

THE QUODDY TIDES

Vol. 39, No. 15

The Most Easterly Published Newspaper in the US


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Conservation efforts bear fruit in lakes region

by Gail Menzel

In only six years since it was established in 2001, the Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT) has acquired some 27,000 acres of undeveloped lake region land in Washington County, participated in partnerships that acquired conservation easements on more than 312,000 additional acres, and conducted a successful \$31.5 million capital campaign to fund their mission. According to Executive Director Mark Berry, who spoke to the Fundy Chapter of Maine Audubon at their June 19 meeting, the Grand Lakes Stream organization is now ready to embark on an ambitious new effort - the acquisition of 6,600 acres that includes eight miles of shorefront surrounding Wabassus Lake and the Getchell Pugs.

Wabassus Lake, "a trophy smallmouth bass lake," will take "at least a year of hard work," says Berry. The scenic property is surrounded on three sides by conservation lands already protected by the trust or one of its partners, such as the New England Forestry Foundation.

Berry says the DLLT emphasizes both economic and environmental benefits in managing the sustainable forest known as Farm Cove Community Forest. While the operation doesn't yet produce "a lot of income" for the land trust, "In 50 years or so we expect it will be highly profitable," he thinks.

In managing wildlife habitat, the trust identifies particular species and provides for their unique needs. In mature forests, the targeted species are white tailed deer, American marten and the black-throated blue warbler. In other areas, the focus is on habitat that encourages American woodcock, ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare, Atlantic salmon, brook trout, beaver, bald eagle, wood frog, spotted salamander, pileated woodpecker and black bear. Access by the human species is also a consideration in planning hiking trails, remote campsites, and educational programs geared to children and adults.

DLLT volunteers have assisted in the enormous task of removing debris that has been dumped in forestlands over the years. "Truckloads" of discarded appliances have been taken out, with more work to be done to reach the point where annual roadside cleanups will be sufficient for maintenance.

Asked about the organization's success in fundraising, Berry said he attributes it to "community support." While area residents don't provide the majority of DLLT's revenue, a high percentage of them do offer financial support at some level. "That local support convinces others to support the project," and donations come from individuals, foundations and government sources in about equal proportions. Maine Guides who live and work in the region are active supporters of the organization. The land trust's website, <www.downeastlakes.org>, links to that of the Grand Lake Stream Guides Association as well as the Grand Lake Stream Chamber of Commerce.

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