



# Mahoosuc Land Trust

## Summer 2022 Newsletter

Conserving the Mahoosuc Region since 1989



www.mahoosuc.org

### Are Native Plants Always the Best Option?

### Confronting Ecological Crises: Lessons from 50 Years of Androscoggin River Conservation

### An Update on the Intervale Gateway Project



## Are Native Plants Always the Best Option?

Barbara Murphy, Director of Development & Habitat for All Program

**T**he gardening world is buzzing with articles encouraging everyone to garden for pollinators. Creating spaces that support insects, pollinators, and birds allows everyone to be a conservationist. Together, our small spaces help replace the lost habitats of monarch butterflies, native bees, and hummingbirds. Sign me up! I, too, want to feel like my actions make a difference. This message is being heard. For example, in just three years, the National Pollinator Garden Network registered over one million pollinator gardens. Doug

*A bumble bee enjoys the nectar from a verbena bonariensis - Photo by Ben Murphy*

Tallamy's Homegrown National Park has also captured the imagination of many.

Blended into these conversations is strong encouragement to use native plants since some studies suggest that native bees prefer native plants (but not exclusively) for pollen and nectar gathering. This is easier said than done, especially if you are looking for herbaceous perennials. In the spring, most of us head to a local greenhouse or nursery to make our purchases. There, the array of plant choices is stunning and could

include species, cultivars, and nativars. What isn't clear is whether these plant types are equally good for pollinators.

There are many definitions of "native plant" that often contradict each other. One that seems to cover the important points is "native plants are those that have evolved and adapted to a specific location and have remained genetically unaltered by humans." This definition avoids some of the current confusion with plants being labeled Native to the United States, but they aren't necessarily native to a particular state. Or, a plant might be native to your state but not your particular region. This definition implies that plants have adapted to local soil, moisture, and weather conditions and may have specific relationships with some pollinators. Taking this idea to its most stringent level, plant choices would be limited to what occurs/ occurred naturally in your region or, a bit more broadly, in your state.

Native plants are not widely available. Instead, cultivated varieties of native plants, commonly called cultivars or nativars, are abundant. Nativars are plants that have been selected by humans and cross-bred or hybridized by plant breeders seeking desirable characteristics such as different flower color, petal number, disease resistance, or leaf color, that can be maintained through propagation. They are identified by having a name included in a single quotation for example, Echinacea 'White Swan'.

If your goal is to garden for pollinators, how important is it to focus your gardening efforts solely on native plants? As with everything in life, the answer is complicated. To begin with, there is very little long-term data comparing pollinator benefits of native flowers to non-native flowers or cultivars. One small study often cited, conducted in Vermont compared pollinator visits to 14 native species and 12 native cultivars. The results were mixed. For seven of the twelve species tested, pollinators had a clear preference for the straight species. For four of the species, there was no difference between the cultivar and the straight



