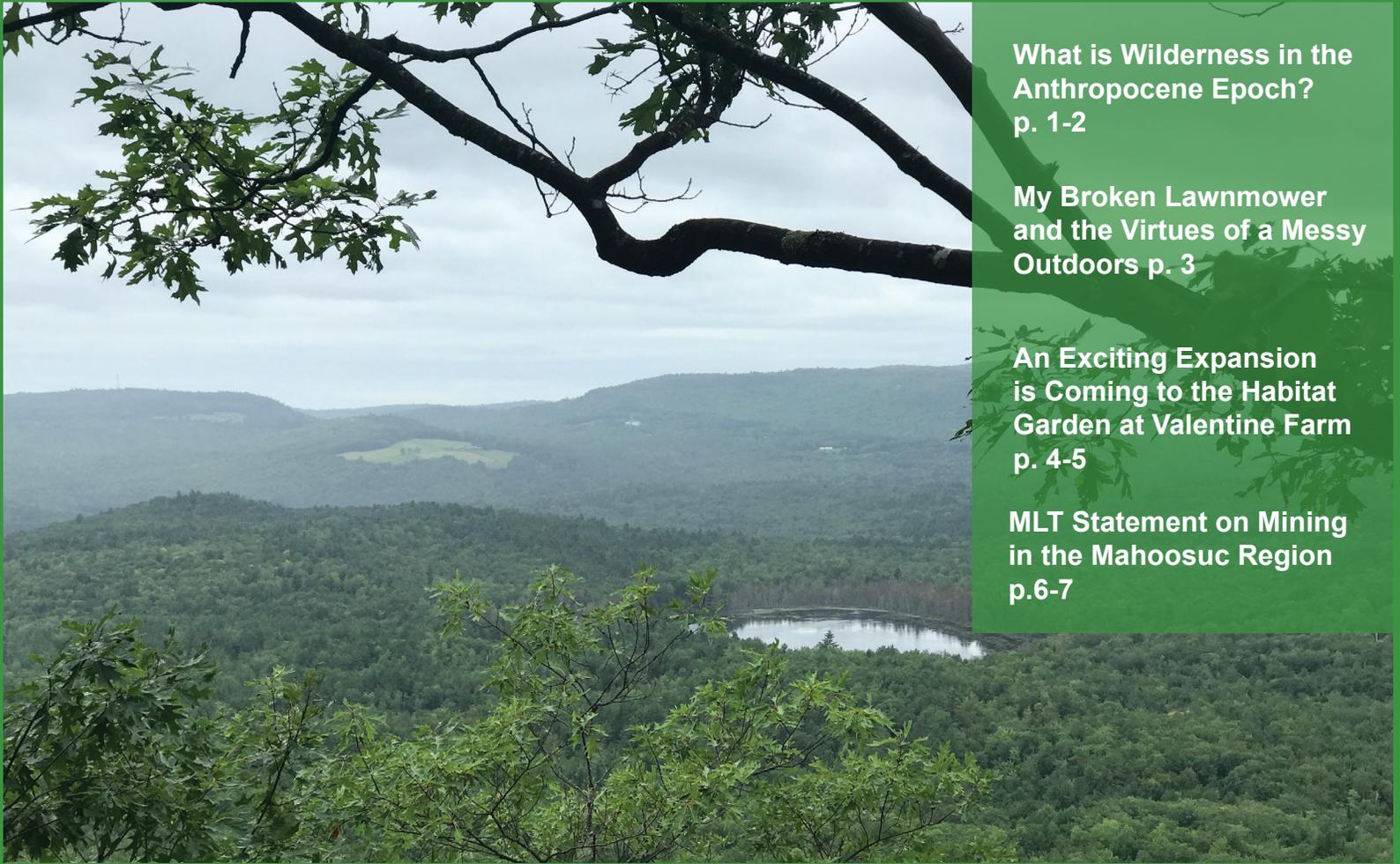




Mahoosuc Land Trust

Spring 2023 Newsletter

Conserving the Mahoosuc Region since 1989



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Wilderness in the Anthropocene Epoch

View to the South from the summit of Flint Mountain, with Chalk Pond in the foreground.

MLT is celebrating our first forever-wild property: 295 acres of land in Albany Township created for the purpose of allowing nature to flourish with minimal human intervention. Flint Mountain Wildlands is next to MLT’s Flint Farm conservation easement, creating a roughly 500-acre conservation area that will be accessible to the public. But what, you may ask, is “wilderness” when no corner of the planet escapes the human touch?

