



# Mahoosuc Land Trust News



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Conserving the Mahoosuc Region since 1989

Spring 2022



## Goodbye, Winter.



## Hello, Spring!

## Working with Mary McFadden and Larry Stifler to “Re-connect the Forest”

Kirk Siegel, Executive Director

*“Fragmenting landscapes into smaller habitat patches over time is a leading cause of degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity.”*

*—Janet McMahon, The Environmental Consequences of Forest Fragmentation in the Western Maine Mountains*

I’ve spent quite a bit of time reflecting on the historic conservation easement the Stifler-McFadden family granted to MLT in December. This easement permanently protects 12,268 acres of largely contiguous forestland in Albany, Greenwood, Norway, and Waterford. If you are of a curious nature it can take years to get to know an acre of land well. So how do you even start to get to know over 12,000 acres of small rugged mountains and valleys, their pristine ponds, bountiful streams, and miles of frontage on the

Crooked River? And how does a conservation project this large come together?

Longtime MLT members Mary McFadden and Larry Stifler had a bit of a head start on getting to know this land. In the 1970s, the couple started acquiring parcels of forestland in Albany Township with a plan to conserve it for future generations, calling it “Northern Retreat.” As surrounding lands in the region were being broken up into smaller ownerships, they made it their goal to “un-fragment” the landscape--not

only to keep it available for public recreation—but to keep a critical mass of largely unbroken forest intact to sustain plant and wildlife diversity as the climate changes.

McFadden and Stifler had long been aware of one potential “fragment” of concern: 1300 acres in Waterford managed for generations by the Chadbourne family. When The Conservation Fund acquired these acres as part of the 15,000-acre Chadbourne Tree Farm project, an innovative plan was hatched: Larry and Mary would purchase the Waterford acres and then conserve them forever along with Northern Retreat’s 11,000 existing adjacent acres.

Thanks to the generosity of Larry, Mary, and their children, we all have the opportunity to get to know this fabulous piece of land. Here is a shortlist of some of the features of the easement:

- The project area is within a very large, ~23,000-acre undeveloped block.
- 35 contiguous acres of mature Red Oak Northern Hardwood White Pine forest that shows little sign of human disturbance in the past 100-150 years.
- The project area includes at least 13 low summits between 900 and 1760 ft. In Maine, summits below 2700’ are generally less well conserved than the high elevation counterparts.
- The project area contains above average stocking of mid-successional to mature 70-90 year old stands, relative to the rest of the state, and some stands of 100-140 years old.
- Significant portions of the property have been identified as climate-resilient sites capable of sustaining biodiversity and ecological functions into the future under a changing climate
- The Nature Conservancy’s forest carbon stock calculator estimates that forest carbon storage in the project area will reach 1.3 million megatons of stored carbon by 2050.
- Seventy-eight miles of stream frontage.

A fortuitous alignment of the planets and stars (and watersheds!) was about to occur. As MLT and its project partners explored a possible deal, a somewhat overlooked aspect of Stifler and McFadden’s lands became very important: over 7,500 acres of their lands are located within the Crooked River watershed.

The Crooked is the largest tributary to Sebago Lake, the primary drinking water supply for over 200,000 Maine residents, and one of only 50 public surface water supplies in the U.S. that requires no filtration before treatment. This attribute unlocked critical financial support from a USDA initiative spearheaded by Sebago Clean Waters, with critical financial support from Portland Water District.