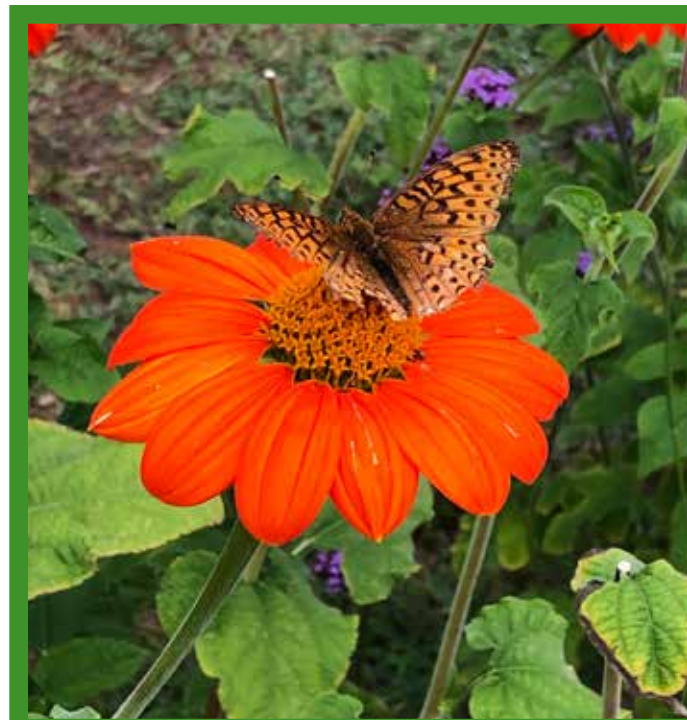
*Wilflowers bloom at Valentine Farm*

species in terms of pollinator attraction. And in one case, pollinators actually preferred the cultivar to the straight species.

Also part of the native plant discussion is the point that some pollinators have evolved specific relationships with native plants. A good example of this is monarch butterflies. Yes, milkweed is required for egg-laying and larva development. However, in the limited experience we have had in the Pollinator Garden at Valentine Farm, monarchs also lay eggs on a cultivar, 'Ice Ballet'. Also, the adult butterfly doesn't feed on milkweed. They need nectar flowers, the more types the better.

And what about the generalists, the insects that collect pollen and nectar from a variety of flowers? Research indicates that flying insects of all types are experiencing population declines. To counteract this trend, planting flowers with different colors, bloom times, heights, and shapes could benefit insects in general in addition to specific pollinators.

Another consideration is how close to native is native enough? Is a plant that is native to Vermont close



*A butterfly visits a tithonia flower in the Pollinator Garden at Valentine Farm*

enough geographically to be considered native to Maine? Importantly, if this plant were planted in Maine, would it attract fewer pollinators than in its native state of Vermont?

Finally, none of us are gardening in a native environment. All of us live on altered ground - trees were removed, land was excavated, lawns installed. A place that once supported mature trees with moist, shady understory and soils now has a neighborhood of houses in full sun with lawn as the dominant crop. Climate change is altering everything in ways we can't imagine or plan for...warmer temperatures, shortened and lengthened seasons, more rain at times, drought spells, earlier flowering, later frosts...sigh.

*If you would like more information on gardening or would like to be involved in the gardening effort at Valentine Farm, contact Barbara at [barbara@mahoosuc.org](mailto:barbara@mahoosuc.org), or 207-824-3806.*

## So what is a gardener to do?

There are no clear answers, but here are some suggestions:

- Cause no harm. Don't knowingly plant invasive species. Even this relatively simple statement is tricky as the invasive species list seems to expand daily.
- Don't use pesticides. Just don't.
- Ask questions. Is the plant you are considering purchased grown without pesticides? The tag says "bee-friendly" which bees benefit? Only by demanding more, better information will the garden industry change its practices and plant offerings.
- Include some native plants in your garden. The insects that are dependent on this class of plants need them to continue to survive. But...
- Include a diversity of plants in your landscape. Diversity begets diversity and don't forget to include trees and shrubs. Often, it is the woody plants that provide food for caterpillars that feed our birds.
- Finally, just garden both for food and flowers. Gardening opens a window into the background of life. Linger in the garden allows us to notice the small things that buzz and hum, the timing of flowers, the way light filters through leaves, the ripening of a tomato. It is also a skill that is disappearing, so...
- share your knowledge and enthusiasm with others!