MLT believes in the importance of having places among our conserved lands that are different and where you feel the difference. Flint Mountain Wildlands is unlike the vast majority of MLT’s 20,000+ acres of conserved lands and easements, many of which allow active management, including timber harvesting, farming, and the creation of trails for more intensive recreational

use. Visitors to Flint Mountain will have access to enjoy the scenic beauty and other wilderness values through minimal impact, non-mechanized uses, such as walking, snowshoeing, ski touring, and nature observation and study.

“It’s an exciting idea for people when they realize that they will experience places like this in a different way,” says Kirk Siegel, MLT Executive Director. Flint provided generations with lumber, crops, feldspar, and grazing lands. Now able to heal and “rewild,” it will be part of only 3.5% of permanently conserved lands in New England that are wildlands. Old trees will fall and rot, enriching the underground fungal networks essential for soil structure and carbon storage.

Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT), the holder of the forever-wild conservation easement, worked closely with

MLT to protect, in perpetuity, the land’s ecological integrity and wild character. “Forever-wild forests are allowed to grow old, acting as carbon stores while providing critical habitats for many species,” said Caitlin Mather, Land Protection Manager at NEWT. “It gives me a great sense of relief knowing that the signs of wildlife observed during our visits to the land will continue to be part of its story.”

The Flint Mountain property has unmarked trails with views to the White Mountains, and MLT plans to work with NEWT on a trail improvement plan later this year that will be shared with the public when complete. Motorized uses are prohibited. Hunting of deer and other non-predator species will be welcomed, following the creation of a management plan developed with NEWT. The conservation easement recognizes that the Wabanaki people have lived in this area for thousands of years and will allow MLT to enter into tribal cultural respect agreements.

The Flint Mountain Wildlands will be a modest first step to demonstrate how undeveloped and minimally managed lands play an essential role in forest ecosystems. The land will serve as a benchmark to understanding the benefits of wildlands within a landscape of managed forestlands. The land has large hardwood stands containing abundant red oak approximately 100 years in age and pasture oaks of very significant girth possibly dating back well into the 1800s when the land was actively farmed. There has been little or no harvesting in recent decades on much of the acreage. MLT believes the lands are thus well on

“Anthropocene Epoch is an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the most recent period in Earth’s history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet’s climate and ecosystems.”*

*<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/anthropocene/>

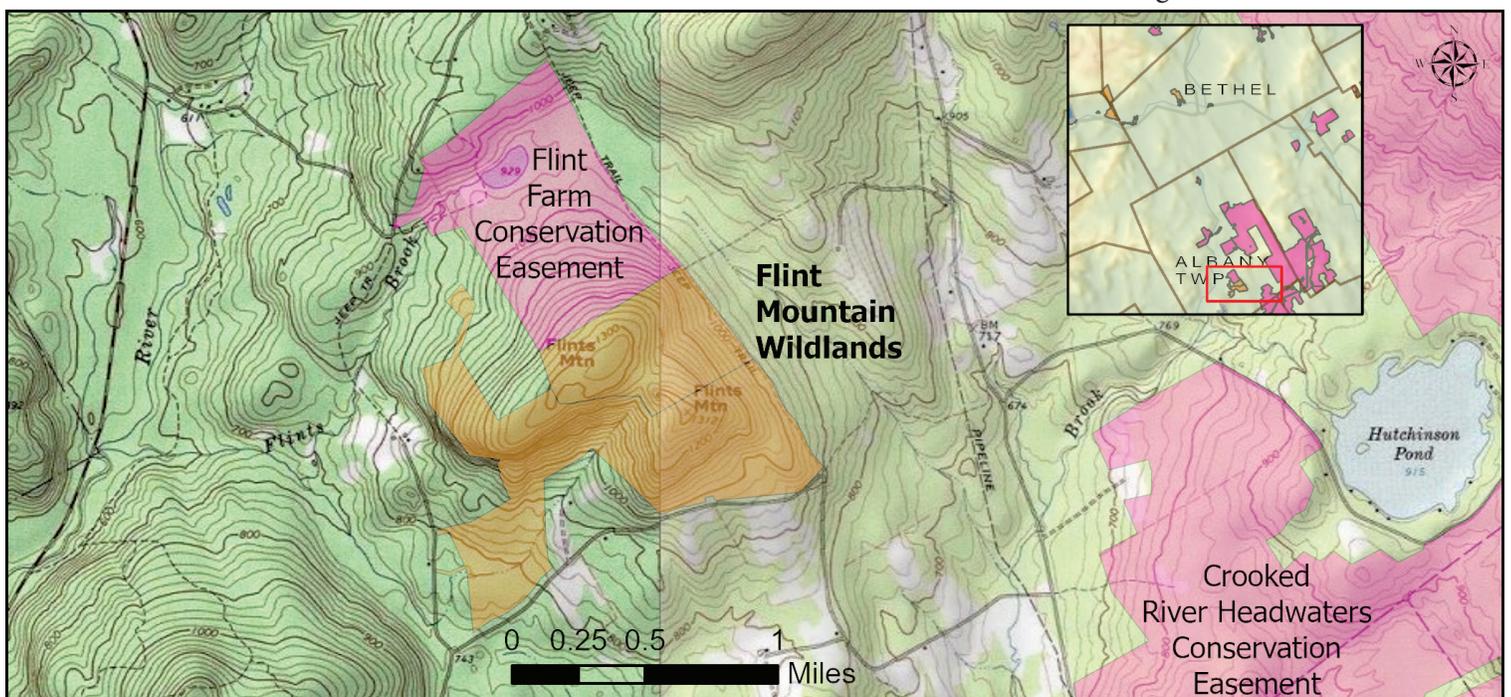
their way toward healing and restoration from human impact. The property’s wildland status will also protect state-identified wild brook trout habitat on streams that feed the Crooked River.

