

Spring Renewal

As spring unfolds, the temptation to get outside grows exponentially. Resident and migratory birds regale us with birdsong, spring blooms become commonplace in gardens and along our trails, and trees and shrubs are budding out. On several of the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust preserves, monitoring and trail work is underway, or behind the scenes planning has begun. For a newcomer like me, it's an exciting time to discover the diverse habitats protected by SRLT and to meet the volunteers, stewards, and community members who give to and benefit from protected lands.

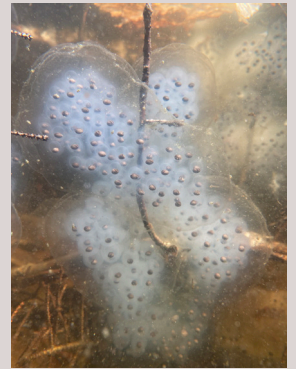
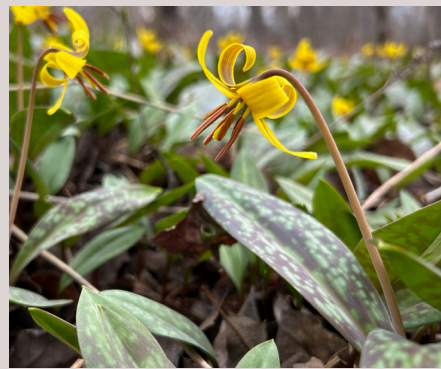
Recently, seven land stewards circled around a table to discuss conditions at several SRLT preserves and exchange ideas for work days and how to address challenges, such as flood damage to bridges, parking area improvements, trees that have fallen or lean over trails due to windstorms, and new growth that wants to encroach on carefully established trails. What I observed in my first SRLT stewardship meeting and in recent conversations with other stewards was the focus of each of these individuals on caring for the land and the communities where these preserves are located. I saw a sense of commitment, and camaraderie. It's in part why I wanted this job – in earlier meetings I saw very busy people devoting significant time to these special places. I saw a passion in their eyes that has lasted through years of challenges common to land management and conservation mixed with the difficulties of the pandemic.

As I come to know SRLT properties, I am lighting up inside myself. I feel incredibly lucky that these protected lands exist, and grateful to have an opportunity to work alongside or carry on the work of the many people who love Maine's wild and working lands. We hope you can experience the beauty and wonder found while exploring our preserves. We would love to have your continued support as a member and as a volunteer. **Spring is a time of renewal, and it's the perfect time to renew your SRLT membership!** Please also follow us on Instagram and Facebook – we will become increasingly active on these social media platforms with updates on events, trail work days, and many of the discoveries we will encounter out on the land.

~ Cheryl Daigle, Program Manager



Volunteer Mike Oberlander builds and then donates bluebird boxes to the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust. He installed his latest creations in April at the Richardson and Albert J. Sousa Preserves and at the Woodsong Farm easement. The inset photo shows a male bluebird checking out his new digs on the Richardson Preserve last year. Photos: Tom Aversa



SPRING UNFOLDING

Recent walks at SRLT nature preserves have been full of wonderful signs of spring. Shown above: trout lilies in bloom at the Moulton's Mill Preserve and developing spotted salamander eggs at the Freedom Forest Preserve. What are you seeing out on your woodland walks? Let us know on social media or email us at info@sebasticookrlt.org.



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BOARD MEMBERS

- Tom Aversa, Chair
- Ellen Batchelder, Treasurer
- Adrianna Bessenaire
- Trevanna Grenfell
- Tyler C. Hadyniak
- Brandon Kulik, Vice-Chair, acting Secretary
- Doug Miller
- Doug Westcott

Program Manager: Cheryl Daigle

**Since 2004, we've worked with a variety of organizations to conserve the wild and working landscape of the Sebasticook River Watershed ...
 THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS!**

- Avian Haven
- Biodiversity Research Institute
- Colby College - Chace Community Forum
- Kennebec Woodland Partnership
- Hills to Sea Trail Coalition
- Longroad Energy
- Maine Audubon
- Maine Farmland Trust
- Maine Land Trust Network
- Maine Rivers
- Midcoast Conservancy
- North Star Adventures LLC
- Penobscot County Conservation Association
- The American Chestnut Foundation
- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- The Ecology Learning Center
- The Grassland Bird Project - Ag Allies
- The Nature Conservancy
- Two Trees Forestry
- RSU 3
- RSU 19
- Unity Public Library
- Unity Barn Raisers
- Villageside Farm

