

PRESS RELEASE



New England
Forestry Foundation



Downeast Lakes
LAND TRUST

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Saving Downeast Forests

Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership completes a 7-year, \$34.8 million project to protect land, lakes and livelihoods in Washington County, Maine.

The New England Forestry Foundation and the Downeast Lakes Land Trust announced this week the completion of an ambitious \$34.8 million fundraising effort to permanently protect 342,000 acres of forest and hundreds of miles of remote lakefront in Downeast Maine. In all, the partnership has secured 445 miles of lakeshore on 60 lakes and 1,500 miles of riverfront in Washington County. The completed project contributes to a block of over 1.3 million contiguous protected acres spanning the Maine - New Brunswick border.

The project, launched seven years ago, ensures that the region's lakes, streams, and forests will avoid the haphazard development that is changing many of Maine's remote areas. The land will remain open in perpetuity for traditional uses, including hunting, fishing, other types of outdoor recreation, and timber production.

"Grand Lake Stream is one of the premier landlocked salmon fisheries in the entire country and sits in the heart of one of Maine's most pristine areas," said Maine Governor John Baldacci. "This project is noteworthy for the depth and vigor of local support and the many positive economic benefits it brings to businesses, guides, loggers and residents in the region. This complex and historic undertaking, spearheaded by the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership, builds a legacy that will benefit generations to come."

The protected land will continue to serve as an economic engine for the region, providing jobs for Registered Maine Guides, forest workers, and sporting camp owners and their staffs.

“I’ve always associated Grand Lake Stream with the people I’ve known over the years as much as the landscape itself,” said Syd Lea, whose family has long ties to the region and who served on the leadership committee charged with raising funds for the project. “I didn’t want this to be a big set-aside just for people who had the money to visit here. I liked the idea of a working landscape.”

The Grand Lake Stream-based Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT) acquired the 27,080-acre Farm Cove Community Forest, located just west of the village of Grand Lake Stream. The forest includes 62 miles of shorefront on West Grand, Pocumcus, Sysladobsis, Wabassus, and Third and Fourth Machias Lakes. DLLT is managing the property for sustainable forestry, wildlife habitat protection, and outdoor recreation, and has established a 3,560-acre ecological reserve around Fourth Machias Lake.

The New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) now holds a conservation easement on the Farm Cove Community Forest and on an additional 312,000 acres of forestland currently owned by Typhoon, LLC and managed by Wagner Forest Management Ltd. The easement prevents development on the land, but permits timber harvesting, hunting, and other traditional uses. The restrictions will convey with the land in perpetuity, meaning that any future landholders must abide by the conservation easement.

“The area speaks for itself,” says Jake Lea, the conservationist (and Syd Lea’s brother) who headed the Leadership Committee. “There are lakes, wetlands, nesting areas, wildlife habitats, and all the flora and fauna along the lakeshore. It’s an area that just screams, ‘Leave me this way!’”

The protection process began in 1999 when a handful of Grand Lake Stream residents realized that the region no longer was immune from the development pressure sweeping much of the state. Recent land sales made it clear that change was quickly approaching as longtime timberland owners sold off their holdings. Without action, the woods and lakes that provided the base for the region’s timber and outdoor recreation economy would be carved up into vacation home lots.

"I think the biggest concern was fear of change and uncertainty of the future," said Stephen Keith, a Grand Lake Stream resident who attended the first meeting and later would become the

land trust's first executive director. "We knew that through our stewardship, the Farm Cove Community Forest could set an example of what can be accomplished when a group of determined people work hard to save the place they love."

An ad hoc committee of local guides and residents eventually became the nonprofit Downeast Lakes Land Trust, which identified the lands most in need of protection, then sought assistance to raise the needed money. DLLT partnered with the New England Forestry Foundation, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit forest conservation organization with experience managing conservation deals of this magnitude. The two groups, working in tandem with the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust of Forest City, created the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership.