Critical funding came from donors to MLT’s Ken Hotopp Wildlands Fund, inspired by and in memory of MLT board member and volunteer, Ken Hotopp, a naturalist, conservation biologist, and defender of wilderness and the climate. Landowner Ken Wille of Albany Township made the transaction possible through a generous bargain sale to MLT.

Sebago Clean Waters (SCW), a coalition of ten organizations, including Mahoosuc Land Trust, contributed funding. “This project is an important part of a broader vision to create an expanse of conserved lands in the Sebago Lake watershed to protect drinking water, wildlife, and quality of life. Each time we add a piece of protected land to the puzzle, these impacts deepen,” said Karen Young, SCW partnership director.

SCW founding member Portland Water District

-Kirk Siegel, Executive Director



provided additional funding. “The Portland Water District supports the work of Mahoosuc Land Trust because Sebago Lake, our source of drinking water, is downstream of the forests they conserve,” said Paul Hunt, the District’s environmental manager. “These woods naturally treat the water our customers drink and this property will remain wooded forever. This means cleaner water, healthier fisheries, more habitat for animals and birds, and outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.” Maine Mountain Collaborative provided additional funding

as part of its goal to conserve both well-managed forests and ecological reserves.

If you would like to learn more about MLT’s wildlands initiative, call Kirk at (207) 824-3806 or email kirk@mahoosuc.org. If you would like to get involved with the Flint Mountain Wildlands or stewardship activities at other MLT properties, call Spenser at the above number, or email spenser@mahoosuc.org. Donations toward future wildlands can be made at www.mahoosuc.org/wildlands-fund.

No Mow May: The Quiet Blessings of My Broken Lawnmower

Stronger sun, later nights, bird songs, frisky squirrels, and the first insect on your jacket. Spring is here. Along with all the signs of the season’s rebirth come some other noises too—the loud ones. The lawnmowers, weed whackers, and, of course, leaf blowers. Few are the moments of quiet on a sunny day this season, especially considering the damage revealed from December’s first heavy snow as the last of the plow piles recede.

In some ways mud season offers respite. A chance for quiet observation while earth and lawn are too soft to manipulate mechanically. But it doesn’t have to end with mud season. The answer may lie in how we assess our surroundings or consider the need for order and control. Either way there are better and easier alternatives to a grass lawn.

My lawnmower is broken, but it still mostly works. It’s a superb starter, the first time. I’m told it overheats quickly, preventing a second start anytime within the next 8 hours. The net result is one lawnmower start per day. Enough function to prevent any greater action on my part for the last 2 years. Needless to say, there’s some strategy involved and duct tape.

After taping down the throttle lever, sticks and branches are thrown in the corner, then toys are cleaned up. Wait! First, the child goes in a backpack (with his own earmuffs), then the toys are cleaned up. And only after surveying the task ahead do I start the mower.

But despite my best preparations I inevitably find a dirt clod, camouflaged stick, most often tall or wet grass to jam, bog down, or downright kill the mower. It was intensely frustrating the first few times. Then it became interesting.

Gone was the obligation or possibility of a manicured lawn, and I instead welcomed a grassy patchwork of mixed lengths and ages. The side yard

sits between our driveway and the American Legion’s parking lot, and its ownership has never been defined. After mowing it regularly through 2021, I let it go from May until September last year. And then I started to notice things.

