

Conserving the Heart of Maine since 2004

View from the Chair

By Dana Ward, SRLT Board Chair

It's been an exciting summer and fall for SRLT, with lots of work, fun, camaraderie, and progress. Trail improvements have been made, invasive species battles fought, new plantings rooted, new signs set up, and new board members recruited (welcome Doug Fox and Erika Presley!). With your help, we can do even more. There are many ways to get involved with SRLT including volunteering to steward one of our preserves, joining work days to improve trails and eradicate invasive species, helping out on committees, attending events, donating land, providing funds, or simply getting out and enjoying nature on our public lands.

Your support will help us protect our forests and fields and create a thriving habitat for wildlife. Time and labor are always greatly appreciated, but financial support is also essential. This is a challenging time for all. ***Financing our expanding operations has never been easy, so especially in these times we all need to step up and do what we can to sustain our community lands.***

The end of the year is a perfect time to give to SRLT. A tax-smart way to give is using Qualified Charitable Distributions from an IRA (an RMD, or required minimum distribution). It's easy to do and will help ensure our preserves will thrive. Likewise, renewing your membership not

only provides much needed operating funds, it helps demonstrate community involvement, thus improving our chances with granting agencies.

Even if finances are tight, there's help you can provide. Are you a woodworker? Then maybe a bench installed on an SRLT trail is a contribution you can make. Are you a wordsmith? Then help us get the word out about our activities. Are you a farmer? Then advise us on how best to maintain our working fields on SRLT's stewardship committee. Do you like to bake? Then bring goodies to our public talks and events. In short, there's always a way you can help to improve life in the Sebasticook watershed. Working together we can secure a future with healthy fields and forests.

The importance of Staghorn Sumac (Rhus typhina)

By Tom Aversa

Many people consider sumac to be a nuisance because it grows around the edges of recently cleared areas. It gets classified as "brush" because it doesn't attain timber value and necessitates constant vigilance to ensure that it doesn't encroach on recently cleared fields. Sumac pops up just about anywhere that receives full sun throughout the day.

However, the record should be set

straight because unlike shrubs like honeysuckle, autumn olive or burning bush, staghorn sumac is a native species. It plays a critical ecological role in New England by providing food and cover for wildlife. It may look "messy" but biologists and wildlife lovers have come to realize that messy generally means "good" for wildlife. Sumac's bright red fruit clusters are a critical winter food source for numerous



species of birds as well as several mammals. The exact number of Maine's wintering birds that eat the fruits is undetermined but it includes grouse, turkeys, robins, bluebirds, Hermit Thrush, many sparrows, crows, all our woodpeckers and Cedar Waxwings among others. Sumac thickets also provide dense cover where prey animals hide and escape predators. In addition to feeding wildlife, it is utilized as food by people. Its fruits

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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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- Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust • Newport Cultural Center • North Star Adventures LLC
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- 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 Public Library
- Unity Barn Raisers • Villageside Farm



Sumac, continued from page 1

provide antioxidant and antimicrobial properties so it offers a cost free method to bolster health. Certain cultures utilize the ground fruit as a spice, but the most common method of consumption in the U.S. is to use the fruit clusters to produce a cold-brewed tea that tastes like tart pink lemonade. I drink it without sugar, but sugar or honey can be added to match one’s tastes. Sumac can also be used as a dye or dye fixative because the tannins in the plant help set the colors of other dyes and reduce fading over time.

My purpose here is to urge watershed residents to think twice before clearing out a sumac thicket on the edge of your woodlot. Homeowners often tolerate the introduced, “invasive” plants I mention above because they produce fragrant flowers or colorful fall foliage. Although these shrubs also produce food for birds, these introduced plants did not evolve in North America, so they don’t provide as many ecological services. Non-native, invasive plants are actually a net negative to Maine’s



environment because they outcompete natives due to a lack of natural checks and balances. In addition to habitat value, staghorn sumac will brighten your fall with its brilliant scarlet foliage. If you brew the drink be sure to collect only prime, deep red fruit clusters in August as soon they mature and attain this color. I test flower clusters by rubbing my finger through them and checking for the tart flavor. If not collected in a timely manner, invertebrates soon find them. Bugs also know the value of this plant – they just ruin the beverage for us!

Bird photos by Tom Aversa, page 1: Cardinal (masthead); American Robin (bottom); page 2: American Bluebird (left); Pileated Woodpecker (right).