**FOLLOW US ON
 SOCIAL MEDIA!**



Change is in the air! Things have improved for SRLT in several ways. Most importantly, we hired a Program Manager. We are excited to welcome Cheryl Daigle who brings us extensive experience in community-based conservation across New England, including here in Maine. This will radically improve our outreach and conservation work in the watershed, presenting a great opportunity after operating all-volunteer for over six years. Throughout her professional career, Cheryl has focused on conserving and improving the ecological and economic health of the communities in which she has worked. Her experience and skills in community engagement, fundraising and land stewardship will help us meet the challenges of the future. She most recently served as the editor of *Northern Woodlands*, an incredible magazine that celebrates northeastern forests and the people who care for them.

We also added two outstanding community members to our board during the last year. Doug Miller (top photo) from Unity brings lifelong experience in environmental engineering, while Freedom native Tyler Hadyniak presents a perspective that he has acquired while pursuing a legal career.



Conservation takes many hands. Because there is more power when we work together, we fostered many collaborations over the last year. Furthering regional conservation initiatives by working with Midcoast Conservancy has resulted in collaborative programs and strategizing sessions. Cooperating with local schools, state agencies and other conservation groups also remains a focus. We presented a full slate of in-person programming in 2022. The pandemic showed us that online programming is possible, but we believe that hearing an expert answer pertinent questions at our speaker series, touching native plants, or watching birds up close while smelling the damp forest and flowering trees are clearly better, more effective ways to reach our supporters.



SRLT is facing a critical time in its mission to conserve the wild landscapes of our watershed. Development pressures are increasing nearly exponentially. The time to conserve

Continued on page 5 ...

Common Snapping Turtles: Slow and Steady

By Ellen Batchelder

As we move into spring, some animals are becoming more active, some are migrating back to, or through, Maine, and others are awakening from hibernation. Turtles are among those who, after spending a winter lying dormant and burrowed in mud, leaves, or under woody debris, are now emerging to eat, breed, and lay eggs. Springtime may be the only time of the year when many of us see turtles, often as they cross roads in search of nesting sites or summer habitats.

Six native turtle species (and one invasive) can be found in Maine. Three of these are listed as threatened or of special concern, including Blandings, spotted, and wood turtles. Special protections are in place for these species, including laws against collection and ownership in Maine. More commonly seen species that are not considered threatened in Maine are the painted, musk, and common snapping turtles. Limited harvesting of snapping turtles and their eggs are allowed under Maine law.

If you see a common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), it might put you in mind of a small dinosaur. These turtles sport brown or dark green carapaces, long tails with saw-tooth ridges, strong claws, and long, mobile necks with a hooked beak at the mouth. The largest turtle species in New England, adults weigh in at 10-35 pounds, on average, with a carapace of 8-18 inches, though larger ones have been documented. Contrary to popular belief, there are no documented stories of people losing toes to snapping turtles while swimming. Their varied, omnivorous diet is made up of least as many plants and invertebrates as frogs, fish, and birds. When they do venture on land they are noted for a “combative disposition,” but common snapping turtles are mostly

aquatic, nocturnal animals that prefer to avoid confrontation when in the water.

Like most turtles, snapping turtles have evolved a “slow and steady” approach to reproduction. The species has a long natural lifespan of an average 50 years, and reaches breeding maturity only at 10-15 years, and possibly longer in cooler northern climates. While they move *slowly*, they can *steadily* cover large distances. A snapping turtle’s range may be up to 22 acres, and females may travel a mile from the nearest water source to nest. In May and June, females dig in well drained soils in sunny locations and lay a clutch of 20-40 eggs. If the nest is not among the 90% that are destroyed by predators, the eggs will hatch in August through October. Newly hatched and one inch long, young turtles instinctively head for the water. Once their shells harden, they will have few natural predators, but until then, they are eaten by foxes, raccoons, skunks, foxes, dogs, birds, snakes, and fish.

While snapping turtles are adaptable to human activities and habitats and can even tolerate some pollution in their environment, they are still susceptible to many of the pressures that other turtle populations face. The long time to breeding maturity and low success rate of hatchlings is a reproductive strategy that clashes with human use of the landscape. Snapping turtle populations have been declining, and for sensitive turtle species, the loss of even a few adults in an area from vehicle impacts or habitat loss can quickly lead to local extinction.