# Confronting Ecological Crises: Lessons from 50 Years of Androscoggin River Conservation

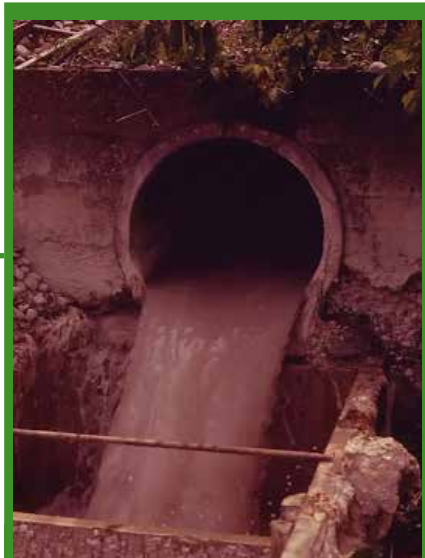
Kirk Siegel, Executive Director

Today, dipping a kayak paddle into the Andro near MLT's Shelburne Riverlands Preserve, we see June sunlight dappling the stony river bottom through clear water. Downstream, a rope swing is getting good use on a summer swimming day, as are fly rods across the state line in Gilead. Same place, but imagine it's 1972: no rope swings or paddlers, no desire for trails such as the Esker Loop, and no kayak rental or fishing guide revenue coming into the local economy.

Mahoosuc Land Trust's dozens of conservation successes on these pages—and those of our partner organizations and agencies—could have been imaginable only by the most visionary half a century ago. One of those, Senator Edmund Muskie of

Rumford, authored the Clean Water Act exactly 50 years ago, ushering in the investment of federal funds to reclaim America's waters for the benefit of the public.

Confronted today by new global environmental crises, MLT's work takes inspiration from the success story of the last 50 years on the Androscoggin. We must work together to write the story for the next 50 years. That story can feature affordable housing, vibrant economies, and places to escape and play. It must also include swaths of conserved land that safeguard shifting habitats as the climate warms. And the story's newest chapter—MLT's Habitat for All program—will show us how **all** of our gardens, yards, and woodlots will build conservation corridors critical to reverse global species decline.



Rumford, ME, 1973 Charles Steinhacker/US National

**1972**  
The Clean Water Act becomes law. The Shelburne River is unsafe to swim in due to pollution.

“By the early 1960s, the Androscoggin had become one of the most severely polluted rivers in the United States. Dissolved oxygen levels from Berlin to Brunswick frequently reached zero during the summer, resulting in the death of virtually all fish and other aquatic life in the river.” – *Cleaning Up the River: Challenges, Opportunities and Achievements*, Bethel Historical Society Online Collections & Catalog

**1989**  
Mahoosuc Land Trust incorporated

**1987**  
Friends of the Androscoggin incorporated

**1990**  
Schools Canoe Landing  
MLT's first acquisition is 7 acres on the Androscoggin with 1,000 feet of river frontage donated by Eva Schools, a collaborative effort with the Friends of the Androscoggin.

**1993**  
Philbrook Islands  
Roy and Mary Newton of Gorham, New Hampshire, donate the Philbrook Islands totaling 21 acres in Gilead and including an exemplary mixed hardwood floodplain forest.

**1991**  
Kendall Island  
A 35-acre island near Newt's Landing in West Bethel donated by Becky Kendall in memory of her husband, Maurice Kendall.

**1997**  
Newt's Landing  
Roy and Mary Newton donate Newt's Landing, MLT's first of many boat landings for public access to the Androscoggin River.

**Hay Crossing**  
Becky Kendall donates the Hay Crossing parcel, including 735 feet of frontage on the Androscoggin.

**1999**  
Willis Island  
Helen Dolloff donates 12-acre Willis Island, located in the Androscoggin in Hanover and including prime wildlife habitat.

**2000**  
Androscoggin Canoe Trail  
MLT establishes the Androscoggin Canoe Trail, a series of access points between Shelburne, NH and Rumford, ME. The project is supported by staff of the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program.



**2001**  
Moran's Landing  
The Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Program approves and funds the Canoe Trail Committee's application to purchase Moran's Landing in Hanover, and MLT's second boat landing is born.

**Gilead Landing**  
MLT creates a fourth public river access site via a generous 30-year agreement with landowners, Larry Stifler and Mary McFadden.

**Valentine Farm Conservation Center**  
Richard and Mary Valentine leave their 142-acre family property to MLT, with its wetlands, floodplain habitats, and significant frontage on the Androscoggin. Valentine Farm Conservation Center is born.