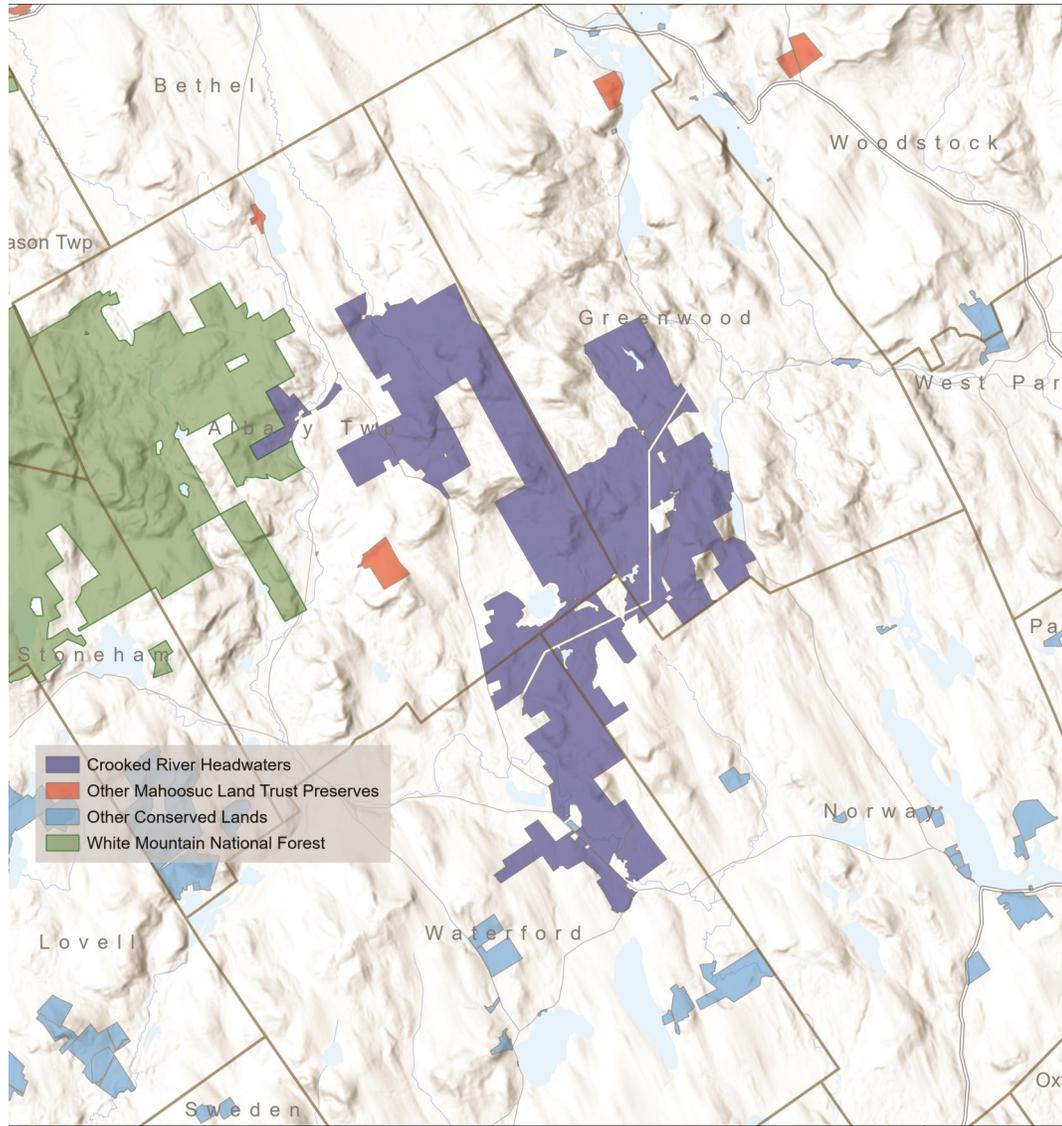
McFadden and Stifler donated the vast majority of the conservation easement’s value to make this collaborative effort possible and to inspire others. “Our donation of this land was to ensure it will be permanently conserved,” McFadden and Stifler said. “We and our three children are also pleased to protect the Sebago watershed and the extraordinary resources and beauty of this area for generations to come. We’re excited to share this land with the public and make this statement for conservation.”

This admittedly winding conservation story enters deeply into local communities. Many know “Mary and Larry” from their founding in 2012 of Bethel’s internationally renowned Maine Mineral & Gem Museum. Less well known is that it was in assembling their conservation lands that they discovered the rich mineralization of Oxford County, famous for its tourmaline, quartz, and beryl. This was the genesis of the museum.

**If the Stifler-McFadden family’s project has inspired you to consider conserving your land, please contact MLT Executive Director, Kirk Siegel: [kirk@mahoosuc.org](mailto:kirk@mahoosuc.org)**

Larry and Mary worked closely with various nonprofit partners to make this goal a reality. Says Kirk Siegel, Mahoosuc Land Trust's Executive Director, "Western Foothills Land Trust and Inland Woods + Trails jumped at the opportunity to work with The Conservation Fund and our other partners to help conserve the Chadbourne Tree Farm lands last year. The creativity that came out of that

partnership is what made it possible to complete this historic project with Larry and Mary, while we continue working on the conservation of the entire 15,000-acre Chadbourne Tree Farm lands." Funding was also provided by The Nature Conservancy and Maine Mountain Collaborative, along with additional Sebago Clean Waters funding.