Sources:

1. Reptile, Amphibian, and Invertebrate Conservation & Management. 2019-2020 Research and Management Report MIF&W. <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/reports-publications/research-management.html>
2. Common Snapping Turtle. Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Nov 2022. <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Fact-Sheets/Common-Snapping-Turtle>



Money raised from the State Tax Chickadee Checkoff and Loon License Plates supports study and protection of Maine’s non game and threatened and endangered wildlife. We can further help snapping turtles and other turtle species by being vigilant when driving, and when it is safe, helping them cross the road. Experts recommend being aware of the traffic, grasping turtles at the edge of the shell in the middle of the body (away from the snapping turtle’s head and *never* by the tail as it can damage their vertebrae) and moving them in the direction they were headed. Since snapping turtles can be large, slippery, and have a long neck and a “snappy” mouth, using a car mat to drag them may be easier. Happy Turtle Spotting!

Photo by Matt Chatfield

THE ALEWIVES ARE COMING!

By Brandon Kulik



The alewife is one of the most ecologically important native fish species, and the Sebasticook River watershed is home to the largest run of sea run alewives in North America, perhaps the world! About 6 MILLION alewives return to the Sebasticook's lakes and ponds from the ocean every spring to spawn. Each adult weighs about ½ pound and is about 4 years old. A single female may carry up to 100,000 eggs. Most adults return to the sea shortly after spawning.

Young alewives hatched in the spring live in lakes and ponds until late summer when they migrate to sea. While in lakes, they feed on zooplankton and absorb phosphorus from these freshwater systems, which improves lake water quality. The young fish migrate to the ocean during the fall.

Adult alewives are like Gatorade for freshwater ecosystems because they import marine-derived protein and provide nourishment for predators in the spring when they need it most after a long hard Maine winter. A partial list of animals that feed on alewives while they are in freshwater includes eagles, ospreys, herons, terns, gulls, loons, mink, fox, otter, snapping turtles, raccoons, striped bass, pickerel, smallmouth and largemouth bass, trout, and Atlantic salmon. While in their saltwater habitat, alewives again provide an important food source for other migratory fish such as salmon, as well as seals, cod, haddock, porpoises, sharks, and whales. Adult alewives are also used by commercial fishermen as the preferred bait for lobster. Young alewives also provide one last big meal for predators as autumn arrives, and are favored by juvenile wildlife as they learn to feed on their own and seek a smaller “bite-sized” meal.

The SRLT has supported habitat and fish passage improvement projects to allow this important native fish species to recover in abundance and bolster our ecosystem. Most recently, last year the Outlet Stream project was completed which removed six migration barriers to China Lake and will add an additional 1 million fish to the annual migration.



Alewife Watching

Seeing millions of silver fish arriving in the watershed like a stampede is a spectacle to see. Add in all the eagles and ospreys and it's breathtaking. The best times are any sunny afternoon during mid to late May.

A few easy viewing locations:

- Box Dam fish ladder (North Vassalboro) where Oak Grove Coburn Road crosses Outlet Stream. There's easy parking and a landscaped walkway around the fish ladder.
- Benton Falls (Brimstone Hill Road). Stand on a bluff overlooking the river and watch the commercial alewife harvest, as well as the fish elevator at the Benton Falls Dam. Please park away from the fishermen and respect adjacent private property.
- Pattee Pond Brook (Garland Road, Winslow). Fish ascend a culvert under the Garland Road on their way up this tributary to Pattee Brook. Limited parking for up to three vehicles.

Illustration: Sally Gilbert Photo: USFWS

Join Us at the Benton Alewife Festival!

The town of Benton is resuming their annual alewife festival this spring on Saturday, May 20, 2023. The event has some great events lined up including tours at the dam, trail walks, Smokey Bear and the Maine Forest Service, and live music! It is located at 1279 Clinton Avenue next to the town office. SRLT will have a booth there so please stop by and say Hi!

land and educate people about the value of conserved land is now. Population growth at the southern end of the watershed has been increasing for some time, but pressure now extends northward to Skowhegan and beyond. New Balance is expanding its facility and plans to add 200 new jobs. The Sappi Somerset Mill investment of \$418 million could produce employment for 1000 people. This is good news for central Maine residents, but more people mean more houses so meaningful conservation needs to be considered in land use planning decisions. SRLT has worked towards this goal since its inception. Please join us by making a financial contribution! We need your support now more than ever due to the increased expenses of supporting staff. We also feel the necessity to grow our membership and volunteer bases.

