

HEALING  
AND  
REPAIRING

RE-IMAGINING CONSERVATION  
FROM WHERE OUR LIVES  
INTERSECT

BY PETER FORBES

*For Maine Coast Heritage Trust*

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## PETER'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Healing and Repairing* is a joint project with Maine Coast Heritage Trust to offer observations on a moment when much is evolving in the relationship between people and place in Maine, and to share an essay that respectfully stretches and encourages the hearts and minds of those who care about both. The audience for this essay is people everywhere who think, work and devote their lives to healthy soils, forests, oceans and people. This is a story mostly about Maine; hopefully people from other places will be able to see themselves and their situations within this story.

There are so many powerful community-building innovations happening in Maine right now and this essay explores only a few that are happening on the land. I hope my efforts to share these stories encourages others to tell their own stories of change, community and connection.

I'm deeply grateful to each of the people interviewed in the essay for their time, expertise and candor. Their stories of change are this essay. Several who were interviewed joined other colleagues to go further by commenting on what I wrote and challenging my conclusions. I thank these colleagues for their collaboration: Danyelle O'Hara, Jay Espy, Warren Whitney, Angela Twitchell, David Montague, Tim Glidden, Mike Tetrault, David Vail, Sydney Lea, Deb Bicknell and Theresa Kerchner. I have an especially large debt of gratitude to Tom Haslett, Roger Milliken, Warren Whitney and Judy Anderson, who dug in quite deep, called out where my vision was lacking and really pushed me to think harder about a number of important things. If this essay has resonance, it's largely because of their ideas and willingness to urge me on.

Finally, that you are reading something at all is entirely due to Tim Glidden and Warren Whitney at Maine Coast Heritage Trust. It's an honor to collaborate with all of you.



### **About Peter**

Peter is a facilitator, writer and edge walker who works across the boundaries of profession and culture, and this has made his work influential to the fields of leadership development, philanthropy and conservation. Peter calls his work “making allies” and seeks to strengthen the shared narrative between social justice and environmentalism. A former vice president of Trust for Public Land, and the founder and former executive director of Center for Whole Communities, Peter cares most about strengthening peoples’ relationships to one another and to the land that sustains them. He practices what he preaches from his family’s working farm in Vermont, and he travels out across our country to help people, communities and organizations have conversations that transform and heal. Peter is the author or photographer of seven books. You can learn more at [Peterforbes.org](http://Peterforbes.org).

*A note about the charts: the six charts reproduced in this essay represent an incomplete distillation and summation of thinking gathered from a dozen workshops with conservation leaders across the country conducted by Peter Forbes, Danyelle O'Hara, Deb Bicknell, Judy Anderson and Ernie Atencio between 2012 and 2015.*

## THE STORY IN BRIEF

Maine is a place shaped by stories. The most important ones are about our relationships, the kind we have with places and the kind we have with each other. This essay explores dozens of efforts underway today to re-think the promise of conservation as bringing those two stories together: repairing and, perhaps, healing some of the divides between us while strengthening people's connections to a healthy landscape.

Through examining a uniquely modern lineage of conservation from Rockefeller to Rachel Carson to Helen and Scott Nearing, these different perspectives have created an ethic with three goals: protect a place, protect peoples' relationship to that place and invite new people to share in those benefits. This essay looks at land trusts working on food security, on rebuilding local wood economies, on fostering local self-determination in the face of global investment, on understanding how to sustain a fishing industry, on improving how some rural cultures treat each other and how we might consider sharing what we have through a new national park.

If we are willing to change the types of conversation we have and to broaden the audience we commit to speaking with, then conservation can support a much broader range of issues and opportunities. Conservationists have a longer time horizon and many have unique privileges and expectations that contrast with local views. If conservationists can raise their awareness to consider patterns of class, local fears and shorter time perspectives, they can work through many of these divisions and forge understandings to be able to share power and neighbor well. And in this effort to better understand one another, we are learning the skills to protect land in a much more durable way.

In other words, by expanding our awareness and strengthening our knowledge and understanding of people and their needs, we might grow a land-based culture across an entire state that leaves nobody out. Land trusts are taking innovative risks: seeing new connections, building relationships, adjusting patterns of behavior, embracing new strategies, defining new measures of success; these risks are changing the character of these land trusts and creating new opportunities.

These pages explore who owns conservation and how we make sure it belongs to all of us.



# HEALING AND REPAIRING

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. <i>Chapter One:</i> Imagine This.....	17
2. <i>Chapter Two:</i> A Story or Two Maines.....	33
3. <i>Chapter Three:</i> Who Owns Conservation?.....	44
4. <i>Chapter Four:</i> Human Wellbeing.....	52
5. <i>Chapter Five:</i> Commitment and Creativity.....	66
6. <i>Chapter Six:</i> Being in Service.....	74

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Imagine This

Imagine if you can, a very old place. A place whose bedrock has 1.5 billion years of history. This place has existed for a third of the entire swirling, crashing, colliding life of our planet. Imagine, if you can, that this very old place once had ice atop its bedrock a mile high, the weight of which pressed that bedrock down a few hundred feet. It has 35,000 square miles and many, many lakes, some 2,600 of which have never been named. It has the largest alpine area east of the Rockies. It has 18 million acres of forests that touch the sea at a coastline that runs for 3,500 miles. This place has an inner passage between the coast and the Atlantic created by some 3,000 offshore islands. This very old place is where the sun first touches our nation each day. When the Laurentian Ice sheet began to withdraw about 11,000 years ago, people began to occupy this very old place. The first ones were called the Wabanaki, and many others followed.

Imagine this today: there's a rural community of 150 people in Maine's easternmost county, a place known as much for its healthy forests and remote lakes as it is for folks who work hard to make ends meet, who look out for one another. They have always relied on themselves to improve their situation and on this day they feel threatened: all the land around them, as far as the eye could see, was put up for sale by the investment firm who owned it all. Syd Lea, a man with long roots in Grand Lake Stream and who happens also to be the poet laureate of

Vermont, told me: *“If that land gets sold, everything we’ve relied upon will be gone. Our way of life will be done for.”* A dozen folks, both full time and seasonal residents, met at a table outside the general store and, over a few years of working together, figured out how to become a land trust – the Downeast Lakes Land Trust – and to buy and manage their own 57,000-acre community forest set within a much larger 370,000 acres of protected lands on which, they vowed, there will never be a “No Trespassing” sign.

