



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **For Immediate Release**

June 13, 2008

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### **Downeast Lakes Land Trust to Add 6,644 Acres to Community Forest Half-way to \$3.2 Million Capital Campaign Goal**

**Grand Lake Stream, Maine:** The Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT) announced this week that it plans to purchase 6,644 acres of forestland around Wabassus Lake in central Washington County. The current owner, Timbervest, LLC, is a private investor group that bought the land in 2004 to keep it from being developed or closed to public access, and has offered the property to DLLT at substantially below its market value. DLLT intends to transfer a conservation easement on the property to the State of Maine, to practice sustainable forestry on its woodlands, and to keep it open to the public forever, with guaranteed access for hiking, canoeing, camping, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and other recreation.

The Wabassus Lake Tract contains almost nine miles of frontage on Wabassus Lake and the Getchell Pug Lakes, four miles of streams in the St. Croix River watershed, two miles of Machias River tributaries, 550 acres of wetlands, and upland areas that include Wabassus Mountain and Third Lake Ridge. It lies on the southern boundary of the 27,080-acre Farm Cove Community Forest, which DLLT purchased in 2005 as part of the recently concluded \$34.8 million Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership. It is sandwiched between nine miles of a state-owned 1,000-foot-wide Machias River corridor shoreline conservation zone to the west and the 312,000-acre Sunrise Easement held by the New England Forestry Foundation.

Governor John Baldacci, Senators Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe, former Senator George Mitchell, and Congressman Mike Michaud, recognizing the statewide significance of the project, serve as Honorary Co-Chairs of the Wabassus Lake Project Committee. "I commend the Downeast Lakes Land Trust for tackling the Wabassus Lake Project immediately following the

Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership,” says Governor Baldacci. “The land trust’s community forest approach to land protection and forest management is home-grown from local needs for both economic opportunity and natural resource conservation. The Wabassus Lake Project will protect forever three beautiful lakes, productive forestland and jobs in the woods, water quality for endangered Atlantic salmon in the headwaters of the Machias River, the major snowmobile trail across Washington County, and many other opportunities for outdoor recreation.”

DLLT Executive Director Mark Berry credits residents of Grand Lake Stream and the surrounding area for providing the vision and energy that established the Land Trust and sustains it seven years later: “The Farm Cove Community Forest exists because local people recognized the need to work together to preserve our livelihood and quality of life. The Wabassus Lake Project will succeed because that cooperative spirit still drives us. Local residents and people with strong connections to this area continue to give their time and money, knowing their efforts will be appreciated by future generations.”

DLLT has formed the Wabassus Lake Project Committee to oversee a \$3.2 million capital campaign to cover the land purchase and transaction expenses; road repairs; administrative and fund raising costs; and management and stewardship endowment funds. The seven-person committee of DLLT Directors, staff, and supporters is led by James P. (“Jay”) Petri of Bolton, Massachusetts, a fifth-generation campowner on nearby Sysladobsis Lake. Petri says, “The Wabassus Lake Tract will be a wonderful addition to our Farm Cove Community Forest, with spectacular undeveloped lakeshores and great wildlife habitat. We are excited by this opportunity to protect it and guarantee continued public access, and I am delighted to announce that we have raised over \$1.6 million and passed the half-way point in our campaign.”

DLLT has partnered with The Nature Conservancy and the Maine Department of Conservation in applying for federal funding for the Wabassus Lake parcel and a nearby property surrounding Washington Bald Mountain in a joint proposal entitled “Machias River Phase III: Washington Bald Mountain and Wabassus Lake.” This proposal has been selected as the nation’s highest priority U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program project for Fiscal Year 2009 funding. If Congress funds the Forest Legacy program in FY 2009, the federal funds would be applied to help the State acquire conservation easements and allow for public access on both parcels.

The Wabassus Lake Project Committee awaits decisions on proposals for funding through the Land for Maine's Future Program and the federal North American Wetlands Conservation Act. The project's successful completion will depend on a diverse pool of funding from government, charitable foundations, corporations, and individual donors. A generous anonymous donor has recently offered a \$60,000 matching challenge gift to DLLT for the Wabassus Lake Project – individual donations will be matched dollar for dollar, doubling the value of each contribution to the project. Additional matching funds may be available from The Northeast Land Trust Consortium, a program of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

### **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 and way of life of their region. DLLT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit 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 purchased its 27,080-acre Farm Cove Community Forest in 2005 through the Downeast Lakes Forestry Partnership, and it sustainably manages it for wildlife habitat, forest products, and public recreation, as described on its web site, [www.downeastlakes.org](http://www.downeastlakes.org). 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.

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