

# Spring 2025



# Newsletter

*Conserving the Heart of Maine since 2004*

## View from the Chair

**By Dana Ward, SRLT Board Chair**

After chairing Sebasticook Regional Land Trust's board of directors since 2020, Tom Aversa has left big shoes to fill. I'll do my best to follow in his footsteps. Tom joined the SRLT board in 2011, the year the Friends of Unity Wetlands and the Sebasticook River Watershed Association merged to create SRLT. His steady efforts have kept us going



ever since. Fortunately, he will continue to serve on our Board, acting as our Secretary, continuing his many other contributions including stewarding our lands, leading bird walks, shepherding the Christmas Bird Count in Unity, and most importantly, whispering in my ear to guide me as the new Chair.

In addition to enjoying time birding and exploring the Sebasticook River watershed, Tom also enjoys the habitat in Belize, one of his favorite tropical destinations (shown here in a photo by Steve Aversa).

The momentum Tom helped create continues. While we are in the midst of troublesome times this year with federal funding in jeopardy for a range of natural resource-related investments, SRLT's funding is bolstered by additional support from the Quimby Family Foundation and Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust. We've made great strides forward under Cheryl Daigle's leadership as executive director to increase the capacity of SRLT, but we will need everyone's help to keep moving forward at a steady pace. A critical goal is to increase our capacity to steward our growing list of preserves and easements. Recent support from the Davis Conservation Fund is helping us contract with a part-time steward this spring and summer to meet management needs and

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## Grant Funding Supports Land Stewardship

This past fall, we were awarded a grant from the Davis Conservation Fund to help build our land stewardship capacity. This is supporting land steward Tommy Diehl (right) this spring and summer to take the lead on trail assessments, work with our stewardship committee to manage trail and wayfinding improvements, and build our capacity by reaching out to schools and businesses to attract and coordinate

volunteer groups for special workdays. We are excited about the experience that Tommy brings with trail improvements as well as with invasive species management.

An additional grant award through Natural Resources Conservation Service will support our ability to tackle invasive species management at Moulton's Mill Preserve, Albert J. Sousa Preserve, and Fowler Bog, and improve habitat for wildlife such as American Woodcock, Ruffed Grouse, and migratory birds that rely on early successional habitat at these preserves as well as at Great Farm Brook Preserve in Jackson. We will be seeking volunteers to help with all these activities,

so please stay tuned for additional volunteer workday opportunities! Besides working alongside a great group of community-minded people who love nature, you will learn about some of the special habitats and the biodiversity we are working to protect in the Sebasticook River watershed.



***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.***





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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Dana Ward**, Chair

**Adri Bessenaire**, Vice-Chair

**Ellen Batchelder**, Treasurer

**Tom Aversa**, Secretary

**Tyler C. Hadyniak**

**Doug Miller**

**Jonathan Milne**

**Buck O'Herin**

**Alison Whitlock**

## 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 • Belfast Veterinary Hospital • Bar Harbor Bank & Trust  
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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  
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RSU 3 • RSU 19 • 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 Public Library  
Unity Barn Raisers • Villageside Farm



*View, continued from page 1*

to strengthen our volunteer crew. We are working to raise additional funds to extend that position into the fall and to purchase supplies to rejuvenate our kiosks and trail signage. Please help by renewing your membership, volunteering your time, or donating funds in honor of a friend, loved one, or community stalwart. If you own or know of a business that may be willing to become a "business steward" please be in touch.

You can also help build momentum by serving on one of our committees. In addition to the Stewardship committee, we are reigniting the following committees: Education and Outreach, Finance and Development, and Acquisition and Conservation. If you are interested in helping SRLT's work and have particular skills in any of these arenas, please let us know! Committees meet monthly or every other month for an hour or two, and may involve another hour or two in between meetings, so if you can spare a few hours a month please pitch in—your contributions will be greatly appreciated.

Our forward movement is clearly evidenced by the acquisition of two

new properties. The Brown Memorial Methodist Church in Clinton gifted SRLT a half-acre island in the middle of the Sebasticook River, and my wife, Julia Karet, and I have donated 91 acres that we purchased almost 50 years ago which is now the Clark Road Wildlife Preserve in Unity. That these two properties were acquired within weeks of each other could be used as a textbook definition of serendipity. Jonathan Brown, who settled in Clinton in the 1780s, donated the land upon which the church that memorialized his name was built. Jonathan's granddaughter, Belle Manning Brown, in 1882, married my first cousin, three removed, Randolph Goode Ward! Yet another example of how we are all connected. We'll be celebrating the acquisition of these two properties and establishing access to the Clark Road Wildlife Preserve in the coming months. Keep an eye out for details to be announced. Other opportunities to conserve our watershed have also been identified, so the need for more volunteers to help steward the land is greater than ever.