Created *“by and through”* as opposed to *“for”* their community, this larger forest has ecological reserves of about 10,000 acres, and the greater part of the land is gardened at a huge scale by the community to provide healthy habitat for species and healthy relationships between nature and people. David Montague, the executive director of this land trust told me, *“We walk a thin line between conserving land for other species of life and conserving that land for human enjoyment. We fully recognize the intrinsic value of wild nature, but we also see a need to respect and engage the people who live here. The danger is if we go too far in either direction, we risk losing the big picture. And holding onto that big picture is really hard and really valuable.”*

Syd Lea paints an image this way: *“I don’t want to live in a world that doesn’t have wilderness but I also don’t want to live in rural New England that doesn’t have rewards and opportunity. The biggest reward is that relationship to nature and to earn a life through that relationship.”*

Imagine a coastal Maine land trust that manages a farmer’s market visited by 3,000 people on a summer’s day, and aspires to confront hunger and to support farmers’ efforts to protect their ways of life. Angela

Twitchell, the executive director of the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, puts it succinctly: *“If there’s a healthy food economy, farmers will be successful, and they will keep their land in farming rather than selling it for development. This benefits the whole community.”* Her board and staff are working regionally with farmers to create a healthier community for all of us. Angela told me, *“The only way conservation happens in the long run is if people care about it. Conservation won’t be durable if people aren’t connected to it.”*

What would Maine be like if we could nurture a local wood economy similar to Angela’s vision for a local food economy? Theresa Kerchner of Kennebec Land Trust is wrestling with this question and working to figure it out. Half of her land trust’s conservation portfolio is protecting “forever wild preserves” and the other half is making land available to people for hay, timber, blueberries and places for people to have a community bonfire on a winter day. Every year since 2009, Kennebec Land Trust has put 100 elementary and high school students through a sustainable forestry program. Theresa says, *“One of our goals is for people in Maine to be able to afford to buy things made in Maine. All the lumber and other wood products that Americans want have to come from somewhere, and I would prefer that they were made well by someone near here who makes a livable wage and came from a sustainably managed forest. The conservation ethic in Maine didn’t arise solely from preserving land in the Rockefeller tradition; it also arose from being in the woods and on the ocean earning your living from that relationship.”*

David Vail, an *emeritus* economics professor at Bowdoin College, is imagining a more just and sustainable tourism economy that is created

in partnership with conservation. David put it this way: “The goal of conservation is shared prosperity for people and healthy ecosystems for other species of life. Let us work toward a vision where there are both protected wild lands and more rural people with great skills and pride earning livable wages. More conservation dollars need to go into tourism infrastructure and revitalizing host communities, not just into buying forestland. There’s a shift already underway, from simply buying land to connecting livelihoods to that land. This is the healing.”

Here’s another form of healing happening in Maine. Starting ten years ago, the Penobscot Indian nation along with seven conservation organizations and a gaggle of government agencies created the relationships and the working skills to figure out how to remove two dams and bypass a third, undoing more than two centuries of damage to the Penobscot River. They made their dream much more interesting and challenging by seeking a world with both plenty of fish and plenty of electricity. In 2014, over 180,000 alewives passed the New Milford Dam fish lift, and an additional 180,000 migrated up Blackman Stream. Ted Koffman, who was executive director at Maine Audubon at the time, said, “We didn’t lose any electricity. We removed and bypassed dams and re-engineered generators, and restored 1,000 miles of spawning territory. There are kayak races today and we added in the opportunity for other economic benefits that arise from having these creatures in our lives again and from having a free-flowing river.”

In the Downeast coastal town of Milbridge, population 1,400, there’s a community development project focused on women’s health. They take on a wide range of practical issues like what’s it like to be a woman growing up in rural Maine as well as the hope and possibility of feeding

every person in town through community gardens. They empower women, they help build a stronger community and they’ve earned the respect of a great many different people. When the Women’s Health Resource Library wanted more land on which to expand their popular food gardens, Incredible Edible Milbridge, they didn’t know how or where to start. Maine Coast Heritage Trust had a strong desire to be a good neighbor. They met with people in town, primarily to listen to what Milbridge needed from its relationship to land. Everyone hoped to find a sweet spot where the community’s needs overlapped with what MCHT could do to help. The result was that MCHT bought 5 waterfront acres for the women’s health organization to use. Betsy Ham, the Director of Land Protection for Maine Coast Heritage Trust told me, “We recognized that these women are doing some great things in their community and we were pleased when they asked for our help. In the past, I doubt someone in this community would have thought to ask for our help, and I’m not sure how we would have responded. Because we now know that small properties like this one can make a big difference to communities, we said yes. They’re going to get the use of the land and we’re going to get some new partners. Chances are good that everyone will benefit.”

Imagine a Maine where there could be, as David Vail envisions it, “thriving rural communities, rewarding tourism careers and stewardship of all species of life.” What’s the combination of biology, social capital and economic creativity needed to create that? The global conservation group, The Nature Conservancy, is trying to answer that question. They’ve been engaged in Maine since the biologist and writer Rachel Carson suggested starting a chapter 60 years ago. And at the Maine chapter, their heads are deep in biology and their hearts are somewhere

closer to sociology and yearning to forge a practical understanding of how the two connect. Mark Tercek, TNC's global chief, writes in their new guiding document Conservation By Design: "How might combining access to healthcare with sustainable fishing practices in Tanzania inform the way forward for sustainable fisheries in more of the world's oceans and lakes? We embrace the realization that the plights of people and of nature are inextricably linked."

It's Mike Tetreault's job to figure out what that looks like in Maine. He told me, "The goal is healthier oceans with more fish in them. You don't have a stable healthy fishery without a stable healthy fleet. Working with that fleet in Maine, we're trying to understand the pressures they live and work under in a way that leaves them stable financially and able to practice better, more sustainable fishing. That likely means a smaller fleet, more selective and more adaptable to what's abundant."

Three very different people – Rachel Carson, Peggy Rockefeller, and Tom Cabot – each came to Maine from "away," fell in love with the coast, and developed an enormous commitment to act on that love. Their stories are parables for how a good deal of conservation in Maine got started. For Rachel Carson, it was the health and diversity of ocean life that she found most captivating. Her book *The Sea Around Us* came out in 1952, the year before she settled in Maine, and was translated into 28 languages, and later gave her the platform to write *Silent Spring*. Peggy and Tom, 20 years apart in age and from New York and Boston, were deeply influenced by the beauty of the mostly undeveloped coastline that they saw from their sailboats and by the rural people they met, living skilled lives deeply connected to the water. I imagine Peggy and Tom observed in coastal Mainers a quality of direct, simple human

experience of land, surf and ocean; perhaps they saw in these lives meaning that they respected. No matter how they discovered and valued it, they called it 'heritage' and sought to protect it. The organization they founded 45 years ago, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, was meant to protect a heritage that Tim Glidden, their current president, describes this way today: "Our sense of the unique character of the coast is a rich stew of its ecological bones, a healthy, vigorous marine life and people who have grown up amidst it, loving it, thinking about it, using it."

