environmental consultants Northern Tilth hopes to explore whether incorporating biochar into contaminated fields minimizes leaching to groundwater or reduces PFAS uptake by crops. When funding becomes available, Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife biologists hope to test unhatched eggs. We would like to attract additional research to measure PFAS effects on grassland-dependent wildlife reproduction and recruitment. Richardson Preserve is becoming a true hub of research on PFAS contamination.

Continuing Wildlife Research

Wildlife research focused on bird behavior and habitat is increasing at Richardson Memorial Preserve as well as at our other conserved lands. SRLT volunteers continue to monitor Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow reproduction with field surveys and nest box checks. We are also assisting Erynn Call and her team from Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MIF&W) on their long-term open habitat raptor conservation project. Providing and monitoring American Kestrel nest boxes will provide nesting opportunities and help assess causes for their recent decline. Richardson and our other conserved agricultural lands also provide critical habitat for Northern Harrier, another of the MIF&W study's focal species. At the nearby Clark Road Preserve, SRLT installed



A male American Kestrel peers outside the new nesting box at Richardson Memorial Preserve. MIF&W photo.

and monitored a wildlife camera at a bait pile to potentially attract a Golden Eagle, a high priority species for MIF&W.

Back at Richardson, researcher Kshanti Greene of Thomas College is returning for a second year of collaboration with Ag Allies—a New England wide grassland bird program spearheaded by our long-time partner, Laura Suomi-Lecker of Somerset County Soil & Water District—to use audio recorders to correlate vocalizations of nesting grassland birds with nest sites. Ag Allies hopes that acoustic analysis of Bobolink vocalizations might inform delayed mowing techniques and minimize impact on conservation-minded landowners who are harvesting forage for dairy. Working with Laura for nearly a decade has allowed SRLT to strategize how to best balance healthy hayfield production with delayed mowing and other techniques designed to maximize population recruitment while minimizing increases in invasive plants.



There are Many Ways to Give

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

Online

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

Timber Harvest at Albert J. Sousa Preserve

by Cheryl Daigle, Executive Director

This past winter, we conducted the first phase of a timber harvest at the Albert J. Sousa Preserve to address impacts of white pine disease complex on the woodland, help healthy trees thrive, and enhance wildlife habitat. Our forester Jon Doty of Two Trees Forestry is guiding implementation of the updated Forest

Management Plan for this woodland, and we are contracting with logger Tyler Reynolds to harvest the timber. We follow Maine Audubon's Forestry for Maine Birds guidelines and Tyler is doing an excellent job conducting the harvest with minimal impacts to soil and non-target tree species. A wildlife camera placed on site will continue to capture wildlife use in the harvested area and nearby wetlands (see photo of deer feeding on tree tops and branches post-harvest). We anticipate resuming the harvest in the fall or winter depending on soil conditions at that time.



SAVE THE DATE!



Annual Meeting

Thursday, October 8, 5:30 PM
Clifford Arts & Student Center
Unity, ME

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION Winged Wetland Wonders

by Danielle D'Auria,
Bird Group Leader for the
Wildlife Diversity Section of
the Maine Department Inland
Fisheries & Wildlife

Freshwater wetlands are among Maine's most important ecosystems, sustaining a wide array of birds found nowhere else. Join us for an exploration of Maine's rare waterbirds hidden within our marshes. This talk will also focus on the graceful great blue heron and the endangered black tern, and efforts to better understand the conservation challenges facing these iconic wetland species.

Stewardship Update

Doug Miller & Ron Waldron,
committee co-chairs

Our volunteer crew has been busy! Over the winter, we completed conservation easement monitoring with the added help of newer board members Doug Fox and Buck O’Herin, allowing them the opportunity to get to know some of our conservation properties better. We’ve also put some emphasis on checking and re-flagging boundaries on some of our woodland preserves. Our monthly volunteer workday in April focused on the Connor Mill Trail with a large group - including four new volunteers – re-installing the metal bridge over Bacon Brook, removing old bog bridging, picking up roadside trash, clearing fallen trees from the trail, and identifying invasive honeysuckle to remove at a later date. THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS! We appreciate the sense of camaraderie and community building that emerges as we work together! We are resuming our Thursday morning workdays - we are always looking for additional volunteers to help with trail and preserve maintenance and can accommodate individual schedules. If you are interested, you can fill out a volunteer form at sebasticookrlt.org/volunteer-work-parties.

In late April, we co-hosted a live stake harvesting and planting demonstration with Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District and Maine Forest Service. This program was led by District Foresters Allyssa Gregory and Jared Gregory. Moulton’s Mill Preserve offered the perfect place to hold the event with ample shrubs suitable to collect live stakes and an active restoration site alongside Twentyfive Mile Stream for planting. A live stake is a dormant cutting of about 2-3 feet in length taken from a living plant and then planted into moist ground in spring before the active growing season. Certain species of shrubs and trees, including redosier dogwood, willow, buttonbush, and elderberry, will establish roots – it may take up to two years to see leaves emerge, so the process takes some patience! With a success

rate of 30%-70%, it is a cost-effective way to create buffer plantings along waterways or to diversify your backyards for both wildlife habitat and aesthetic values. We advise that you attend a workshop to understand the nuances of live staking for greatest success. By print time, the workshop series we participated in will be over, but the Maine Forest Service created this video to provide guidance: scan the QR code at right, or search for “Conservation Stewardship Simplified: Live Staking” on the Maine Forest Service’s YouTube channel. Also keep an eye on the Waldo County SWCD website for additional resources.