FOLLOW US!



Biodiversity—The Living Fabric

By Buck O'Herin

The natural world is wondrous and diverse, full of life forms that have adapted to thrive in equally fascinating environments. As a small child I was captivated by earthworms, spiders, snakes and frogs—broadly, anything smaller than me that I could get my hands on. Over time, I learned about their characteristics, behaviors and what they needed to survive. In my twenties I became an environmental educator, and part of the sad

knowledge I now carry is that many of earth's species are imperiled, and some are already gone forever.

The word biodiversity was coined to denote the variety of

species, ecosystems, interrelationships and processes that have evolved over millions of years. Humans have converted so much of the earth's surface for our own purposes that the steady loss of all types of habitat has led to an extinction crisis of our making that threatens to unravel biodiversity and the living fabric of our co-mingled lives with other species. Examples of loss include the longleaf pine forests that once covered 90 million acres in the southeastern U.S. – these have been reduced to just 5% of what originally existed. And, of the original tallgrass prairie in the midwestern U.S., more than 99% has been converted to agriculture and other uses; it is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world.

Part of the challenge with these changes is that they often happen gradually over generations and we quite reasonably consider the present

look of a forest, for example, to be normal regardless of how much change has occurred. Ecologist and writer Joan Maloof calls this "ecological amnesia." Without maintaining healthy and intact ecosystems and being able to experience them, we lack that understanding and the ecological comparisons to contrast with what is occurring. Forests cover 90% of Maine, nearly 18 million acres, that at the beginning of European settlement are estimated to have contained 70% or more of old growth or late successional forest, a vital component of healthy forests. Today, the largest remaining expanse of lower elevation old growth forest—forest that has never been cut, covers less than 5,000 acres or less than one tenth of a percent. Most Mainers have never experienced these woods.

Our politics and science have never mastered the fact that people need more than to understand their obligation to one another and to the earth; they need also the feeling of such obligation, and the feeling can come only within the patterns of familiarity.

Wendell Berry

What has become alarmingly clear in the past 50 years is that the evolutionary processes that have shaped everything from the chemical composition of the atmosphere to the characteristics of each species—including humans, are being fundamentally altered. Because we don't wholly understand the complexity of how everything works, we are risking our future. It's like being adrift at sea and throwing items overboard from our survival kit before we understand what they are for.

What has also become clear is the science that reveals we must protect enough of different ecosystems and allow natural processes to be the primary dynamic at work—not extractive activities that degrade natural systems. In spite of all that we have learned about the natural world, we still have not closely studied most species and don't adequately understand their roles in the structure of how everything works. Maine ecologist Janet McMahon points out, "if we were to describe the region's natural history in a book, most of the chapters would be missing."

Nonprofit conservation organizations in Maine are the driving force behind most land conservation in the state. Maine's 80+ land trusts frequently work with each other, state agencies, and professional consultants. Efforts by these groups, including Sebasticook Regional Land Trust, are guided by conservation science and collectively they have protected nearly 3 million acres of vital habitat in Maine.

Photos by Tom Aversa



Stewardship Update

Sometimes stewarding conserved lands has a peaceful and meditative rhythm, like the simple and repetitive action of painting fresh blazes along a trail. Other times, the weather and landscape set a pace that demands we sprint to keep up, which is exactly how this summer began. May and June brought an explosion of plant growth fueled by snowmelt and rainstorms, keeping our weed whackers, loppers, mowers, and chainsaws in constant rotation as we worked to keep trail corridors clear and accessible.

As summer settled in, we found ourselves facing a historic drought. With vegetation growth slowing, we were able to shift our focus to other trail improvement projects. At Kanokolus Bog Preserve, we replaced several sections of aging bog bridges. At Richardson Memorial Preserve, we rerouted two sections of trail out of eroding gullies and onto a more sustainable grade. At Clark Road Wildlife Preserve, our newest preserve, an enthusiastic group of volunteers broke ground on a brand new trail system in late June! Over the following month, volunteers helped build a new trailhead kiosk, install signage and benches, construct a footbridge, and establish a new trail loop branching off from the existing Hills to Sea Trail segment that crosses this preserve. At the end of August, our hard work was rewarded with a wonderful community celebration at the home of Dan Ward and Julia Karet, whose generous land donation made this preserve possible.