I sense that Maine Coast Heritage Trust has three connected aspirations today: to protect a place, to protect peoples' relationship to that place and to help communities find solutions to problems through using the land consistent with its natural capacity. This last aspiration is "*where the rubber hits the road*" in community conservation, where conservation becomes a tool, designed, in part, to improve peoples' everyday lives, solving everyday problems. The founding motivation of MCHT may have been to protect scenery viewed from a sailboat, but that has evolved over many years of relationships with coastal people. Very likely, they have heard over and over from their neighbors some version of the line, "*you can't eat scenery*" and they've been forging a thoughtful response to this statement through the evolution of their actions.

And there's at least one other significant influence from away that shaped the Maine of today and its unique orientation toward conservation. Helen and Scott Nearing moved to Cape Rosier in Downeast Maine from Vermont in 1952 and wrote a book about their experiment in living called *The Good Life*. It advocated self-reliance, simple living, vegetarianism, a deep connection to nature and social justice. By 1974, that book had sold a million copies and helped draw thousands

of young people to Maine at a moment when Maine's population was shrinking; many stayed and joined conservation commissions and started local land trusts. The Nearings' ethic was about working the land with a hoe, living organically for the sake of the earth and subsisting on less so that others might have more. Their philosophical offspring are varied and numerous, from best-selling gardening guru Eliot Coleman, to the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, to social critic and homesteader Bill Copperthwaite. Within this lineage of Maine thought, nature is sacred and best understood up close and personal, with dirt under your fingernails. One's close connection to nature is a path to social justice because within nature one sees the patterns of life more clearly, which builds empathy and can open a heart and a mind to the needs of others. Scott Nearing wrote: "realize that you are part of all and responsible to all that goes on around you." It is this rich stew of ideas, passions and commitments that has created the practice of community conservation in Maine.

What did conservation mean to Rachel Carson, Peggy Rockefeller and Tom Cabot in the 1960 and 70s? How was that different from what it meant to Helen and Scott Nearing? What does conservation mean today to a 32-year-old executive director of a local land trust who came of age after these ethics were expressed?

We're entering a time when old definitions begin to fail us, and conservation as a concept is molting, revealing how much Maine – with all its traditions from privilege to poverty – has moved this discussion forward, toward inclusion and full communities and a bigger definition of what conservation might mean, one that more and more Mainers can see themselves within. Today, conservation can be about saving

wild lands and also be about putting healthy food on people's plates. More and more, this comprehensive practice of conservation is concerned about all forms of life: species of life, ways of life, and lives that are plainly horrible. 16.2 percent of Maine households, or more than 208,000 individuals, don't have access to enough food to get proper nutrition, nearly 1 in 4 Maine kids don't get enough food weekly.<sup>1</sup>

### What is Community Conservation?

- An act of repairing, restoring, or protecting nature that emphasizes the relationship between people and nature.
- Conservation that recognizes the interdependence of the health of people and the health of nature.
- Conservation that fosters sustainable economies and supports just and resilient communities.
- Not conservation for people, but a practice that puts people within the landscape.
- An approach for building relationships: relationships between people and between people and nature.
- Builds community resiliency through making investments at the local level.
- Builds social capital by opening doors and provides opportunities for more and different people to be involved.
- Uses land as a tool to change lives, and address community issues, such as poverty; mental, physical, and spiritual health; education; domestic violence; equity; prejudice; and hunger.

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<sup>1</sup> *In the wake of the recent economic crisis more people are hungry than ever before. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (USDA) reported in September 2015 that 48 million Americans, including over 16 million children, are food insecure. Maine ranks #1 in New England for food insecurity.*



*You can't put a bell jar  
down over a piece  
of land and imagine what  
you are "protecting"  
there will thrive.*

An inclusive, honest story of Maine must share all these deep and different experiences of place that lead to a turning toward and a turning from nature. Has the story always been healthy? Of course not. What parts of Maine's land-and-people story shall we work hard not to repeat? Almost all communities in Maine were organized at some point around extraction –lumber, fish, bricks – and that ongoing story of production has brought her people dignity and sometimes servitude. What is the role of conservation in fostering a better

balance between production and consumption that provides for more dignity?

Many in Maine call this effort to use land conservation as a tool to improve human lives "community conservation," and think of it as new, but for others it's as old as time itself. The understanding of the interdependence of human and non-human life is the bedrock of many Native people's definitions of conservation; it's clearly recognizable in Hispanic traditions of land grants in the American southwest; and 60 years ago it was scientifically defined and lyrically described as a "land ethic" by Aldo Leopold. Much western systems-thinking of the last 50 years repeats what many cultures have lived: that an act of repairing, restoring, or protecting nature that doesn't include people in that nature won't last. You can't put a bell jar down over a piece of land and imagine what you are "protecting" there will thrive.

What we are witnessing in Maine is a natural evolution of conservation from isolated, narrow objectives like maintaining scenery, protecting recreation, and stopping unwanted development to a bigger picture aspiration to nurture a whole living system that includes people and the human and natural communities that we inevitably shape. This is not conservation *for* people, but a practice that consistently puts people within the landscape. And this is not conservation *for* biodiversity and wildness, but a practice that demands we create the tools and understandings to nurture healthy people within healthy ecosystems.

Maine is succeeding in this experiment to re-define conservation because of its relatively small population, a rich history of conservation innovation and risk taking, the strong presence of nature, progressive funders who are simultaneously urging holistic responses, and more than 100 community-oriented conservation groups. Maine is giving voice and detail to a global shift in conservation.

Community conservation entails a shift in expectations about the potential for a good relationship between people and nature. Can we humans have a relationship with nature without doing damage, being a bully and getting our own way? Does our relationship to nature always need to end badly? Most early conservation assumed so, demanding a "cease and desist" order to restrain our economy and culture from abusing nature, and that's why we have a system of parks and wilderness areas. That thought is now called "Nature for itself" or others call it "Nature for the rich." Later, we realized we couldn't keep people and nature apart, but we tried to minimize the damage that people did to nature. That could be called the "Nature despite People" era. Then we tried to advocate for a relationship on purely utilitarian grounds, making the

economic argument that a rainforest has value because it produced medicines. That's the 'Nature for People' approach, where one makes money from the other, and it's also working out better for people than for nature in the short run. More recently, conservation is saying this relationship can be good for both under conditions that require restraint and more understanding of both biology and sociology. This approach is called "People and Nature"<sup>2</sup> and, of course, is not new—it is revealed in family woodlots and orchards all across northern New England. Can a return to this "lived relationship" be the deeper and more fulfilling partnership that we most need to have with our place?