There were more birds in our yard and on our yard. New unknown plants, some with taller or strange shapes and colorful flowers. The potential held in our yard’s seed bank (bed?) was just waiting for the opportunity to blossom. And all I had to do was... nothing, except pay attention.

But maybe the idea of your yard going wild is too much. New plants may inflame allergies or spread undesired seeds, or maybe you just want to have a hand in shaping the course of your surroundings. There are options for you that can reduce your time on or behind a mower and support a diverse environment and at-risk species in your immediate surroundings.

The interest in grass free lawns is growing substantially as is the body of supporting scientific research. From yardscaping to pollinator gardens, Food Not Lawns to Bringing Nature Home, the collective thoughts on introducing diversity to our lawns and yards has the one end of the Think It-Do It see-saw pinned down. What’s needed now is action. Your action.

Whether No Mow May is your toe in the water, or you’re convinced and the clover, sedum, sedge, moss, and snow-in-summer are coming in, there is no shortage of grass alternatives for your lawn.

-Spenser Williams, Land Steward



Illustration by Mike Murphy of the new garden design, which will feature a pond, butterfly house, and a variety of educational areas.

A Garden Unlike Any Other

It is a fascinating time to be a gardener. Over the past few years, many blogs, podcasts, books, and articles have been produced about the power of gardening to heal ourselves and the planet. Gardening has come of age.

Starting this spring and continuing into 2024, the pollinator garden at Valentine Farm will expand and transform into the Habitat For All Garden to better reflect this broader view of how gardening fits into the conservation world.

For those of you who love the current pollinator garden, don't worry. The blowsy, buzzy, colorful area you know and love will continue to be a major focus of the garden. It will now be surrounded by grasses, shrubs, a butterfly house, a fruit and vegetable garden, and of course more pollinator plants.

Rather than be prescriptive, the Habitat for All

Garden will inspire by example. Its goal is to have you think differently about the potential of your backyard, porch, or community space. The garden will reveal transformative ideas for large and small spaces, techniques for growing your own food, creating a sanctuary for you, plantings for birds, butterflies, and pollinators, and ideas to spark creativity and discovery. It will be a garden unlike any other.

The Habitat For All Garden will demonstrate the inclusion of four backyard elements. Though listed separately, the components and feel of each element will be present throughout the garden, giving a unified spirit to the space. There will be much experimentation. We will share our successes and failures with you.

Remember, gardens can serve many functions:

sound or light blocking, food, beauty, wildlife habitat, play/exploration, and sanctuary. They are never one-size-fits-all and they don't have to be big to be effective.

This year will be a season of renovation. Come. Visit the garden often. Watch the garden evolve. Ask questions. Visit the website. Become part of the

garden team. We always need gardeners. But, we also need painters, artists, plant and butterfly enthusiasts, photographers, writers, financial supporters, and much more. If you are interested in jumping in, email Barbara at barbara@mahoosuc.org.

The Four Elements of the Habitat For All Garden

1. A sanctuary for you.

We all need respite from our busy, overbooked days. We know, and research supports, that we feel better - less stressed, depressed, and overwhelmed - when we can see birds and other wildlife, hear bird song and moving water, and are surrounded by greenery. In the garden you will find strategically placed chairs and benches, along with small bird baths, and potted plants to spark sanctuary ideas for your garden space.

2. Reconnecting with Food.

Savoring the crisp snap of a pea or the juice of a ripe tomato is one of life's most delicious experiences. There is such a sense of accomplishment from growing all or part of a meal. As your skills deepen, you will see how the success of your harvest depends on the success of soil organisms, pollinators, butterflies, and birds.

3. A sanctuary for wildlife.

The overwhelming decline of insect and bird species begs us to ask ourselves, "How can my landscape work to combat this loss?" Thoughtful installation of plants and shrubs is a great first step. You can also add a little water and some nesting boxes to increase the possibility of attracting wildlife to your yard. Better yet, join forces with friends and neighbors to create larger patches of habitat for bugs and birds.

4. A place for discovery and creativity.

Gardens can have a lot to offer if your goal is to provide an alternative to "the screen." Come to the garden and see truly unusual plants and structures. Bring your camera, paints, or sketch pad, and let the creativity flow. Late this season, enter the butterfly house to see butterflies in all stages of development.

-Barbara Murphy, Director of Development and Habitat for All Program



MLT Statement on Mining in the Mahoosuc Region



View from Puzzle Mountain of Plumbago Mountain, where a significant lithium deposit has been discovered. Rumford Whitecap is in the background.

