

OVERVIEW & DEFINITIONS

Conservation is just as much a tool for protecting natural resources as it is for preserving people’s ways of life, especially when that lifestyle is tied inseparably to the land. Kennebec Land Trust (KLT) recognizes the inherent value of working with communities to build a conservation ethic that benefits both people and the natural world.

Across the conservation movement, an awareness is growing of the need to build relationships with the Indigenous people who have lived for thousands of years on the land where conservation is taking place. This can benefit all parties as they share knowledge and develop new ways of working together.

This pamphlet offers a glimpse into some of the recent actions that have stemmed from bonds between Native groups and conservationists.

Land justice: The process of healing social inequalities through returning or providing access to land for traditionally underserved communities, including Indigenous people.

Wabanaki: Meaning “The people of the dawn,” an umbrella term referring to the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Micmac, and Abenaki people, many of whom live in this area which we now call Maine.

Abenaki: (pronounced “A-ben-a-key”) The Wabanaki tribe whose homelands include KLT’s service region.

First Light: A “learning journey” of land organizations and Native tribes in Maine, formed in 2018, that uses multiple strategies to advance dialogue and fuel action toward land justice for Wabanaki people.

HISTORY IN BRIEF

Since the Laurentide ice sheet retreated over 11,000 years ago, the People of the Dawnland have hunted, fished, traveled through, and lived on the land, giving natural features names that are both cultural and practical. “Kennebec,” from the Abenaki word *kinēpk* or *kinēpkw*, translates to “deep river.”

The arrival of European colonists brought both disease and aggressive expansion into Native lands. The Wabanaki lost possession of a vast portion of the land they lived on as a result of conflicts and broken treaties. The Norridgewock Massacre in 1724 is an example of a deliberate attempt to forcibly remove Wabanaki people from their homelands.

Today, the Wabanaki people and culture remain vibrant and strong throughout modern-day Maine.

TRADITIONAL RESOURCES

Wabanaki creation stories feature brown ash and sweetgrass. This oral tradition underscores the cultural significance of these species. Both have been used in Wabanaki basket-weaving since time immemorial.

But what happens when these resources are accessible only on private property? Conservationists and Wabanaki leaders are beginning to work together to address this issue and increase Wabanaki land access using land justice strategies.



Anthoxanthum nitens, sweetgrass. Photo: M. Lovit.

WHAT’S NEXT?

It’s important to remember that establishing relationships between previously unacquainted groups takes time, commitment, and energy. Equally important to keep in mind is that Native groups themselves have often been overloaded by reactive, though well-intentioned, outreach. Before taking steps to engage with Wabanaki people directly, First Light encourages conservation organizations to engage in internal dialogue about their intentions and goals.

By expanding the practice of conservation in Kennebec County, we have a chance to build more connected, socially responsible, and conservation-minded communities. Whether this comes in the form of advocacy, resource-sharing, or helping return lands to Native stewardship (or a combination of the three), Kennebec Land Trust is beginning to consider its role in this important process.



A full listing of Kennebec Land Trust properties and their recreational uses, and an interactive map with directions, can be found at our website: www.tkl.org.

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This brochure was created by 2021 KLT summer intern Johnny Robinson. Special thanks to Colin Brown, Susan Caldwell, Jane Davis, Peter Forbes, Suzanne Greenlaw, Theresa Kerchner, Marilee Lovit, Janie Matrisciano, Ella McDonald, Alivia Moore, Ciona Ulbrich, and KLT donors and supporters.



TOWARD LAND JUSTICE: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION WITH THE WABANAKI

By Johnny Robinson
KLT Summer Intern 2021



Gott Pasture Preserve. Photo by Jane Davis.

*The **Kennebec Land Trust** works cooperatively with landowners and communities to conserve the forests, shorelands, fields, and wildlife that define central Maine.*

SOME EXAMPLES OF LAND JUSTICE ACTIONS

CO-MANAGEMENT

Under the Tribal Self Governance Act of 1994, Native tribes can petition for co-management of public lands managed by the Department of the Interior. Government and the tribes must then collaborate on management decisions. Minnesota's Grand Portage National Monument is an example of a successful collaboration along these lines.



Grand Portage National Monument (Source: nps.gov).

INTENTIONAL ACCESS RIGHTS

Though we like to think of our conservation lands as “open for all to enjoy,” social factors can still be a barrier to access for many groups. Some organizations have taken deliberate steps to create a safer atmosphere for Native people.

Acadia National Park closes down one of its mountains one day a year to limit the potential for disturbance while Wabanaki people conduct a spiritual ceremony at the summit.

The Appalachian Mountain Club provided a group of Wabanaki people with an access permit for a stand of brown ash on one of their properties. The group visited the property and determined that one of the trees was worthwhile to cut and use for basket-weaving.