Finally, thanks to everyone for helping improve life in our watershed.

FOLLOW US!







# SRLT Conserves Land in South Unity

## SRLT is thrilled to add our first new preserve in eight years!

In March, a longtime dream of Julia Karet and Dana (Dan) Ward came to fruition with the donation of 91 acres of their land on Clark Road in Unity to the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT). These woods and waters have helped grow their family, provided wood for construction and heat, and have been continuously managed to favor the needs of wildlife. Conservation of this special place was years in the making. Conversations over tea and baked goods coupled with walks in the woods exploring the unique beauty of this land clearly demonstrated to the Trust their vision of protecting wildlife and providing recreational access. The project will expand access beyond the Hills to Sea Trail, which passes through the property, to a special place for those seeking to experience the Maine woods.

"For 75 years I've tried to make a lasting difference that makes for a better world. Rarely have I succeeded, but thanks to SRLT, for generations to come there will be open space for nature and neighbors to enjoy," said Dan.

The forested hills and valleys provide habitat for deer, fox, coyote, snowshoe hare, porcupine, and bobcat – and occasionally even a moose wanders through. Several brooks intersect the land, converging in Fly Brook and contributing to the vast system of tributaries that comprise the Sebasticook River headwaters. A bog at the southeastern corner supports beaver and a variety of amphibians and reptiles.

"Our land in Unity has always been my happy place. We married on it in 1976, built a home there and always knew that we wanted the land to be conserved for future generations. SRLT has given us the opportunity to realize that dream. For me, it's a fairytale ending," said Julia.

They've long held an interest in keeping the land open to nature enthusiasts. Since 2015 they've allowed the Hills to Sea Trail to run through the property, and Dan has already flagged a new system of trails to connect with this 48-mile trail that starts in Unity and extends all the way to Belfast. SRLT hosted a volunteer skill-building workshop here last fall to help break ground on the trail, led by trail building expert Erin Amadon, where we learned

about proper trail placement to work with the rolling topography of these woods and to construct a bench slope trail to avoid erosion.

While about a third of the property was selectively logged more than a decade ago, the remaining two thirds has not been cut since before 1975. A mature forest of red oak mixed with birch, ash, hemlock, fir, and white pine, provides home to owls, woodpeckers, eagles and a variety of hawks and other birds. A 4-acre field at the south corner welcomes flocks of wild turkeys and grassland nesting birds.

"When I first met Dan and Julia in 2015, their passion for Maine and in particular, the land they lived on was evident. They were not just residents, but inhabitants, deeply embedded in that place and paying attention to "who" else lived there," said board member Buck O'Herin. "This passion was what motivated them to seek a conservation option for the land and inhabitants they care about."

Yellow-rumped Warbler and snowshoe hare photos by Tom Aversa. Top photo and unfurling ferns by Cheryl Daigle.





# Nineteen Miles

by Buck O'Herin

***“...we are tied in myriad ways to the millions of earth's species. Humanity's well-being profoundly depends on biodiversity. No species is truly redundant because all contribute to an ecosystem's ability to function efficiently.”***

*Diversity of Life, Edward O. Wilson*

A few years ago, while walking in the woods near my Montville home, I crossed paths with a large black bear. It was exhilarating to be so close to the bear but what struck me most was realizing that the bear, whether living here or just passing through, is utterly dependent on the land here to provide for its needs.

Unlike me, able to drive to a grocery store to get food, the land must provide enough food and suitable habitat to support not just this bear, but other bears as well for a healthy bear population to be sustained. If the population of a species becomes too small, it is more difficult to find mates and genetic diversity can become compromised. Genetic diversity strengthens a species' ability to adapt to changing environments, resist diseases, and maintain long-term viability.

The condition of the natural world is connectivity. An ecologist friend once explained to me that the thumbs of land on the Maine coast that jut into the Atlantic Ocean will lose species of wildlife over time as these peninsulas become cut off by unplanned development. This is especially true along the Rte 1 corridor where development tends to cluster and form significant barriers. Maine State Planning Office maps indicate that within 25 years only a few towns between Bangor and Kittery will still be considered rural based on the spread of development.