We should be deeply grateful to each of these thought forms for making real manifestations of our human capacity for vision, care and restraint. That we have National Parks, Wilderness areas and systems of wildlife refuges, and an enormously successful form of private conservation that has succeeded in protecting 20% of the landmass of the state of Maine (18% in Vermont and 31% in neighboring New Hampshire) is all due to all these previous approaches of conservation.

In very simple terms, this shift in Maine – and many other places – from "protecting land and nature" to "connecting people and nature and people to people," can be described as an evolution from conservation 1.0 to conservation 2.0, adding value, meaning and resiliency to past good work. Today, all these versions of conservation are happening in Maine.

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<sup>2</sup>For an excellent scientific explanation of these four stages of global conservation, please read Georgina Mace's article "Whose Conservation?" in *Science* (issue 345 in 2014). Mace is the Professor of Biodiversity and Ecosystems at University College London.

And while there is neither uniformity in practice, nor a common definition of community conservation, it can be seen everywhere from the taking down of dams, to the differing expressions of how to create a new national park, to a hundred different shades of love of land that can be seen across the state. Tim Glidden, president of Maine Coast Heritage Trust told me, "I have some sense for what the people of this state want: young people want to continue on in the traditions of their elders here on the land and have the opportunity to live here. If you sustain that relationship, one feeding the other, you've got a system that's powerful and will last forever. I believe that's what most Mainers want."

The writer Terry Tempest Williams spoke to her friend, the forester/philanthropist Roger Milliken, before hundreds of Maine conservationists and offered this observation: "Finding beauty in a broken world is creating beauty in the world we find. Maine has made it through to the other side of the wounding." Are we on the other side of the wounding? What does that other side – the healing – look like?





*“Finding beauty  
in a broken world is  
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world we find.”*

—Terry Tempest Williams

## CHAPTER TWO

# A Story of Two Maines

THE EDGE,  
CENTURIES IN THE MAKING,  
THAT DIVIDES PEOPLE.

When economist David Vail speaks of something in Maine being broken and in need of healing, what is it exactly?

David told me that one thing in need of healing is a gulf between people, where the median household income of those who live and work in the north woods is \$40,000 and the median household income of “commercial” overnight visitors there is \$110,000. “It perpetuates an attitude that those who live and work there are crypto-servants and not people with great skills and pride.” The former legislator, Ted Koffman, calls what needs healing is the “urban/rural” divide which sometimes shows up in Maine as a north/south divide, but it’s most profoundly and consistently the divide between haves and have-nots. That divide has created two Maines and there’s a lot of hurt and angst around this. Though we don’t talk about it much and try to be polite with one another, this divide has always shaped the dialogue here.”

Senator George Mitchell coined the phrase “*two Maines*” when he first ran for statewide office in 1974 at 41 years old. That year, he spoke personally of his life experiences growing up in Maine. “My mother was an immigrant, my father the orphan son of immigrants; my mother

worked nights in a textile mill, my father was a janitor who had little or no formal education. I went to a public school in Maine. I guess in a sense my experience was typical of many other youngsters in Maine.” By speaking of the two Maines almost continually, he sought to make it the state’s most visible problem to be solved.

The two Maines divide was around long before Maine became a state in 1820. I have to keep in mind that David Vail is thinking back 300 years, and not only speaking of today when he tells me, “All of Maine was land grants from the King of England before the Revolution. Settlers arrived and for several generations had to defend their turf from absentee property owners... Dickey-Lincoln dam, clear-cut laws, national park proposals, ATV restrictions and bear-baiting: all are evidence of the ongoing tension between the frontier mindset of many rural residents and the implicit “neo-colonial” attitudes of some large scale landowners and affluent tourists from away. These controversial issues reflect divergent values and interests, as well as a lingering resentment of rich people from away attempting to dictate to ‘us.’”

Financial capital from Boston and from other “away places” flowed into Maine to construct Bath Iron Works, lobster pounds and pulp and paper mills – each dollar of extractive, exploitive capital sought the highest return possible. The complex relationship between capital and labor brought good jobs and dignity for some and left others having much less. This reality, even more than ‘defending our turf’, has created a sharp edge in Maine.

Is there a possible role that conservation might play in making the divide between the two Maines smaller? Can conservation visibly and

meaningfully address the differences in backgrounds, perspectives and needs of the people of Maine?

In other places, at other times in history, we have turned to our landscapes for examples of how to live better together and for symbols of who we want to become as a society. The idea is if we can see it on the land, we can get there as a culture.

One of our very earliest parks – Yosemite in California – was created at a bleak moment in history to help guide our country toward a better future. A decade before Yellowstone became the first official national park (1872) and many decades before we had a National Park Service (1916) Lincoln envisioned Yosemite during the civil war’s costliest and bloodiest year of 1864, when our divided nation needed a new symbol of national unity and hope for something better than our current selves. Frederick Law Olmsted, the man who brought democratic ideals of inclusion, community and equality into the vision of our national park system, was assigned the job of writing a plan for Yosemite and he drew heavily from the consciousness of the nation, borrowing language from our Declaration of Independence and from Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address to describe a physical place in our national imagination where, “all men are created equal” and could find a “new birth of freedom” in a “great public ground for the free enjoyment of all the people.”<sup>3</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, and many others within the national park movement of that time, believed that in honoring and respecting a place, we could heal and rebuild a nation.

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<sup>3</sup>Please read Rolf Diamant’s excellent description of the role that Frederick Law Olmsted had in the creation of our national parks at [www.olmsted.org](http://www.olmsted.org).



*How might  
conservationists  
authentically enter  
this American  
conversation?*

Today, from Atlanta to Juneau to Los Angeles, a defining characteristic of our time is polarization: how difficult it is to talk to one another. From the tenor of our political dialogue to the messaging of our consumer culture, we are taught to be assertive rather than to listen, to advocate rather than respectfully exchange views. How do our communities learn or practice how to keep talking and to build strong relationships? Do our churches teach it? Do our schools teach it? Does our state house teach it? Do our town halls or our malls

teach it? Today, our nation is having a conversation about the challenge of reducing inequalities that result from our differences in skin color, political ideology, sexual orientation and the size of our wallets. How might conservationists authentically enter this American conversation? What do we have to offer?