Editor's note:

This statement was prepared in response to a flurry of recent legislative proposals that could have significant impacts in our region, and was submitted to the legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee hearings on mining legislation on April 13th. If these issues are important to you, you may wish to learn more. Testimony of MLT and others is at www.legislature.gov/committee/#committees/ENR (navigate to April 13, 2023 hearings). Each week brings new developments: email info@mahoosuc.org for a list of other resources.

About the organization:

Mahoosuc Land Trust (MLT) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit serving western Maine and eastern Coos County, New Hampshire, with a mission "to conserve and share the Mahoosuc region's important natural lands with our communities, now and for the future." MLT has conserved roughly 22,000 acres through its publicly accessible preserves, and conservation easements on private lands. These include Androscoggin River boat landings, iconic summits like Rumford Whitecap and Puzzle Mountain, working farms and forests, and dozens of miles of multi-use recreational trails.

Our tradition of conservation:

Since 1989, MLT has focused on those critical lands

which protect biodiversity, water quality, and habitat connectivity, mitigate climate change, and deliver recreational, scenic, cultural, economic, spiritual, and ecological benefits. These lands include "working landscapes" contributing to local economies and quality of life, provided that they also support other conservation values. Increasingly, we see how the region depends on a tourism economy attracted to the region's beautiful open space and high quality nature-based recreational offerings resulting from government and non-profit conservation. Today we also seek to better understand the Wabanaki cultural importance of the lands we steward.

All Land Matters:

We also recognize that even though most land cannot be "preserved" in the traditional sense, that all land matters. That includes our working lands, backyards, schoolyards, and other spaces with more intensive land uses. Through our Habitat for All Program, we ask people to think differently about the cumulative impact of a multitude of actions to conserve species diversity in places where we live, work, and play. We must make the most of every scrap of land, no matter its condition.

MLT and Climate Change:

On behalf of our 574 members, we are committed to addressing climate change consistent with our mission. Our forest conservation work is a key strategy to address the climate crisis by sequestering and storing carbon in trees, while also stemming the effect of forest fragmentation on biological diversity. Additionally, we are sharing new research with landowners that demonstrates that “climate smart” forest management strategies on their lands can remove more carbon, while also improving habitat and producing more and better quality wood.

MLT and Mining:

MLT is not anti-mining, and we appreciate the long history of respectful quarrying and gem and mineral prospecting that is one of the hallmarks of the region. We are just beginning to gather information about the recent lithium discovery on Plumbago Mountain in Newry, Maine. It is our understanding that, once processed, it can be a component for clean energy technology (including electric vehicles) the widespread adoption of which is also a key strategy for attaining a low-carbon future to combat climate change.

The Plumbago lithium deposit sits squarely within MLT’s Rumford Whitecap Mountain—Ellis River Focus Area in our 2020–2025 Strategic Conservation Plan. This designation is based on the area’s long history of public access, its climate change resilient habitat, public drinking water protection values, and other ecosystem services. The focus area also includes Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) Focus Areas and MNAP Natural Communities—located on the opposite side of the Ellis River valley from Plumbago Mountain. We do not have adequate information at this time to understand how all of these values might be affected by significant mining operations, and we will seek knowledge and insights from informed sources.

MLT appreciates the balancing act that is needed as any mining law changes or legislative proposals on this topic are considered. MLT will need to understand more fully the details of any proposals relating to mining in this area, and elsewhere in the region, using the lens of our mission and in support of decisions that sustain a healthy natural

environment for our communities. MLT welcomes any and all conversations that allow us to deepen that understanding.

Have You Made Your Plan to Shape the Mahoosuc Region of Tomorrow?

This spring, Barbara and Kirk have had phone conversations and meetings with many of you who wanted to learn more about leaving the Mahoosuc region a permanent legacy by including MLT in a will or other estate plan. Providing such a legacy is a strong statement that you believe in our conservation work now and for future generations. We’re here to help if you are interested in learning more. Call us at (207)824-3806 or email barbara@mahoosuc.org. Summary information is also available at www.mahoosuc.org/planned-gifts.

Welcome Aboard, Meg!

Mahoosuc Land Trust is pleased to announce that Meg Kuker will be joining us this summer as the Recreational Land Steward at Step Falls for 2023. Meg, a frequent volunteer in the Habitat For All Garden, is a regular at Valentine Farm. She brings with her years of experience in Early Childhood Education and Fiber Arts. Meg is excited to welcome area visitors and locals alike to Step Falls and to support the Mahoosuc Land Trust in conserving special and wild places in the Mahoosuc region. Welcome, Meg!



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