Connectivity can be blocked anywhere in the landscape by development, utility corridors, and roads. As this fragmentation of the landscape occurs, areas of habitat for wildlife continue to decrease in size and become less viable for many species.



The midcoast region itself could become cut off from the rest of the state by the I-95 corridor. Strategic conservation to ensure landscape connectivity, especially for wide-ranging species with large habitat needs, is essential to prevent this isolation from happening and species being lost. Habitat loss and degradation is the largest threat to wildlife.

When explorers Lewis and Clark crossed the continent in 1804 there were no roads between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean. From St. Louis they traveled

by boat on rivers or overland by horse. Today, the continental U.S. (not including Alaska) has more than 4 million miles of roads within this vast area of 2,959,064 square miles yet the furthest you can get from a maintained road is nineteen miles. More than one eighth of these roads are in our national forests.

Even some of our largest national parks and wilderness areas in the western U.S. are not large enough to sustain healthy and stable populations of the most wide-ranging mammals. Landscape connectivity is needed for them to migrate and to be able to find food, breeding opportunities, and suitable habitat. Midcoast Maine is not suitable for vast areas of protected land, but we can do a lot for the health of our natural environment and wildlife by protecting corridors of land between the larger blocks of protected land and being sure there is connectivity from our region to the rest of the state.

We need to be proactive in these efforts, especially in the face of climate change and shifting population demographics. For all of the reasons mentioned, SRLT has begun regional conservation planning with towns, neighboring land trusts and state natural resource agencies. You will hear more about these efforts in the coming months.



# Enhancing Bird Habitat AT HOME

By Tom Aversa

The majority of birds complete their migration to Maine by the end of May. Migration is the most exciting time for birdwatchers because we see more species when birds are still on the move. So how do we continue to enjoy birds once the foliage makes viewing more difficult? There are many ways—including trekking to the coast and other open habitats where birds are more easily seen. But there is another great way...

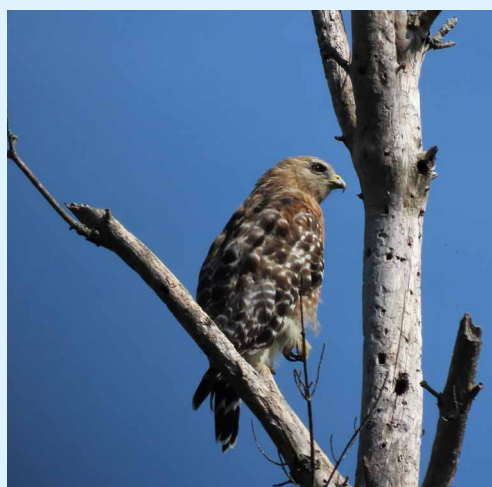
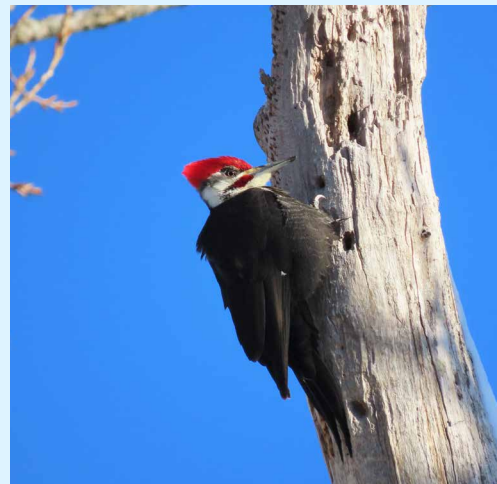
Creating a backyard habitat will bring the birds to you! Planting native trees and shrubs provides what they need. These plants produce flowers, fruits, invertebrates and cover to keep birds in your yard. Plant strategically by choosing rich berry producers like elderberry, viburnum, dogwood, service berry and other species. Non-native but naturalized species like mulberry and crab apple are also good choices. These plants will pay dividends in just a few years. A bird bath or water source is also a great idea. Mounting nest boxes for bluebirds, swallows, chickadees and titmice provides housing. You might mount a kestrel or duck box if you live near fields or open wetland.

Providing bird feeders and suet is a great idea but must be done with caution

because it can attract unwanted visitors such as bear and raccoon. I feed birds all summer long in my rural yard in Unity without a problem, but I recommend that if an unwanted guest appears that you take the feeders down for a spell or figure out how to mount them out of reach of troublemakers. Hummingbird feeders with sugar water can also supplement flowers, but if you don't want to deal with that, strategic planting of native plants with red, pink or yellow blooms will keep hummingbirds in your yard all summer. Unfortunately none of this works if you have free-ranging, outdoor cats. Domestic cats kill (literally) billions of birds each year in the U.S.