In addition to our trail endeavors, we took major strides in our ecological restoration efforts at several preserves. At Great Farm Brook Preserve, we created thirty-two snags to provide critical standing dead-wood habitat and foraging opportunities for many birds, mammals, insects, and fungi. At Fowler Bog Preserve, we cleared an old log landing in preparation for planting climate-resilient tree and shrub species that will benefit native wildlife. At Moulton's Mill Preserve, we hosted six volunteer work days to remove invasive honeysuckle shrubs along the Twentyfive Mile Stream



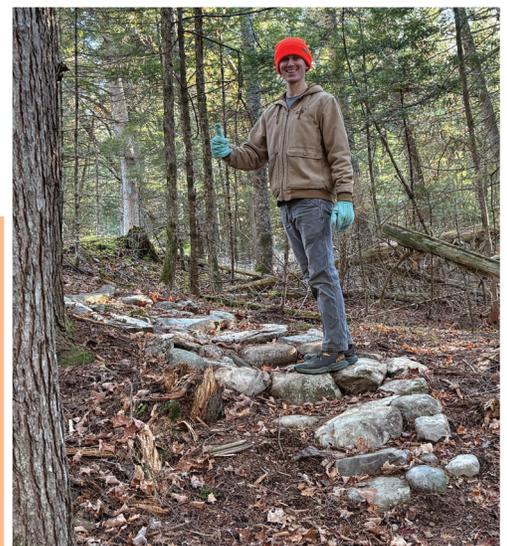
corridor, followed by planting live stakes of dogwoods, willows, alders, and viburnums.

In late October, we welcomed staff from the Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District and Friends of Lake Winnecook, as well as students from the Ecology Learning Center, to harvest live stakes at Moulton's Mill Preserve. These live stakes will be planted at properties around Lake Winnecook (Unity Pond) to enhance native biodiversity, reduce erosion, and improve water quality.

With the addition of Thursday morning volunteer sessions to our regularly scheduled last Sunday of the month volunteer work days, we saw fantastic volunteer engagement through the summer and fall. Volunteers are truly the lifeblood of our stewardship efforts at SRLT and we look forward to carrying this momentum into 2026!

By Stewardship Coordinator Tommy Diehl. Tommy moved on to a full-time position with Coastal Mountains Land Trust, and we wish him the best of luck! He helped SRLT meet our land management goals throughout the watershed and we appreciate his dedication to land conservation and stewardship.

Clockwise from top: A volunteer crew replaces bog bridging at the Kanokolus Bog Preserve; new sign for the Clark Road Wildlife Preserve; volunteers clear poplar from an old timber landing at Fowler Bog Preserve to prepare for planting climate-resilient trees and shrubs; Tommy Diehl displays a new section of rerouted trail at Richardson Memorial Preserve; leading a live stake harvesting crew at Moulton's Mill Preserve.



Restoring Healthy Habitat at Moulton's Mill Preserve

By Tommy Diehl

Why We're Managing Invasive Honeysuckle

Large stands of invasive bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.) have become well-established throughout this preserve. These shrubs leaf out earlier and hold leaves longer than native plants (see photo, right), while also releasing allelopathic chemicals into the soil that inhibit the growth of nearby native plants. Due to these competitive advantages, unmanaged honeysuckle would continue to spread and suppress native plant populations, resulting in a cascade of negative ecological impacts.

How Invasive Honeysuckle Impacts Wildlife

When dense thickets of honeysuckle become established at a site, it doesn't just change the look of the forest, it changes who can live here. Many of Maine's insects, particularly caterpillars and other host-plant specialists, have evolved to feed on specific native shrubs and trees such as dogwoods, viburnums, alders, and willows. Honeysuckle supports far fewer insect species, which means less food for birds that depend heavily on native caterpillars during the breeding season. Honeysuckle berries are also nutrient-poor compared with native fruits that are essential food sources for wildlife through the fall and winter. Beyond its negative impacts on native food-webs, thickets of invasive honeysuckle provide poor habitat structure for many ground- and mid-story nesting birds that prefer the branching structure and leaf density of native species.