If conservation produced widgets, it might not have much to offer. But conservation doesn't produce widgets; it protects nature and "produces" a healthy relationship between people and nature and between people to people. We can help connect people to place, we can help people to live better lives together and we can help individuals to understand themselves. What about working with recent immigrants and veterans to obtain needed skills; what about providing joy and safety to kids in bad home situations; what about creating job training programs that pay youth and adults living wages; what about helping to address the isolation that many elders feel? Conservation does have something to

offer to each of these issues and more, and some conservationists are now listening to learn how to "produce" these products.

There are big challenges facing conservation that reinforce the two Maines. Conservation tends to be disproportionately white and wealthy; thus, in Maine, class is the first challenge. How we live together is heavily shaped by different responses to daily life that arise from some having more and others having less. These boundaries between us are impossible to cross through charity alone. Personal awareness of our different privileges and a desire to meet people where they are creates behavior change. When both Maines embrace this understanding, conservation practices can evolve. A commitment to reciprocity, meaning everyone's got a good reason to move toward each other, might help the most.

#### Some Beginning Principles for Community Engagement:

- Go deep in a small geography. Deeper is better than wider. Resist pressure to take things to a larger scale.
- Reciprocity between partners. This is about shared destiny not charity. "We are here to help you" is replaced with "working together changes us both."
- Self-interest is important. Name it for community and for the land trust and help each other work toward achieving it.
- Long-term commitment between organizations and individuals.
- Taking responsibility for your own learning by asking questions of yourselves: what are our motivations, who are we serving, how is our power being used here?
- The goal is bringing together the most affected with the most connected.

Basic human fear gets in the way. Whether you look twice at the Ford F-150 with a gun rack or at the new Prius with out of state plates, many people react to symbols of things that we believe are threats and those emotions isolate us from one another. Ted Koffman, of Bar Harbor, frames the challenge this way: “It’s true and unfortunate that conservation does have the ‘other’ ... the person we’re afraid to meet, the guy on the skidder, but I think the fear is not so much of the person but of giving up some of our values, of our own identity, to find the common ground. The fear is about being changed through our compromises. For some, compromise is a dirty word, but maybe it’s about becoming something stronger, more connected.

This brings up our different concepts of time. Many Mainers who love the land have their jobs attached to it along with their weekly grocery bill and monthly utility bill. Their sense of time is today and this month. Other Mainers who love the land focus on the ecological degradation that is eliminating species, population pressure in conflict with fragile eco-systems and rapid warming and acidification in the Gulf of Maine. Their sense of time is measured in years, decades and centuries. A subset of this second group of Mainers think about legacy, preservation and perpetuity, all of which seem like a very long time, especially near the end of their lives. How do we reconcile these different time horizons of survival?

Without some serious intention to break these patterns of class, fear and time, it’s guaranteed we’ll fall back into the well-established ruts of the ‘us versus them’ idea that perpetuates two Maines and keeps conservation from changing and making a difference for more Mainers. Syd Lea, of Grand Lake Stream, put it this way: “This is the vibe that conserva-

tion sends out: ‘We know a lot and you don’t know anything. We care for the land better than you do. It’s really easy to say that’s a redneck attitude and these people are stupid for voting against their own interests.’ Our political climate is so poisoned, and yet around the land in rural New England we now have the possibility for a different dialogue. How do you neighbor well?”

Syd Lea is right. What conservation has to offer toward the healing of two Maines is the example of being powerful and being committed to sharing that power. Lucas St. Clair said to me: “Instead, we’ve got to go into conservation willing to have a discussion. What’s the value of conservation to you? How does that jibe with what I value and want? How do we compromise and learn to live together?” No one should get left out of conservation’s goals for shared prosperity and shared relationship to place. David Montague from Downeast Lakes Land Trust spoke personally and poignantly to me about this on my visit to Grand Lake Stream. David grew up doing a variety of jobs that depended on a healthy ecosystem: he guided, he trapped and he farmed. And he watched as conservation efforts often failed to include people like him: “I saw the people that most often got left out by conservation, and I was potentially one of those people. And it didn’t feel good. I came into this job hoping to find ways in which conservation can serve this element of the community.”

Angela Twitchell from Brunswick speaks clearly of her own intentions around the presence of two Maines: “Some people who love the land the most won’t ever call themselves conservationists. No one has a stronger connection to nature than clambers, lobstermen, loggers and farmers; yet they haven’t historically seen themselves as part of the conservation

movement. There are two communities here: the people who work at an office job and the people who work in the forest, on farms, in the ocean. 25 years ago, conservationists were seen as rich people from away protecting their own interests. Since the 1990s we've been working really hard to change that reality here in Maine. The 1997 Land for Maine's Future bond campaign made conversation happen between a broad array of stake-holders. We needed to talk to farmers, to sportsmen, to loggers, to single moms to garner the support to pass a large bond. Often, dialogue changes who you are. Conservation began to change with the voices and perspectives of others, and now we're something different. Something much more community-oriented. Stronger, wiser."

The 1997 Land for Maine's Future Bond act earned the support of 67% of Maine voters, people who have rarely aligned as strongly on anything else. In comparison, no candidate for Governor in the last three elections has received even 50% of the popular vote. What does this tell us about Maine's commitment to its landscape?

Northern New England may be one place where we can have an honest, productive conversation about our shared future, about how to neighbor well. Theresa Kerchner, at Kennebec Land Trust, made this clear to me through a story about how one of their most successful programs got started:

"Governor Curtis gave us a beautiful piece of land, 360 acres in Leeds, his home town, but he did not contribute to our stewardship fund and instead said to us, 'Cut some wood from it... that's what my dad did.'"

"Nat Bell, a local logger and a neighbor, had grown up in Leeds and wanted to be involved with KLT's Curtis property in his own neighborhood. Nat offered to help us manage the forestland that Governor Curtis had given us, but our board back then didn't want to harvest timber on any KLT lands. From his perspective, Nat probably felt our board didn't appreciate Governor Curtis's intent nor his own skills. Eventually, the board agreed to do some sustainable harvesting; Nat volunteered to help us, and at the same time teach local kids sustainable forestry and good forest ethics. That was the beginning of our sustainable forestry education program, and it wouldn't have happened if we hadn't found a way to understand another perspective. I think for a time Nat thought of us as the "the bird-watchers" and now he sees us as an organization that appreciates his knowledge and skills and a group that has benefited from having a wider vision. Nat is part of our story, and, I think, we have become part of his story."

I sense all of us would much rather look each other in the eye and get a feeling for where our lives intersect and build from there. What does it take to do this? How do we honestly observe our own histories – like the history of conservation in Maine and the current realities that perpetuate two Maines – and learn to work through them to create something better for the future? This is the work that community conservation is attempting in Maine right now.