# Business with Beavers: Protecting Water Quality in Headwater Streams

Spenser Williams, Land Steward

In December 2021, Mahoosuc Land Trust closed on the 12,268-acre Crooked River Headwaters Conservation Easement, via a generous bargain sale from Mary McFadden and Larry Stifler of Albany Township. Much has been said about the geographic importance of this Easement near the top of the Crooked River Watershed, protecting undeveloped lands and maintaining forest integrity and water quality. Continued conservation within the Crooked River Watershed should preserve water quality and allow the Portland Water District to continue providing unfiltered and sediment-free water to the City of Portland, one of only 10 utilities its size nationally that does so.

Less has been said about the daily life, wildlife, and ecosystem services at work within the Crooked River Headwaters Conservation Easement, and how these forces have shaped the land and precious water that leaves from it. Such a discussion is incomplete without a look at the not-so-humble Beaver.

The North-American beaver, *Castor canadensis*, may be the most charismatic minifauna in North America. Now recognized for their ability to slow moving water and reduce sedimentation, beavers have long been sought for fur and food alike through history. Following the French Revolution and the rise of the proletariat, the growing middle class created a huge demand for beaver top hats, a quality hat using 2 or 3 pelts. Pursued nearly to extinction, the demand for beaver pelts created business empires and started and ended multiple wars in North America.

Still today, beavers are altering the world around them to great lengths. Aptly named keystone species, through an instinctual urge to stop the flow of water, beavers' dam-building behaviors are responsible for creating entire wetland habitats for other species, while destroying other habitats in the process. Under experimental conditions, beavers have been found to respond to the sounds alone of running water, using available sticks and mud to cover the researchers tape recorders. The ongoing construction projects of the beavers continually challenge the Bureau of Reclamation. The largest known beaver dam was

discovered in 2014 in Alberta's Wood Buffalo National Park. The dam is 2,788 feet long or twice the width of the Hoover Dam.



Beaver activity is an excellent display in the Crooked River Headwaters. North of Hutchinson Pond, along a tributary to Swell Brook, a series of beaver ponds string together in a drop-and-pool system. The largest pond is over 6-acres in size and has two lodges over 10-feet high. A nearby hiking trail passes below the 120-foot wide dam with many chewed tree stumps and some recent signs of life.

Nearby, Furlong Pond is 17-acres in area and rather shallow. Located centrally in the Crooked River Headwaters Easement, Furlong Pond begins the course of Hobbs Brook, a major tributary to the Crooked River. A closer examination of the

USGS map shows the town corner of Albany, Greenwood, and Norway sits in the middle of Furlong Pond. At only 20 feet deep, it is easy to envision the original surveyors wedging a painted cedar post between a few rocks in a boggy area and the waters behind a nearby beaver dam rising around it.



## A Focus on Business Partner: Bethel Adventure Tours

The Androscoggin River is a re-polished gem that is central to the success of Alex Carr's business. Bethel Adventure Tours (BAT), a Maine Guide-owned business, began offering active adventures around the Bethel region in the fall of 2020. BAT is a four-season recreational service offering active, privately guided excursions from Bethel. Hiking, mountain biking, paddling, snowshoeing, ski touring, winter fat biking, bird watching, and nature trips are all possible adventures. Although he does guide larger groups, his specialty is getting reluctant, anxious, or impaired single travelers outdoors and immersed in an adventure.



Growing up in the area, Alex clearly remembers how polluted the Androscoggin was in the 70s. Today, while paddling with clients on the now relatively clean

river, Alex's stories about the history of the river and the impacts the Clean Water Act and preservation efforts such as MLT's Shelburne Riverlands have had on the Androscoggin River are met with amazement.

Alex highly recommends the Shelburne to Gilead section of the Androscoggin River. This stretch has some of the wildest parts of the river, great fishing, and fewer weekend visitors. For more information about Bethel Adventure Tours, visit <https://betheladventuretours.com/>

## A Solar Energy Partnership

So how will Maine meet its climate change goals when three-fifths of Maine's households use fuel oil as their primary energy source for home heating, a larger share than any other state? A quick drive around the area indicates solar power is positioning itself to be a significant player to provide electricity-based power for heating and more.



Several months ago, National Renewable Solutions (NRS) began developing the Bethel Solar Project in a dormant gravel pit 3.5 miles east of Bethel on Rt. 26. Passing the site today shows hundreds of panels ready to capture the sun's energy and reduce Maine's CO2 emissions. What is especially forward-thinking about NRS is their philosophy to use sites that are already disturbed, like a gravel pit, reducing the need to remove trees.