**2018**  
McCoy-Chapman Forest  
Relatives of Ginnie McCoy deed this 493-acre parcel with over a mile of Androscoggin frontage. The parcel includes the popular Esker Trail with its intimate approaches to the swirling river.

**2019**  
Hastings Farm  
Maine Farmland Trust assigns the Hastings Farm agricultural conservation easement to Mahoosuc Land Trust on 174 acres of prime agricultural land with 3/4 mile Androscoggin frontage.

**2006**  
Goodnow Island  
Patty Dooen donates nine acres of Goodnow Island in the Androscoggin River at West Bethel. The island is recognized for its plentiful wild grapes and abundant wildlife.

**2014**  
Hastings Landing  
MLT acquires a 3/4-acre parcel of land on the Androscoggin River at Rumford Center and develops MLT's 3rd public river access site.



Shelburne Riverlands, 2021. Katie Stuart

**2021**  
Shelburne Riverlands  
MLT teams up with local volunteers and conservation leaders, the Town of Shelburne Conservation Commission, and The Conservation Fund to acquire over 30 islands and 9 mainland parcels located along a wild and scenic 8.7-mile stretch of the Androscoggin.

**2009**  
Bethel Pathway Extension  
A major grant from the Maine Recreational Trails Program allows for the extension of the Bethel Pathway along the Androscoggin to MLT's Intervale Gateway.

**2013**  
Crow Mountain Easement  
The Werner Family donates a conservation easement on their 240-acre Crow Mountain Farm in Shelburne, NH, protecting land from the summit of Crow Mountain to the banks of the Androscoggin River.



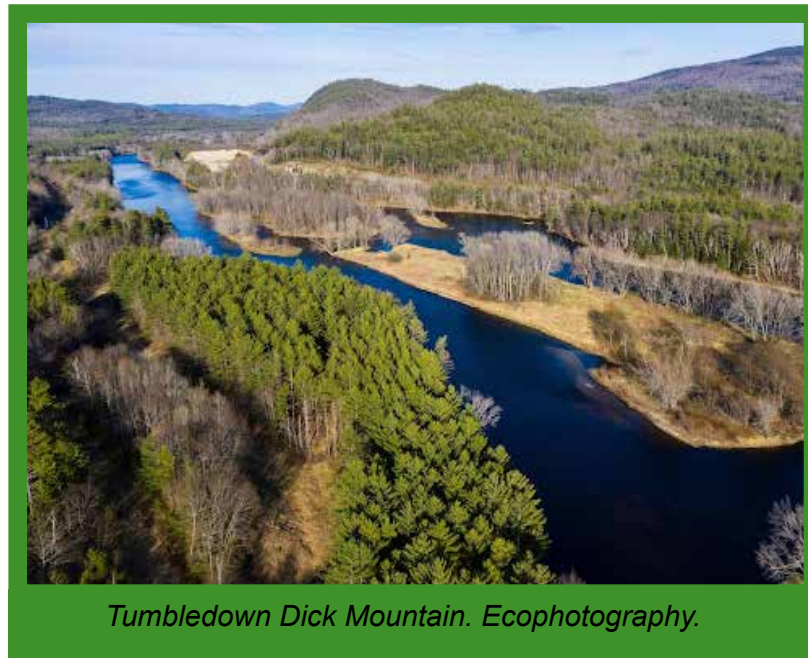
### Stratton Meadow

Richard Stratton and Sandra Francis donate a 13-acre hayfield, with more than 1500 feet of Androscoggin frontage adjacent to MLT's Moran's Landing public boat launch.

2021

### Tumbledown Dick Mountain

MLT signs a contract to purchase this 978-acre property with over a mile of Androscoggin frontage, highly prized for fishing and boating, including an unimproved boat access site with huge potential. If fundraising is successful, MLT will acquire the property in 2023 as part of the MLT Campaign for the Androscoggin.



Tumbledown Dick Mountain. Ecophotography.