I AM  
NATURE!

COURAGE  
AMERICA!

MARCH  
WITH  
ME

MARCH  
WITH  
ME



## CHAPTER THREE

## Who Owns Conservation?

WHEN DOES CONSERVATION

BELONG TO EVERYONE?

Here is a story for which we don't yet know the ending, a story that raises more questions than it answers. For twenty years, Maine has been considering a new national park and its chances rest heavily with the people of Millinocket, East Millinocket and Medway, and whether these communities believe a national park takes from or heals their community.

In this generation, there have been two visions for a new national park focused on the Baxter region of Maine. One was proposed twenty years ago, is called the Maine Woods National Park and Preserve, encompasses 3.2 million acres and generally makes its case through environmental and economic appeals, and assumes an audience beyond the state of Maine. A more recent vision for a new national park, called Katahdin Woods and Waters Recreation Area, was started by Roxanne Quimby, a successful businesswoman, in a similar ethic. She received a similar response from the community, and she has receded from the public light and turned the mission over to her son, Lucas St. Clair.

Lucas doesn't hide that the Quimby family vision for a new national park is made possible by their wealth and he's quick (as is almost every article written about him) to mention that he's a Mainer, not from away, who grew up in a small cabin in Dover-Foxcroft. His own love of Maine

traditions like hunting and the skills of being in the outdoors have created a set of values that he wants to see within a new national park and which, I sense, have created an authentic empathy for the folks who live closest to it. As much as he loves the land that he envisions as a national park, Lucas has tried to face the people who live there, drink coffee with them, listen to their concerns and needs, show care and respect. He's opened up portions of the land to hunting and snowmobiling.

Lucas has tried to calm things down, and he's taken on the risk of desiring diverging things that are beyond his control. Everyone knows he wants a park, and Lucas also wants people who live closest to that park to agree with him. Lucas' struggle asks conservationists what is the most important scale of "community" to consider? At one end of the scale is the community that lives right there, and at the other end is a community who may live far away but feel connected through their values. Which is more important? How are they to be balanced if at all? Lucas has taken on the risk of balancing listening with taking action. What are the unspoken rules in conservation about how to balance listening and taking action? It's a privilege and a reflection of his power that Lucas can choose between how much he listens and how much he takes action. How does one use that power and privilege in support of the things one cares most about? When do you push beyond just listening? Lucas explains his intention this way:

*"We should listen to the people of the three towns in question because it is their home but we should listen thoughtfully and not just to the loudest people speaking. We also have to remember that this is political. This is not an effort of a land trust but an effort to permanently protect and give land to the people of the America, an*

*effort that takes an act of The Congress. This isn't a slick campaign to take advantage of the locals. We are working in the same effort that George Dorr did one hundred years ago. Following in the footsteps and taking the lead of Orr, Tompkins, Rockefeller, Roosevelt, Muir, Leopold and the countless others that charged forward when not everyone thought it was right."*

Despite his efforts, the debate over a national park has been mostly that: a debate, not a dialogue. Worse for the community, it's been a political campaign taken up by activists from outside the region and by political consultants who have squared off against one another in countless previous Maine campaigns. This has largely reduced the idea of national park to a "yes" vote or a "no" vote where what's left is winners and losers. That can't be good for a community or for a national park.

This summer, in straw votes, two of the communities said no by significant margins. And three months later, proponents put forward 13,500 signatures in favor of a new national park from 371 Maine towns and all 50 states.

Durable success doesn't arise from votes but from invitations. How might we have met together in the middle, without the spokesmen and political consultants, to discuss what role a park might play in the future, or to create a park together rather than vote on one created by somebody else?

Charles Buki is the president of a community planning firm called of CZB Partners of Alexandria, Virginia, and he and his colleagues help places that have relied heavily on extractive industries, places like an

Erie, Pennsylvania, or Saginaw, Michigan, to be more competitive and more successful, and they try to make places that are doing really well more equitable. Buki offered CZB's services pro bono to Millinocket to help craft a strategy to improve its economic opportunity and dwindling population (which is expected to drop from 4,500 to around 2,500 in the next 10 years).<sup>4</sup> Buki speaks about a polarization that has made real dialogue in Millinocket almost impossible: "I got a fair amount of hate mail both before and after, ugly things. Very much sort of an insider/outsider thing — "how dare you?" and that. You could sense in my conversations some real angst — if the messenger is wearing a North Face hat, I don't want to hear what they have to say. And in the surveys, the survey narrative includes a fair amount of that."<sup>5</sup>

This isn't a unique story to Millinocket, but a shared narrative of many rural places in Maine and across northern New England who feel that something has been taken from them. For some, it's a loss of their economic base and for others it's an influx of new people with higher incomes. They feel they have lost wealth, opportunity, control, ways of life and in some cases respect. I suspect there are many Mainers who love the land deeply, who have gained a smaller share of the economic progress, who would respond to a national park proposal coming from outside them as a taking rather than a giving.

Some observers say this is local people acting against their own best self-interest, but I see a good deal of pride in Maine; pride in their

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<sup>4</sup>Charting Maine's Future by The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program. [www.Brookings.edu](http://www.Brookings.edu).

<sup>5</sup>As quoted in Dear Millinocket by Brian Kevin in Downeast Magazine, April 2015.

towns and ways of life. And I observe an awareness of two Maines in the DNA of many rural Mainers. When someone comes from away and repeats, through their actions, the story of two Maines, they are playing a familiar role and entering a pattern that can easily be recognized by local people as disrespect even when it is not intended that way. Under these conditions, I understand when someone from Millinocket or Newry says, “if you have money and come here wanting me to do something, you don’t get me.”

Lucas explained to me what had happened to the communities in the part of Maine he’s committed to becoming a national park: “In 1986, 1,000 people were laid off at the pulp mill in Millinocket and that was the beginning of a slow death for that community. In 2013, Great Northern closed the last mill. A way of life has gone away, and now the question is how to recover? It’s sad to see a community in that position. There is trauma at work there. The death of a patriarch is met first with denial, then anger, then acceptance. Everyone knows that I want Millinocket to be part of creating a national park, but I also want them to know that I understand their position. I grew up in Dover-Foxcroft and I’ve had good people I respect say to me, ‘Every time someone comes in, they try to take something away from us.’ I’ve learned many things from that. We rattled the psyche of a community already wounded when we put up gates and threw out the lease-holders.”