Life in the natural world continues despite the politics and personal struggles that we face each day. Remember what else is important by hiking our preserve trails, participating in our walks and outdoor events, and taking time to appreciate the many wonders that the woods and fields of central Maine offer to us. After a long winter, spring is turning the page and the lengthening days will usher in the seasons that we all live here to enjoy. Check the events schedule in this newsletter to learn of upcoming programs. Watch our website and email communications for additional programs as the year goes on. Help us by renewing your membership or volunteering with us. Please contact us at info@sebasticookrlt.org and let us know how you can chip in. We look forward to seeing you on the trails or at our events.

Tom Aversa

Board Chairman

Please help us meet stewardship costs for 2023!

We plan to upgrade kiosks at the Moulton's Mill and Rines Wetlands preserves and add signage throughout the watershed. We also need to fund bridge repairs, equipment purchases, mowing, and bush hogging. A generous donor has provided a restricted fund to match donations up to \$3,000 for capital improvements.

Please contribute today and indicate that additional donations beyond your membership renewal should be directed to the SRLT stewardship fund.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

SRLT SPEAKER SERIES

CONTINUES IN WATERVILLE

Since September of 2022, the popular SRLT Speaker Series has held in-person presentations at the Chace Community Forum in downtown Waterville. Typically before an audience of 25 people, topics have included What Good Are Bats, What is a Watershed, Dogs in Conservation, Sportfishing on the Sebasticook River, Farming and Habitat Conservation, Everything Eats Alewives, and more. The aim of these monthly presentations is to both educate and entertain our supporters and the general public. We recruit experts in their fields to present the ecological and recreational value of not only SRLT preserves but also other preserved land in the Sebasticook River Watershed.

Upcoming topics include a presentation by the Kennebec Water District, supplier of municipal water for Waterville and surrounding communities, Falcons of Maine, Status of Native Fishes in Maine, Return of the American Chestnut, and Bald Eagles on the Lower Sebasticook. We are always looking for topic suggestions, in an effort to keep the series interesting to the broadest range of interests.

We will continue to offer field walks and other programs in the Unity area and we are also adding Newport as a second site for the speaker series. Stay tuned for details! As always, the most current information on this and other SRLT events will be found on our website, SebasticookRLT.org. Board member Doug Wescott coordinates the Waterville Speaker Series - if you'd like to recommend topics, please email us at info@sebasticookrlt.org. We'd love to see you there!



In April, Deron Lawrence of Longroad Energy provided an update on the Three Corners Solar Farm under development in the Unity area.

Carl Richardson Memorial Preserve - The PFAS Problem

By Douglas Lee Miller

By now most of you have already heard of PFAS, “the forever chemicals.” PFAS is a group of chemicals that are formed from a carbon chain of molecules and numerous fluorine molecules attached to the chain. The bond is very strong and does not break down without a great amount of energy. Thus, they last “forever.”

For centuries farmers have added manure to their fields to improve its fertility. During the last hundred years, many farmers applied municipal and industrial sludge (bio-solids) from the wastewater treatment process to improve their fields’ fertility. In the early 1990s municipal bio-solids were permitted and applied to the fields at our Richardson Memorial Preserve in Unity. At that time most people were unaware of PFAS or its environmental impacts. The bio-solids incorporated into the soil had been contaminated by industrial waste. Recently, we have learned that PFAS can lead to health problems in humans.

The Richardson Memorial Preserve was farmed for many years by Ross & Amy Barden. They planned on improving their soil with municipal bio-solids, and in 1992 and 1993 the state issued permits for their hundreds of acres of fields. That decision led to the contamination of their property with PFAS.

The Bardens sold their property to Carl Richardson in 1995. Carl was killed on the property in a hunting accident in 1997. Carl’s estate transferred the property to the Unity Barn Raisers in 2004 to be conserved as the Richardson Memorial Preserve. The Barn Raisers transferred the property to the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust in 2013.

In December of 2021, it was learned that the site was potentially contaminated with PFAS. In early 2022, the soil was tested and the results showed that the soil was still impacted over 30 years after the bio-solids were spread. The PFOS levels (one of the many PFAS chemicals) on one field was 60 times higher than the state’s PFAS Screening Levels for Beneficial Use of Soil with the average PFOS nearly 40 times higher. The lowest PFOS levels were ten times higher than the recommended screening levels.

Prior to discovering the contamination, SRLT leased the Richardson Preserve fields to local farmers for dairy hay, silage, and organic grain production since acquiring the preserve. Due to the PFAS levels in the soil, we decided to cease agricultural production and have lost the income from these leases.