Upcoming volunteer opportunities include clearing old timber landings at Fowler Bog Preserve back to an early successional stage to enhance habitat for woodcock and ruffed grouse. A USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service EQIP grant supports planting climate resilient trees and shrubs at two of these landings for added wildlife benefits. We will also continue efforts to remove invasive honeysuckle from Moulton’s Mill Preserve, Kanokolus Bog Preserve, and Richardson Memorial Preserve in particular. We made great progress last year, and we are working to

get to a point where we can keep ahead of further spread of invasive plants with the help of volunteers.

Photos: Volunteer crews have been busy flagging boundaries at Rines Preserve, maintaining the Connor Mill Trail and putting in the Bacon Brook bridge for the season, removing old bog bridging, participating in live stake harvesting and planting workshops, and setting up a wildlife habitat enhancement project at Fowler Bog Preserve.



Forever Wild

by Buck O'Herin

To most of us it appears that much is known about how the earth and universe work. After all, thousands of books have been written on subjects ranging from astronomy to zoology and we have put humans on the moon. But with the biological sciences many scientists confide that our depth of understanding has barely scratched the surface.

Andy Moldenke is a Stanford trained biologist who has participated in some of the world's most long-term forest studies at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in Oregon. He is considered by many to be a guru in the field of soil science. Moldenke says that what concerns him and other experts the most is that the "aboveground ecosystems that most ecologists have studied in the past are a very small part of what's really out there. Most ecology is based on simple paradigms based on what little has been studied."

Not understanding how biological systems work has unfortunately not kept humans from dramatically altering our environment. In the 1980s a new scientific discipline was created called conservation biology. It is mission oriented with the goal of understanding the causes of biodiversity loss (the variety of species, ecosystems, relationships and processes that have evolved on Earth), as well as the human impacts, and to develop a blue print for

maintaining Earth's species and habitats.

Michael Soule, regarded as the founder of conservation biology, was motivated by the dire circumstances he saw unfolding across the landscape and new research findings indicating that the best—and likely only way, to maintain a thriving planet was to allow large areas of the natural world to function with as little human interference as possible. Forever wild is a land conservation designation to do this for our forests. It prohibits development, logging and commercial use. Forever wild is a vital conservation tool and a conservative strategy to ensure that losses of species, habitats and relationships do not push our environment into collapse. In the 1970s reformist ecologist Frank Egler aptly declared, "Nature is not more complicated than you think, it is more complicated than you CAN think".

Maine is the most forested state in the country, yet less than 4% of our forests are protected as forever wild. The age-old debate is framed as conservation versus using resources. But it is not an either/or question or solution. We need wood products and we also need the full range of healthy forests. We need to follow the science. Forest biodiversity is tied to the complex structure of older, undisturbed forests. These older forests are essential to the health of all Maine forests, as they become reservoirs for species and processes that do not thrive in overly managed forests.



Photo by Buck O'Herin

This summer, a 104-acre extent of old forest in Unity will be protected as forever wild. The land is part of the former Elwell farm, now owned by the Bowsprit Foundation. The easement on the property held by Maine Farmland Trust is being amended to protect this forest as forever wild. Some of the forest has not been cut since the mid to late 1800s. SRLT board member Buck O'Herin and ecologist Aleta McKeage are leading a walk on the property August 8. For more information visit sebasticookrlt.org/events-news.



Spring Special through the end of June!



Make a donation of \$75 or more, and receive a copy of *Writing the Land: Pathways*, a new anthology featuring a chapter on SRLT's Freedom Forest Preserve that includes two poems by Maine poet Stuart Kestenbaum. Make a donation of \$120 or more, and receive a copy of the anthology and an SRLT hat!



P.O. Box 184
Unity, ME 04988
(207) 948-3766
info@sebasticookrlt.org



Native bunchberry blooms through June.

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

Saturday, MAY 23, 2–4pm **World Fish Migration Day Community Art Event**

Join Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District, Sebasticook Regional Land Trust, and Unity Public Library in celebrating World Fish Migration Day with a family-friendly community art event focused on the incredible connections between alewives, freshwater mussels, and the Sebasticook River. An Artists' Reception will be held concurrently in the Library.

Saturday, MAY 30, 9am–1pm **Sebasticook River Paddle Below Benton Falls Dam**

Join SRLT, Midcoast Conservancy, and trip leaders Buck O'Herin and Jeff Cherry for an inspiring 6-mile paddle during the annual alewife migration. The spring alewife migration should be close to its peak, and we anticipate great wildlife viewing opportunities along the route.

Saturday, JUN 6, 9–11:30am **Nature Walk at Freedom Forest Preserve**

Enjoy a relaxing walk at the beautiful Freedom Forest Preserve while learning about the fascinating lives of amphibians that rely on vernal pools with SRLT Director and Maine Master Naturalist Cheryl Daigle. Board member Tom Aversa will provide birdwatching tips along the way.

Saturday, JUL 11, 10am–1pm **Paddle Pleasant Lake in Stetson**

Join SRLT and paddling trip leader Bill Cunningham for an easy paddle from the Town Boat Launch along the Pleasant Lake Preserve shoreline to explore Ells Brook, the large northern tributary, and the eastern part of the lake.

RSVP at SebasticookRLT.org

Be sure to sign up for our e-news or check our events page for updates! Stay tuned for upcoming programs on wildlife management, mushroom ecology and foraging, nature apps such as iNaturalist and eBird, and more paddling trips!

Saturday, AUG 8, 9am–12pm

Old Forest Stands: Explore the Sandy Stream Forest

Join us for a walk in one of the region's unique old forest stands. The Sandy Stream Forest is on land owned by the Bowsprit Foundation and is soon to be protected as forever wild with a conservation easement held by Maine Farmland Trust. Join ecologist Aleta McKeage and SRLT board member Buck O'Herin for a walk into the past.



American Kestrel by Tom Aversa

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