Employment in the paper and forest products industries has dropped by more than half in the last two decades. In early 2015, about 5,500 people were employed by all of Maine’s paper mills, according to the Maine Department of Labor. That’s about the number of people who worked

in the Great Northern Paper Co. mills in Millinocket and East Millinocket alone in the heyday 20 years ago.



How might conservation help to repair this story? How do we collectively shift the story from Something is being taken away from me to We are building something for all of us? Can we hit a reset button and start the conversation about a national park all over again? And begin it in Millinocket with this: In light of our history, how would we create a park differently? What might this park look like and how could it serve us? Can we create a new story of a national park where those who live there can readily, easily see themselves within it?

*Can we create a new story of a national park where those who live there can readily, easily see themselves within it?*

Perhaps the national park discussion is not about jobs or even about how local people will heat their homes in the winter (despite those things being critically important), it’s about respect. The national park concept has been talked about and talked about, the economy there is suffering and statewide polls say that people everywhere else in Maine overwhelmingly support the creation of the park. Why, in the face of all this, should we listen to the three towns? Because it’s their home.



## CHAPTER FOUR

## Human Wellbeing

HOW SAVING PEOPLE  
IS CONNECTED  
TO SAVING NATURE

For as long as we've had a conservation movement in the United States, we've had a healthy debate about what conservation means and how to do it better. What is conservation for?

Here's a parable about the loss that comes with answering that question narrowly. The story goes that John Muir arrived in Glacier Bay, Alaska, by canoe with a Tlingit guide in 1879. Muir was awed by the vast forces at work in this sweeping landscape of mountain, glacier and water. Being in Glacier Bay made Muir feel fully alive, and he translated his experiences in a series of popular articles sent in installments to the *San Francisco Bulletin* even before he got back to California. Muir's writing led directly to the creation of Glacier Bay National Monument in 1925 and helped to establish the dominant theme of the early conservation movement: keep safe what you find valuable by removing people and other species that may threaten it. No one, tourist or Tlingit, isn't grateful that Glacier Bay remains today a largely healthy and whole ecosystem. Muir had a powerful vision that served nature well, but his vision was incomplete: he saw the landscape for sure, but not the people, nor how their health and the nature's were connected.

As the story goes, on that first trip to Glacier Bay 125 years ago, Muir purposefully rocked the canoe so that his Tlingit guide wouldn't be able to shoot and harvest a deer. Muir wrote this account of saving the life of a deer to make clear his values, but today it seems a sad parable of two people unable to hear each other's stories about their different ways of being in relationship with a place they both needed and loved.

Last year, I met Adam Davis, a young Tlingit community leader from Kake, Alaska, not far from Glacier Bay in southeast Alaska. Adam hadn't heard that John Muir story before, but shared a similarly painful account from his own experience. In a meeting between conservationists and community catalysts that I attended, Adam said: "You wonder why you haven't been welcomed here but when you last came you took food off my plate."

Bob Christensen, a man with lots of scientific and cultural training, understands well what Adam is saying and that's why he co-founded the Sustainable Southeast Partnership between five Native communities and five conservation organizations devoted to a finding a shared prosperity between ecology, economy and equity.<sup>6</sup> Bob told me, "I don't say conservation. I say resilience. I say that we are working to achieve resilience for nature and for people. Most conservation that I've witnessed is not conserving something but displacing it. We simply displace our uses over

<sup>6</sup> *The Sustainable Southeast Partnership of southeast Alaska is worthy of reader's full attention as a current example of collective action between conservation and human well-being toward shared prosperity. You can learn more at <http://sustainablesoutheast.net>.*

to someone else's neighborhood. Instead, how do we create something together that is healthy and durable and doesn't displace people, uses or nature? That's what we're working toward here." And that valuable experiment in the forests and salty islands of Alaska has much in common with the experiment now underway in the forests and salty islands of Maine. Talking with Theresa Kerchner reminded me how much this thinking represents what the next generation is bringing to conservation. "The young conservationists are drawn to the ways we try to engage our community and to make the connections between healthy community and healthy ecosystems. They see things in a broader way than some of those in an older generation of conservationists sometimes do. Look at what's happened in the last 20 years. Conservation is conserving wild lands but also conserving working waterfronts and getting food into a community from local suppliers. Younger people seem abler to make these connections and value them."

Lucas St. Clair told me something similar: "My mom was a radical—an Edward Abbey type—with a clear opinion of right and wrong. She wanted a secluded life in nature, to be disconnected. She wanted the solitude and the purity of doing life her way. She's not a compromiser. I respect that and I love Ed Abbey, but my generation is different. We also love the world and want to make a home within it, and we are connected to one another and want to stay that way. Maybe we are better at making compromises."

One of our nation's most eloquent and thoughtful voices on conservation and relationship has been the writer Terry Tempest Williams. Her own journey from radical to middle path is important to read:

*"The middle path makes me wary. . . But in the middle of my life, I am coming to see the middle path as a walk with wisdom where conversations of complexity can be found, that the middle path is the path of movement . . . In the right and left worlds, the stories are largely set. . . We become missionaries for a position . . . practitioners of the missionary position. Variety is lost. Diversity is lost. Creativity is lost in our inability to make love with the world."*<sup>7</sup>

The middle path of relationship, connection, compromise is certainly more complex and messy, but also more creative of possibility. Things can change as result of the middle path. Conservation itself may be changing as result of a path that honors the health of people and the health of nature. Theresa Kerchner said to me, "I frequently start staff meetings asking, 'how can our conservation work help the people in our communities?' We try to negotiate public access on every project. Neighbors come to us to find out where they can fish and hunt. They are so happy to find us when most private land around here has become posted – no trespassing."

Is this a compromise on old values or something else entirely?<sup>8</sup> What's happening in Maine feels more intentional and bigger in scope than a compromise, more like an offering of a different vision for living together well in place.

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<sup>7</sup> Terry Tempest Williams, *Leap*.

<sup>8</sup> This question is the subject of an entire book *Keeping It Wild: Against the Domestication of Earth* published in 2014 by the Foundation for Deep Ecology and Island Press.



*In other words,  
how do you grow a  
land-based culture across  
an entire state that leaves  
nobody out?*

Creative philanthropy is alongside these efforts to change approaches and behaviors. In June of 2013, I met for the first time with the board of the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, based in Freeport, and heard about their motivations and values around their philanthropy. The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation is one of the largest foundations in Maine, and among only a few that concentrates on environmental grant making. They quickly became known as a great ally of conservation, making large financial gifts to support the protection of threatened places. “We’re making a major transition ourselves to expand the meaning of both conservation and human well-being by bringing them closer together,” said Jay Espy, the foundation’s president. Board members spoke that day about trying to find reciprocity between conservation and human well-being. One said, “I want to stop making others feel that I’m taking something from them.” Another said, “I yearn for all Mainers to feel connected to this landscape; I mean, all the people, not just those who can afford a kayak.” They called their early motivations “conservation with social impact” and they saw it building on Maine’s rich and sustainable natural resource base to promote economic development, public health and food security through a lens of social equity. In other words, how do you grow a land-based culture across an entire state that leaves nobody out?