What We're Doing To Restore This Habitat

Our staff and volunteers have been working hard to mechanically remove honeysuckle shrubs by fully uprooting small and medium-sized shrubs and cutting off the foliage of larger shrubs (see middle photos, right). A licensed herbicide applicator is following up on these efforts by applying a small amount of herbicide to cut stumps to prevent resprouting and minimize impacts on surrounding vegetation and soils. We have also planted over 200 live stakes of locally harvested red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), speckled alder (*Alnus incana*), winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*), arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*), and buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) in the areas where honeysuckle has already been removed. These plants will provide high-quality, wildlife-friendly forage and cover.

What's With The Big Brush Piles?

At first glance the large piles of cut honeysuckle you may see onsite may look messy, but they're actually providing valuable wildlife habitat. These brush piles create shelter and foraging opportunities for a wide range of wildlife including mice, voles, squirrels, chipmunks, birds, foxes, and other small predators. Furthermore, as the wood breaks down, it returns nutrients to the soil.

We Still Have Work to Do and You Can Help!

This restoration work is made possible by the incredible efforts of our volunteer community. If you are interested in helping us protect and restore habitat, we invite you to join us at one of our future volunteer workdays. To learn when and where the next volunteer opportunity is, send us a message at info@sebasticookrlt.org or visit our website www.sebasticookrlt.org

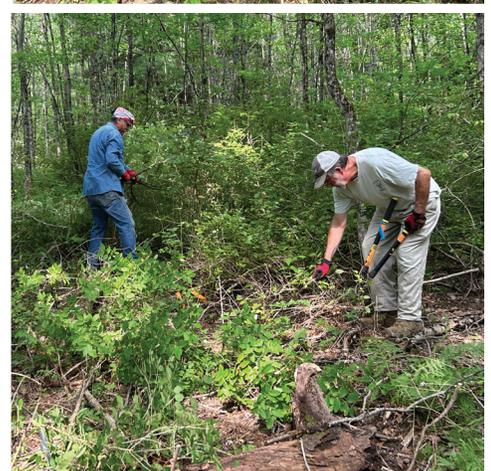




Photo top: paddling trip on the Sebasticook River in Pittsfield, drone photo by Brandon Kulik. Photos bottom: forestry talk and walk at Albert J. Sousa Preserve in Burnham; Maine Master Naturalists presenting a wildflower and pollinator program at Richardson Preserve; board member Adri Bessenaire sharing SRLT news at the Common Ground Fair; watershed game night at Stone Tree Farm and Cidery.

Community Outreach Highlights

It's been quite a year, hasn't it? We are experiencing a period of time where a sense of community is needed more than ever. Creating community through land conservation, stewardship and education is at the heart of the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust's work. Here is just a sampling of the activities SRLT has led or been involved in this past year:

In September, we joined with Waldo County Soil & Water Conservation District to co-host a watershed game night at Stone Tree Farm and Cidery in Unity. Thanks to the district program coordinator Sarah Whateley for coming up with the idea and teaching us the game! Stay tuned for more game nights this winter! SRLT teamed up with Waldo County SWCD again in October to support lake shore buffer planting with Friends of Lake Winnecook and other partners by leading a live stake harvesting program at Moulton's Mill Preserve. Sarah wrote up great blog posts describing these efforts and additional resources that can be viewed at waldocountysoilandwater.org/news-blog.

Corinne Michaud-Leblanc, climate resilience coordinator for Maine's Beginning with Habitat program, presented the keynote address at the SRLT Annual Meeting in October. Corinne described the incredible biological diversity found within the Sebasticook River watershed and planning by the state and community partners to conserve more of the region's most unique habitats and support community land use planning efforts. The Sebasticook region contains five Focus Areas of Ecological Significance, including the Unity Focus Area and the Upper Sebasticook River Wetlands. You can learn more about Focus Areas here: maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/beginning-with-habitat.

The SRLT Speaker Series offered a terrific series of presentations this year, including American Kestrel conservation and community science by state wildlife biologist Evan Jackson; a deep dive into the biological diversity of the Sebasticook region by one of our founding board members, biologist Phillip deMaynadier; an update on farmland conservation efforts and municipal planning by Maine Farmland Trust's Krista Chappell; and the upcoming program on Public Access on

Private Lands, a collaborative program with Maine Woodland Owners and Maine Outdoor Partners.