The trust hopes to maintain the fields to benefit grassland birds, pollinators and other species requiring this habitat. Particularly relevant is the Bobolink, a bird that requires extensive open grasslands. The fields will not be used for anything associated with human food consumption at this time, but annual or biennial mowing will be required. Funding for this mowing is still in question. We are applying for grants to defray these expenses.

As we learn more about PFAS, its transport in the environment, and harmful soil levels and their impact, we will update our reporting.

Stay tuned...



Ash Protection Collaboration Across Wabanakik

By Ella McDonald

Ash trees, in particular brown ash, are cultural keystone species for Wabanaki communities and a critical part of wetland ecosystems in the Northeast. Brown ash splints are used as the primary material in Wabanaki basketry and the tree plays a central role in one version of a Wabanaki creation story. Ecologically, the tree prevents soil erosion in wetland ecosystems, creating habitat for medicinal and unique native plants. The spread of the invasive pest emerald ash borer (EAB) threatens the dynamics of these rare ecosystems as well as basketry traditions of Wabanaki Tribes. EAB is predicted to cause 99% mortality of brown ash trees, but a coalition of partners has been collaborating to protect ash and prepare for the onset of EAB for nearly 20 years.

The Ash Protection Collaboration Across Wabanakik (APCAW) is a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, Tribal employees, and forest caretakers working together to bring more awareness of the cultural and ecological significance of ash trees. Based on current research and Wabanaki priorities, APCAW educates the public about a diversity of strategies to protect ash, including seed collection, silvicultural treatments, insecticides and biocontrols. This year they are organizing a training program for forest caretakers and private landowners to learn the steps for successful ash forest inventory, seed collection, propagation and more. These trainings are free and open to the public and more information is available on the [APCAW website](http://www.umaine.edu/apcaw) (www.umaine.edu/apcaw). This effort encourages diverse partners and knowledges to work together, to ensure ash has a future in Maine.

~ Ella McDonald, Ash Protection Collaboration Across Wabanakik, UMaine Graduate Assistant (Masters in Ecology and Environmental Science).



Clockwise: Tyler Everett (Mi'kmaq Nation) explaining how to identify and inventory brown, white, and green ash. Traditional brown ash basket by Richard Silliboy (Mi'kmaq nation). Brown ash tree leaves. Tyler helping carry a harvested brown ash long for making baskets. Field trip and ash leaf photos by Emily Francis.

If you are interested in inventorying, monitoring and seed collection in ash stands on SRLT lands please contact us at cheryl@sebasticoorkrlt.org.

NEW NATURE COLUMN

Check out the Nature Corner column on our website! Wildlife biologist and SRLT member Cheryl Frederick fills us in on wildlife behavior and habitat needs - recent articles include wood frogs and vernal pools and lawn care that benefits the birds and the bees.

www.SebasticoorkRLT.org





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Sebasticookrlt.org



Remember to 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!

JOIN US!

at the SRLT Speaker Series

the third Wednesday of each month,
from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM.

Colby College Chace Community Forum
150 Main Street, Waterville ME

For more information, visit

www.SebasticookRLT.org

These presentations are always free and open to the public. A \$5 donation is suggested. The venue is user friendly, with a very large screen, plenty of parking, and convenient nearby restaurants for those who wish to combine a talk with a dinner out.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 19 Speaker Series: Falcons in Maine

Wildlife Biologist Erynn Call
Chace Community Forum 6:30 - 8 pm

MAY 20 Benton Alewife Festival

Visit the SRLT table to say hi!

MAY 27 Vassalboro Alewife Festival

See us at the SRLT table!

MAY 28 Bird Walk & Breakfast at Goosepecker Ridge

Led by Tom Aversa and Susie O'Keefe

JUNE 3 Sebasticook River Paddle

Led by Maine Guide Hauns Bassett

JUNE 10 Ecology Walk at Pleasant Lake Preserve

Led by wildlife biologist Alison Whitlock

JUNE 21 Speaker Series: Kennebec Water District

KWD's Roger Crouse and Robbie Bickford
Chace Community Forum 6:30 - 8 pm

JUNE 25 Nature Journaling on the Hills to Sea Trail

Workshop led by Cloe Chun (co-sponsor Hills to Sea Trail)

For more information and to RSVP
visit us at SebasticookRLT.org

WORK DAYS LAST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH & OTHERWISE POSTED ONLINE