## The Intervale Gateway Tansy Control Project

Spenser Williams, Land Steward

What's up with all the orange tape? For those of you coming and going on Walkers Mills Road there has been some new color introduced on the Intervale Gateway: blaze orange flagging tape and a good amount of it, too. For a few weeks before the dandelion took off, these orange flags were clearly visible stretching across the field. The Mahoosuc Land Trust Intervale Gateway Subcommittee has recently enacted the first steps of a Habitat Management Plan to attempt the control of the non-native and invasive Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*). The goal is restore an old field environment on the Gateway Preserve that includes goldenrods, asters, and milkweed. These flags mark locations where, with help from the Gould Academy Outing Club, subcommittee members removed

approximately 80 Common Tansy plants by digging and bagging root balls. The digging method resulted in a 75% success rate in preventing regrowth of Common Tansy in test plots in 2021.

Common Tansy, with nicknames bitter buttons, garden Tansy, cow bitter, and golden buttons, has a complex history in North America, and its abundance in and around Bethel is unique in the state of Maine.

Common Tansy has a certain fecundity that presents real, large-scale, and expensive challenges to farmers, ranchers, and field owners. A prolific seed producer, a single Common Tansy plant can create 150,000 seeds in a single season that are easily spread by wind. Additionally, Common Tansy spreads rhizomatically, sending out runners. Well established plants are often

found in constellations joined with nearby root balls. According to the US Department of Agriculture, Common Tansy is more common in the north than the south, widely distributed across the Great Plains, and occurs in almost every county in New England and New York.

Common Tansy has achieved this great distribution with particular help from humans, as it was cultivated for medicinal purposes beginning with the ancient Greeks and later spreading across North America as a widely utilitarian plant that traveled with European settlers. Documented uses of Common Tansy include the treatment of intestinal worms, face wash, food preservative, pest repellent, an abortive, a cocktail garnish and many more. With a scent similar to camphor, the leaves and flowers in Common Tansy contain thujone and are toxic if ingested in large quantities. Common Tansy was once featured so prominently in New England funerals that it fell out of public favor due to its association with death and morbidity. More recently, Common Tansy has been cultivated and introduced to stabilize disturbed soils at mining sites and along riverbanks. This was the case in New Hampshire and the reason for its introduction downstream along the Androscoggin and into Maine.

In and around Bethel, Common Tansy is abundant and well established along the Bethel Pathway and Intervale-Gateway, the lower field at Valentine Farm, and on two of the lower fields within the McCoy-Chapman Preserve. These areas are good examples of the invasive nature of Common Tansy if left unchecked. In all of these places, with the exception of the Gateway field, the Tansy is too dense to make digging practical, leaving mechanized tilling and reseeding the next best means of controlling the spread. One volunteer effort in October 2021 aimed at removing Common Tansy seed heads in the lower McCoy field; an assessment has yet to be made of the effectiveness of this method.

It is for this reason that the Intervale Gateway Subcommittee, with members Laurie Winsor, Jeff Martin, Paul Motts, and Barry Donahue, adopted the Common Tansy Management Plan in March 2022. The plan, written by Motts, calls for a combination of digging and also mowing the areas in the Gateway field where it is impractical to dig. This regular mowing will continue through the growing season to prevent the Tansy from seeding. And each of those orange flags will soon be receiving a Common Milkweed (*Asclepias*

*syriaca*) transplant in the coming weeks, with the goal of increasing biodiversity within the Intervale Gateway Preserve and offering habitat niches in an old field environment.

Many wildlife species whose life cycles are adapted to field environments are losing habitat as more fields are developed, or frequently mowed for hay production. It is the responsibility of the Mahoosuc Land Trust to manage its properties to promote biodiversity and offer diverse habitats for native species.

*MLT is always looking for folks to help plan and care for our properties. To learn more, email [spenser@mahoosuc.org](mailto:spenser@mahoosuc.org)*



Common Tansy



A Gould Student digs up Common Tansy

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