The partners first purchased a 500-foot-wide corridor along fifty miles of Spednic Lake and the St. Croix River, which forms the Canadian border with Maine, a project launched earlier by the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust, and transferred that land to the state's Division of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Department of Conservation. The partnership then turned to the larger task.

Raising significant funds to protect land in a remote, little-known area of Maine was not without its difficulties. But many generous individuals, public agencies, businesses, and foundations answered when called.

Among the major benefactors was Elmina B. Sewall of Kennebunk, Maine, the largest individual donor, who contributed \$6.2 million before her death in 2005; the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation subsequently granted another \$1 million. Wal-Mart contributed \$6.145 million through its "Acres for America" program administered by The Conservation Fund and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Other large donors included The Nature Conservancy, The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Open Space Institute, C.F. Adams Charitable Trust, the State's Land for Maine's Future Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Sweet Water Trust. The North Cape Oil Spill Settlement Fund provided a grant of \$1.15 million, through an agreement to protect loon breeding grounds following a 1996 oil tanker spill off Rhode Island that killed 400 wintering loons. In addition, NEFF's donors from all across New England and many contributors (in Grand Lake Stream and beyond) recruited by NEFF, DLLT and the Leadership Committee rallied around the cause to protect this large expanse of working forest.

In May 2005, with the land purchase option set to expire, the Partnership found itself short of its fundraising goal. Real estate prices had soared since the option's signing, making it all the more critical that the deal be completed at the initially negotiated price.

"When the time came to close and we were \$6 million short, we weren't about to walk away," said Tim Ingraham, president of NEFF's Board of Directors.

NEFF's board voted to mortgage a sizable forest it owns in Groton, Massachusetts, to secure \$6 million in loans. "Some saw that as a risky decision in terms of normal land trust behavior," Ingraham said. "But we saw it as a good business decision. With all the local support and enthusiasm for the project, we weren't about to let up until we pushed it to the finish." And it worked.

The \$34.8 million project includes \$2 million set aside for a pair of endowments to guarantee compliance with the easements and to aid in managing the Community Forest.

And the story is not over yet.

"This project established the Downeast Lakes Land Trust as a remarkable success in a region of Maine with outstanding conservation opportunities," said Mark Berry, DLLT's Executive Director. "There are some large tracts of forestland in our area still at risk of inappropriate development, and we are working to protect their undeveloped lakeshores and wildlife habitats -- and secure public access -- for future generations."

About the New England Forestry Foundation

The New England Forestry Foundation is a Massachusetts-based nonprofit established in 1944 to permanently protect key New England woodlands and advocate for responsible forest practices. NEFF currently manages 130 properties throughout New England, totaling more than 23,000 acres, and holds conservation easements on over a million additional acres. In addition to the leadership role the organization played in the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership, NEFF was instrumental in raising more than \$28 million to secure a conservation easement on more than 750,000 acres of Maine timberlands owned by the Pingree family.

About the Downeast Lakes Land Trust

In 2001, residents of interior Washington County formed the Downeast Lakes Land Trust to protect the unique natural resources of the region. DLLT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

based in Grand Lake Stream, with a mission to contribute to the long-term economic and environmental well-being of the Downeast Lakes region through the conservation and exemplary management of its forests and waters. DLLT received *Down East* magazine's prestigious Environmental Award in 2006, and was named a 2006 Landowner of the Year by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. DLLT is currently working to secure conservation and public access on additional lands in the Grand Lake Stream area.

About the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust

The Woodie Wheaton Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the protection, preservation, and conservation of land and water in the Chiputneticook Lakes region of eastern Maine for the benefit of the general public. Based in Forest City, Maine, between East Grand Lake and Spednic Lake, on the international boundary between Maine and New Brunswick, the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust has initiated and overseen the conservation and protection of more than a hundred miles of unspoiled shoreline in the Chiputneticook Lakes region.

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