Once again, we set out to explore the waters of the beautiful Sebasticook River with two paddling trips led by Pittsfield volunteer Bill Cunningham – we've been checking out different stretches of the river each year. Join us next year as we head north to navigate the upper watershed! Maine Master Naturalist's Mary Ellen Dennis and Cyrene Slegona led a wildflower and pollinator walk at the Richardson Memorial Preserve – they rose to the challenge as the field was mowed earlier than expected, so we missed the lovely mix of wildflowers at the fields' edge but found a diversity of insects to talk about nonetheless! Our popular bird walks led by Tom Aversa always offer something new to learn or see during spring migration season, and if birding is your thing, you might join us at one or both of the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts that Tom coordinates in Unity and Hartland!

We learned from a wide variety of programs led by other organizations as well. In July, director Cheryl Daigle and Tommy Diehl participated in an Action for Ash Day workshop on lingering ash





The Nature Conservancy's Nancy Olmstead and board member Tom Aversa bushwhack through woodlands at the Albert J. Sousa Preserve to discuss land management goals here. Nancy helps administer the Maine Natural Resources Conservation Program and conducts site visits to review management practices at MNRCP-funded conservation areas across the state. You can learn more about MNRCP goals at mnrpc.org.

trees – those that show resistance to the invasive emerald ash borer - offered by Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the Ash Protection Collaborative Across Wabanakik at Colby. You can learn more at umaine.edu/apcaw. We also went on a tree farm walk and talk at the Reed Family Forest in Unity, participated in both the Maine Land Conservation Conference and the Maine Water and Sustainability Conference, and networked at the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce B2B event at Thomas College. It's amazing how much there is to do and learn about in the Sebasticook region and beyond, and to discover where SRLT's mission intersects with other nonprofits.

We deeply appreciate the partnerships reflected in this list of highlights and all those who joined us to learn about or enjoy the lands and waters that we help conserve. Please visit our website at sebasticookrlt.org for more information on our activities, partnerships, and upcoming events!



You Can Double Your Gift!

A generous local donor has offered a matching gift up to a total of \$10,000 in support of the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust's community-based work to conserve and steward working forests, farms, and wild lands in the Sebasticook River Watershed.



We'd like to keep up the momentum of this past year – and hope we can count on your support!

Please join us this gift-giving season by renewing your membership, signing up for a monthly recurring gift, or contacting us if you think an in-kind donation matches SRLT's mission. Set up a recurring monthly donation of \$10 or more and receive a SRLT hat!

Ways to Give

Online

www.sebasticookrlt.org/membership

Please note: you will be redirected to a secure page on SRLT's Network for Good page.

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. Visit www.sebasticookrlt.org/ways-to-give for more instructions.

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



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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

Sat, Feb 28, 10am–12:30pm
Winter Ecology: Signs, Tracks and Other Indicators of Life in Winter

Join SRLT and Maine Master Naturalist Grace Bartlett for a walk (or snowshoe!) at the Pleasant Lake Preserve in Stetson to explore what the winter woods reveals about plant and wildlife adaptations.

Wed, Mar 18, 6–7:30pm

Alewife Restoration on the Sebasticook River

Last year the Sebasticook River saw a return of 9 million alewives – the largest alewife run on the East Coast. Landis Hudson, executive director of Maine Rivers, will share her experiences with successful alewife restoration efforts, as well as places that have not yet reached their potential.

Sat, May 9, 7–10am

Annual World Migratory Bird Day Walk at Rines Preserve

Celebrate World Bird Migration Day by joining Sebasticook Regional Land Trust for a walk through the Unity wetlands along

the raised esker at the Rines Preserve, led by SRLT board secretary and seasoned birder Tom Aversa.

Sat, Jun 6, 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 with Maine Master Naturalist Mary Ellen Dennis.

Stay tuned for information on Sebasticook River Paddling Trips

We are planning an inspiring 6-mile paddle during the annual alewife migration as well as a trip to the upper watershed to explore the state's Mainstream Wildlife Management Area.

RSVP at
SebasticookRLT.org

Follow us on social media and check our website for updates: we are planning programs on soil ecology and habitat, duck boxes, nature journaling, and more!



2025 Christmas Bird Count

Join SRLT for a Christmas Bird Count at one of two sites that we host in Unity and Hartland (or join us for both!). This annual tradition was started by the National Audubon Society in 1900 to record wintering birds. Sign-up required on our website – the earlier the better for planning purposes!

Saturday, Dec 20

Unity Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, Dec 27

Hartland Christmas Bird Count

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