You also increase the likelihood of birds using your yard by leaving standing dead trees in areas where they do not pose safety hazards. Standing dead wood is in many ways more valuable than a live tree to birds because it provides insects and a place for woodpeckers to drill nest cavities. Snags also offer perching with good look-outs for birds as well as a nice spot for observers to watch their behavior. Woodpecker holes usually are abandoned each year, but provide homes for the same secondary cavity nesting species that use nest boxes along with mammals like flying squirrels.

Photos by Tom Aversa, clockwise from top right: Cape May Warbler eating elderberry, Pileated Woodpecker on a snag tree, Bluebird pair taking a bath, Nashville Warbler sheltering in elderberry, Red-shouldered Hawk with a good view, male Bluebird at the Richardson Preserve.





## Stewardship Update

By Doug Miller & Ron Waldron,  
committee co-chairs

This past winter proved to be similar to winters past: cold, snowy and windy! We still had several opportunities to work in our preserves even with these adverse conditions. However, some workdays were postponed due to the extremes in the weather.

Our team of volunteers came together in November to address some invasive species at the Kanokolus Bog Preserve. We removed many invasive multi-flora rose bushes and cut back the invasive bush honeysuckle from the trail and environs. There is always more work to do to keep our preserves attractive.



December's workday was postponed due to weather; we were rewarded with a beautiful day at the end of January where we worked at the Rines Wetland & Wildlife Preserve. The boundaries of the preserve were surveyed and marked years ago, but boundary marks and signs were not completely visible. One team of volunteers used the former survey marks and boundary maps to re-mark the boundary with SRLT boundary markers attached to the trees. We completed most of the needed marking and will return this year to finish the job. It was a fun and interesting accomplishment. A second volunteer team focused on clearing a view to the wetlands looking out toward Bog Brook where we have a bench placed for rest or a moment to simply listen to the nature around you.

Winter struck again in February with cold temperatures and strong winds. We decided to postpone this workday until March where we worked at a couple of preserves. The kiosk at the Moulton Mill Preserve has had issues with a growing population of burdock plants that are difficult to eradicate. We were able to pull up the kiosk posts and move the entire kiosk out of the way as we plan to install weed cover and regrade the kiosk area this spring. We then went to the Carlson Woods easement where several blowdown trees were blocking the trail. Our team made quick work with our SRLT electric chain saw. The trees were removed, and the trail reopened.

In April we worked at the Albert J. Sousa Preserve to check on our chestnut grove and cut back trees encroaching the fields. Our next workday is planned for the Moulton Mill Preserve where we also have some boundary work to accomplish as well as the typical trail maintenance. We have the tools for you to use to help with our work. Please consider joining us!

Our workdays are filled with fun and interesting work. We invite you to join us as we maintain our beautiful preserves. Our workdays are usually the last Sunday of each month. The location is announced on our website and in our email postings. On occasion, we put out calls for other volunteer workdays as we work on special projects or respond to damage from bad weather events. Please consider joining our volunteer crew for a few hours of camaraderie and enjoyment as we work to improve our environment for all to enjoy.

Check out our webpage [www.sebasticoorkrlt.org](http://www.sebasticoorkrlt.org), our Facebook page or Instagram for additional information about our work. **We look forward to seeing you soon!**



Photos, from top left: Board member Adri Bessenaire talks with a new landowner on an easement property in Benton; steward Tommy Diehl updates kiosk posters at Freedom Forest; board member Doug Miller and volunteer Barry Stoodley marking boundaries at Rines Preserve; director Cheryl Daigle and volunteers help build a bench slope trail during a workshop on recently conserved land in Unity; trail work day at Fowler Bog; new grassland bird habitat conservation sign installed at Richardson Memorial Preserve.



# The Spirit of Community

By Cheryl Daigle

Getting out on conserved lands to work alongside volunteers and introducing people to the special habitats we are working to protect are among my favorite parts of working with the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust. A real camaraderie seems to form when people come together to explore and work with nature, even if it's only a few hours spent together. It may seem fleeting as we continue our busy lives, but I think that time spent together leaves a lasting impression and is key to building and strengthening a sense of community.