Typically, NRS looks for ways to partner in the communities where they develop projects to ensure *everyone* benefits from the project—not just those with solar panels or spinning turbines. MLT was pleased to be chosen by NRS to be their community partner and received a \$25,000 gift to support MLT and its carbon sequestration efforts and to expand the Pollinator Garden at Valentine Farm.

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## In Memory of John Laban

**Past MLT Board President** and long-time supporter, John Laban passed away earlier this year. A forester by training and woodsman at heart, John championed caring for our forests for today and tomorrow. Although he was born in Massachusetts, John always considered himself a Mainer. His best days were walking woodlots with his dogs, talking with clients about long-term goals for their properties, and helping them plan for the future. He had a well-rounded perspective of woodlands, understanding that they could be managed for income, recreation, aesthetics, and conservation. He also understood how important the woods product industry was to Maine and had special relationships with his loggers, drivers, and land-owners. He believed in balance.



His relationship with Sam and Ginny McCoy was special, and he admired their determination to keep their property intact. He worked with Ginny by reassuring her that having MLT manage her beloved woods would be a wise move for both the Bethel area and future generations, and he was so proud to see the establishment of the McCoy-Chapman Forest. He always referred to the large pine trees lining the North Road as "Ginny's Sentinels."

John's family hopes that, when you take a walk on these North Road properties, you will pause for a moment to think as John did and enjoy your walk, smell the pines, and listen to the waters.

# The Transformational Power of Small Steps

Barbara Murphy, Director of Development and Habitat For All

It can be easy to take comfort in believing the decline, loss, and extinction of birds, insects, mammals and plants can be prevented if just enough land is conserved. Unfortunately, that mental refuge has been shattered by recent reports acknowledging that the pace of environmental degradation worldwide is exceeding the ability of conservation organizations to protect habitat and threatened species. So, we citizens could take it upon ourselves to jump in and try to fill the habitat gap. There are a whole lot more of us than conservation organizations.

Did you know that there are roughly 40 million acres of lawn in the US? This is approximately 2% of our land mass. What if each of us who own or have access to a yard with lawn chose to change one landscaping behavior to benefit the greater planetary good? Imagine the impact that would make?

Where to start? A quick Google search and many articles later have convinced me that we are not breaking new ground. Cities and towns across the globe are encouraging people to reimagine their backyards, to see those green squares of lawn and formal gardens as opportunities to create habitat for pollinators. For inspiration, visit the pollinator garden at Valentine Farm. You may swoon when you see its beauty and pollinator activity. Everyone can do something. And, since pollinators account for one out of every three bites of our food, I like to think, if you eat, you are in!

## Rest the Rake

This one is a tough one. I have taken great pleasure whipping my rake around the yard picking up all of the dead, crispy leaves and other lawn debris smothered under the snow. Wouldn't you know, some of those bees and other insects that I invited into my yard with flowers and nectar overwinter in that debris. I now imagine my spring ritual was their spring earthquake. This understanding doesn't mean I can't rake; I just need to wait until a week of 50+ degree temperatures has occurred. This accumulation of warm days will stimulate the bees to leave their nests and begin foraging.



## No Mow May

I am taking it up a notch now. This movement started in Britain but has quickly spread to the US. Appleton, Wisconsin is the poster city for this effort. In 2020, the City Council agreed to suspend Appleton's weed ordinance for the month of May. Over 435 registered property owners participated in the campaign. Researchers from a local university measured the changes in the bee population and diversity, and the results were astounding. Participating yards had three-times higher bee species diversity and five-times higher bee abundance than nearby parks that had been mowed. Visit <https://beecityusa.org/no-mow-may/> to read the whole report. MLT is going to take part in this campaign. Join us and let others know by posting this cool sign in your yard available at <https://xerces.org/publications/other/no-mow-may>. Take a picture and send it to [info@mahoosuc.org](mailto:info@mahoosuc.org). We would love to know who is participating.



## Plant for Spring and Fall

The most challenging time for insects and pollinators is early spring and late fall. They are hungry after a long winter or need to fuel up to make it through the winter. Queen bumble bees are one of the first bees to appear in the spring, and I often find them buzzing in my yard in mid-April. Help insure that these queens and all of the soon-to-arrive insects have plenty to choose from by planting early spring flowers like glory of the snow and corydalis, and now that you aren't mowing, the dandelions will be there as well.