Maine land trusts are crafting access permits to enshrine traditional use rights on properties.

LAND RETURN

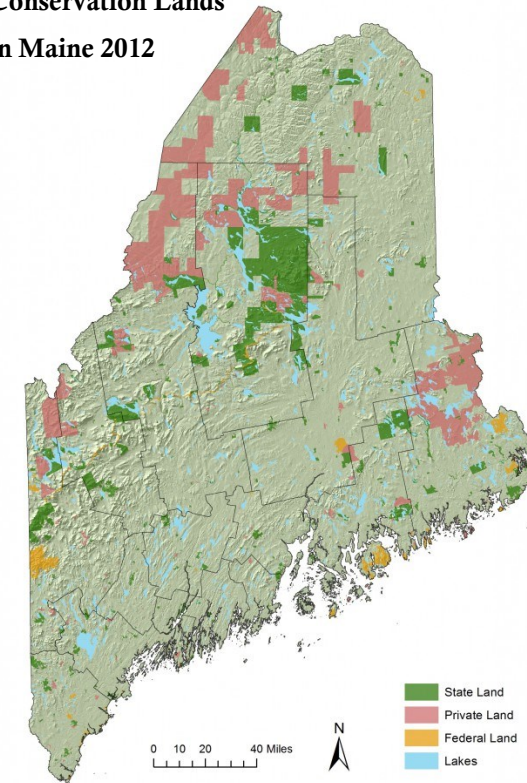
This past year, the Pasamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township reacquired the vast majority of an island on Big Lake in Downeast Maine. Originally promised to the Passamaquoddy after the American Revolution, the island was later illegally sold by the State of Maine during the 1800s. Recently, 140 acres on the island known as Kuwesuwi Monihq, or “Pine Island,” were returned to Native hands with the assistance of First Light and Maine's chapter of The Nature Conservancy, the latter of which provided funding to purchase the property from its previous owner.

Quoted in the Portland Press-Herald, the Tribe's historic preservation officer Donald Soctomah declares “This is an important step for the Tribe. It's also a great example of a partnership where we have groups of land owners and conservation groups and private individuals that are interested in doing the right thing.”



Kuwesuwi Monihq (Pine Island) in the foreground on Big Lake in Downeast Maine (Source: Downeast Lakes Land Trust.).

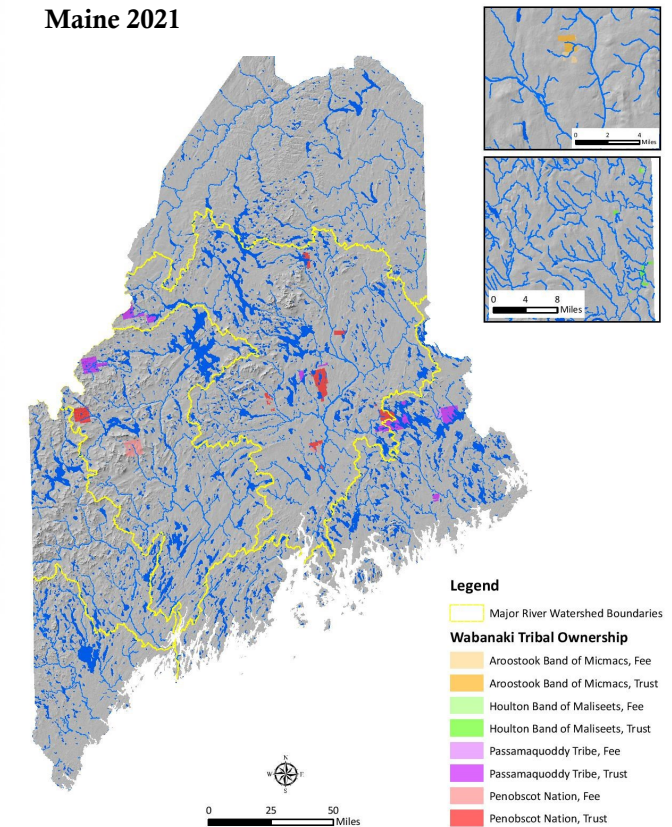
Conservation Lands in Maine 2012



Source: Maine Office of GIS, extracted from Colby College.

MAPS OF CONSERVED LANDS AND TRIBAL LANDS IN MAINE

Wabanaki Lands in Maine 2021



Source: Forest Society of Maine, extracted from the First Light website.

These maps give a sense of the difference between the amount of land in Maine designated as conservation land (~23%) and the amount held by Wabanaki tribes and nations (~1%). What can these images tell those of us in the conservation movement about the importance of sharing land and resources?

There is a natural overlap between conservation practices and Wabanaki stewardship of land. Through a belief in the reciprocity between people, the earth, and all living things, Indigenous people have lived sustainably with the land that is now called Maine for thousands of years.