After our night hike and owl walk in March, led by Maine Master Naturalist Val Watson, we were treated to s'mores and good conversation around a campfire at the home of Ron and Kelly Desrosiers, who neighbor the Richardson Memorial Preserve. Nina and Doug Miller, the preserve volunteer stewards, brought homemade hot chocolate. It was a meaningful evening, an opportunity to sit among friends, meet new people, gaze upon the stars, and celebrate what is special about this place. This generosity of spirit coupled with memories of tromping with snowshoes through the woods lingers, even months later.

The images to the right are just a sampling of a wide range of experiences we have throughout the year. Sometimes it's just a few people, sometimes it's a small crowd. Always, volunteers are part of the scene – leading field trips, presenting on a conservation topic, helping to staff SRLT's table at an event, ensuring the public has well-maintained trails to walk upon, monitoring our easements, or participating in activities that no one sees but are part of the foundation of SRLT. These two things coupled, volunteerism and a spirit of community, are part of what we mean when we talk about stewardship. I don't look at it simply as stewarding the land, but also, in a way, stewarding each other. Being good neighbors. I believe we need more of that now, and I hope you will join us for a walk, a paddle, or volunteer work day in coming months!

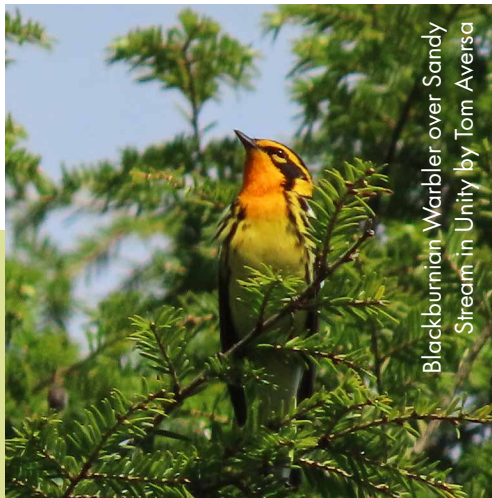


Photos, clockwise from top: Night sky and owl snowshoe at Richardson Memorial Preserve, sharing SRLT news at the Eastern Maine Sportsmen's Show, woodlands walk with a group from Maine Yoga Adventures, wellness day with Ecology Learning Center students, paddling Farnham Brook in Pittsfield, American Kestrel presentation with biologist Evan Jackson, campfire and s'mores thanks to good neighbors, dissecting owl pellets with Maine Master Naturalists. Photos by Cheryl Daigle





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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 24, 7–10am** **Migratory Bird Walk at Unity Pond**

SRLT board secretary and seasoned birder Tom Aversa will lead a walk at the south end of Unity Pond (Lake Winnecook), a Waldo county bird hot spot.

### **Saturday, MAY 31, 9am–1pm** **Sebasticook River Paddle Below Benton Falls Dam**

Join SRLT and trip leaders Buck O'Herin and Jeff Cherry for an inspiring 6-mile paddle during the annual alewife migration. *Rain date June 1.*

### **Saturday, JUN 14, 10am–1pm** **Paddle the West Branch of the Sebasticook River and Douglas Pond**

This trip with paddling trip leader Bill Cunningham will take us on a flat water paddle on the West Branch of the Sebasticook River through Douglas Pond up to the Route 2 Bridge and back.

### **Saturday, JUL 19, 10am–1pm** **Paddle the Sebasticook River in Burnham**

Join SRLT and paddling trip leader Bill Cunningham for an out and back flat water paddle on a quiet stretch of the Sebasticook River from the Burnham Dam Boat Launch to the Eelweir Bridge on the Mount Rd.

### **Wednesday, AUG 20, 5:30–7:30pm** **Pollinators & Wildflowers at Richardson Memorial Preserve**

Led by Maine Master Naturalist volunteers to explore the many benefits of maintaining grassland habitat for wildlife.

### **Wednesday, SEP 17, 6–7:30pm** **Biodiversity in the Sebasticook River Watershed**

Learn about the remarkable biological diversity found in wildlife species and habitat in the watershed, presented by Phillip deMaynadier, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife.

### **Wednesday, OCT 15, 6–7:30pm** **Alewife Restoration on the Sebasticook River**

The Sebasticook River now boasts the largest alewife run on the East Coast. Landis Hudson, executive director of Maine Rivers, will provide an overview of this successful alewife restoration project and place it in the context of continuing river restoration efforts in Maine.

**RSVP at [SebasticookRLT.org](https://sebasticookrlt.org)**  
Be sure to sign up for our e-news or check our events page for updates!



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