Asters are the mainstay for late fall flowers. In the pollinator garden at Valentine Farm, Prairie Aster, *Symphyotrichum turbinellum*, will bloom well into October and withstand some frosts. The bees love it.



# You Can Support the Buck's Ledge Community Forest Campaign

Buck's Ledge, one of the area's most recognizable geographic features, rises from the eastern shore of North Pond in Woodstock. Easily visible from Rt. 26, the iconic cliff face is a magnet to hikers and an inspiration to artists and photographers.

A grassroots effort is underway to permanently conserve this important community landmark. The proposed Community Forest would encompass 634 acres, including Buck's Ledge, Lapham Ledge, and the summit of Moody Mountain. The trail-head parking lot on Route 26, which is maintained by the Town of Woodstock, provides convenient year-round access to recreation opportunities, including six miles of hiking trails and an established snowmobile trail. A recently developed connecting trail from the Woodstock Elementary School allows students to make use of the forest as an outdoor classroom. In addition, the parcel includes rare plants, old growth trees, and nesting habitat for peregrine falcons. Nearby, nesting eagles and loons are often seen and heard as well.



To get a virtual tour of this magnificent property, visit: <https://www.mahoosuc.org/bucks-ledge>

## Your Gift Can Help Wrap-Up This Campaign

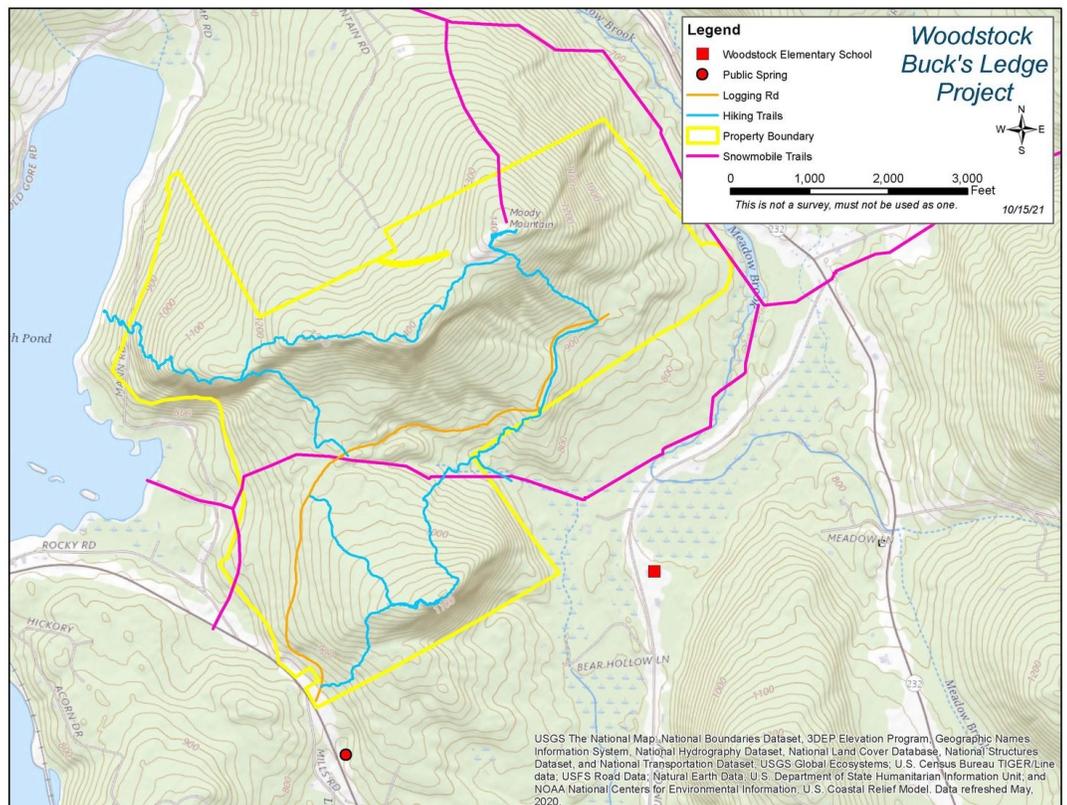
We only have \$50,000 left to raise to meet our local fundraising goal of \$175,000.

**DONATE TODAY**

<https://www.mahoosuc.org/donate>

The Buck's Ledge Community Forest project seeks to secure public ownership and conservation of this remarkable property in perpetuity, ensuring that it will always remain undeveloped and accessible to area residents and visitors.

Use your phone camera to donate to Buck's Ledge today!



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