Prior to 2014, The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation supported more than 120 organizations in two separate fields of conservation and human

well-being. Then they launched one new Healthy People Healthy Places program. Jay described it this way to his grantees:

*We believe that the well-being of people and the environment are inextricably linked. People cannot live in an unhealthy environment or be disconnected from their physical and/or social surroundings and be healthy. Likewise, the environment cannot be healthy if people are hurting – physically, emotionally, economically.*

*Further, it is our belief that none of us can truly care about our environment or each other if we don’t understand one another or the environment around us. And we cannot understand our environment or one another if we don’t have a direct and meaningful relationship with the land, water and resources that give us sustenance, and the diverse array of people who we all rely on to meet our mutual needs. I guess we are saying that we believe each of us is part of all of us and each of us is responsible to all that goes on around us.*

*In developing our hypothesis, we took cues from two parallel movements: environmentalism, with its emphasis on living in better alignment with natural ecological systems so that we can move away from stewarding the world toward depletion due to over-extraction and pollution, and toward abundance through wise and careful use of resources, and Social Justice with its emphasis on moving from a society depleted due to structural unfairness that causes some to thrive while others suffer to one that is abundant, where all people are afforded the opportunity to meet their full potential.*

Sewall is inviting everyone to have a different conversation. While con-



*...what responsibility  
does conservation  
have to human  
well-being?*

ervationists may be willing to talk with clambers and lobstermen, that conversation has remained mostly about ecology. They are only beginning to talk about the harsh realities related to lack of affordable housing, accessibility to good health care and how hard it is to retire. Conservationists aren't yet talking about schools and domestic violence and about the things in a community that aren't healthy. Sewall is pointing out the challenges of adequately caring about our environment when we might not yet fully understand each other.

By offering these integrated grants, Sewall is inviting conservationists to listen to a community and try to understand where they may need help. Sewall is asking a provocative and vital question: what responsibility does conservation have to human well-being?

And simultaneously, Sewall is also asking educators, food advocates, basic human needs providers and public health practitioners to have a different conversation about the root causes of these challenges. How might disconnection and isolation from nature and from each other contribute to health problems? How might integrated approaches help? What can we learn from their deep understanding of human health about how to help heal other things?

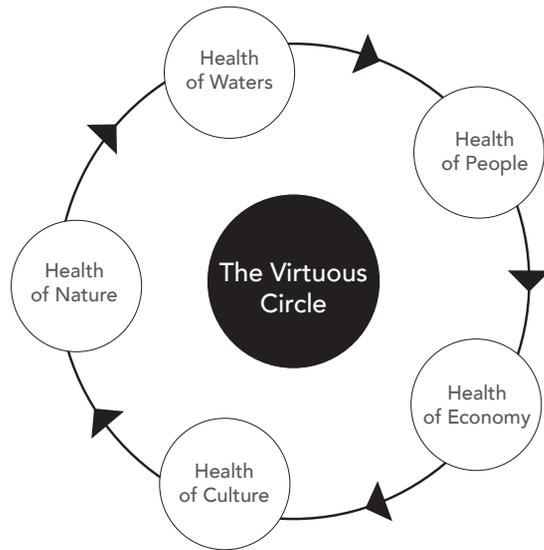
Jay Espy explains to his grantees: "This concept seems to be more intuitively aligned with some areas of endeavor than others – for instance, in public health, food, farming, forestry, fisheries and economic develop-



ment. But how does it apply to someone struggling with substance abuse, chronic homelessness or lack of skilled training? Seeing connections, building relationships, adjusting patterns of behavior all takes time and resources, especially when our plates are already so full in the moment."

Seeing connections, building relationships, adjusting patterns of behavior: that's the core of this work. And when a land trust or conservation group starts off on that journey of inquiry, chances are good they will evolve into something more inclusive, stronger. Conservation groups tend to have a very strong set of transactional muscles exercised over years on science, real estate law and finance. To do community conservation with integrity, those transactional muscles must be balanced with relational muscles. How do we act in the best possible relationship with our community? What are our shared needs around land? How can we help one another? Some land trusts will engage these questions as a necessary strategy to do what they've always done: protect land and to build public support to make conservation last longer. They worry about a changing and rapidly developing world that will share their values less and less. This "being relevant" approach is fully committed to meeting people half-way and making conservation meaningful to more people. For some, community conservation may be a method of winning people over to

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actually is.*



their side; for others, engaging in the community is a way to learn and change what conservation actually is. Either way, to endure and sustain, conservation must be grounded not just in law but in the hearts, minds and every day choices of diverse people. That means that those who love and seek to protect nature need to fully engage people, all people.

Mike Tetreault of the Nature Conservancy, has given these sorts of questions a great deal of thought. From his perch at the Maine Chapter, Mike helped to write the new conservation guidelines<sup>9</sup> that his organization follows all over the world. Mike and I have walked a few beaches talking about a virtuous circle, inspired by Aldo Leopold, where the

<sup>9</sup> *Conservation by Design: A Strategic Framework for Mission Success*, The Nature Conservancy, 2015.

health of nature is dependent upon the health of culture. To Leopold's way of thinking, and to many Native peoples, and to western "system-thinkers" there's a relational pattern to the health of all life that roughly goes like this: health, disconnection, alienation, disease, restoration, repair, health. In this pattern, if a symptom of disease is that humans are beating up nature, the logical response is more than putting a Band-Aid on nature but to treat the human problem. In this pattern, saving nature may only be durable and possible by saving people. But that's theory, and the practice, especially for those who are entrusted with doing it, is so much harder. Mike knows that his fellow conservationists have for generations told people what responsibility they have to the planet, but it's much harder to express what responsibility conservationists have to humanity. Mike always speaks with candor and directness, "The most interesting area of inquiry for me is 'What responsibility does TNC have for human well-being?' We're really exploring that question.... "Conservation by Design" is meant to help us make those decisions."

And I also hear whispers and examples of a deeper shift that's not so much concerned with conservation's relevancy in the future, but about an appetite to broaden the values and purposes of conservation. Betsy Ham, Director of Land Protection, framed up the differences in mind-

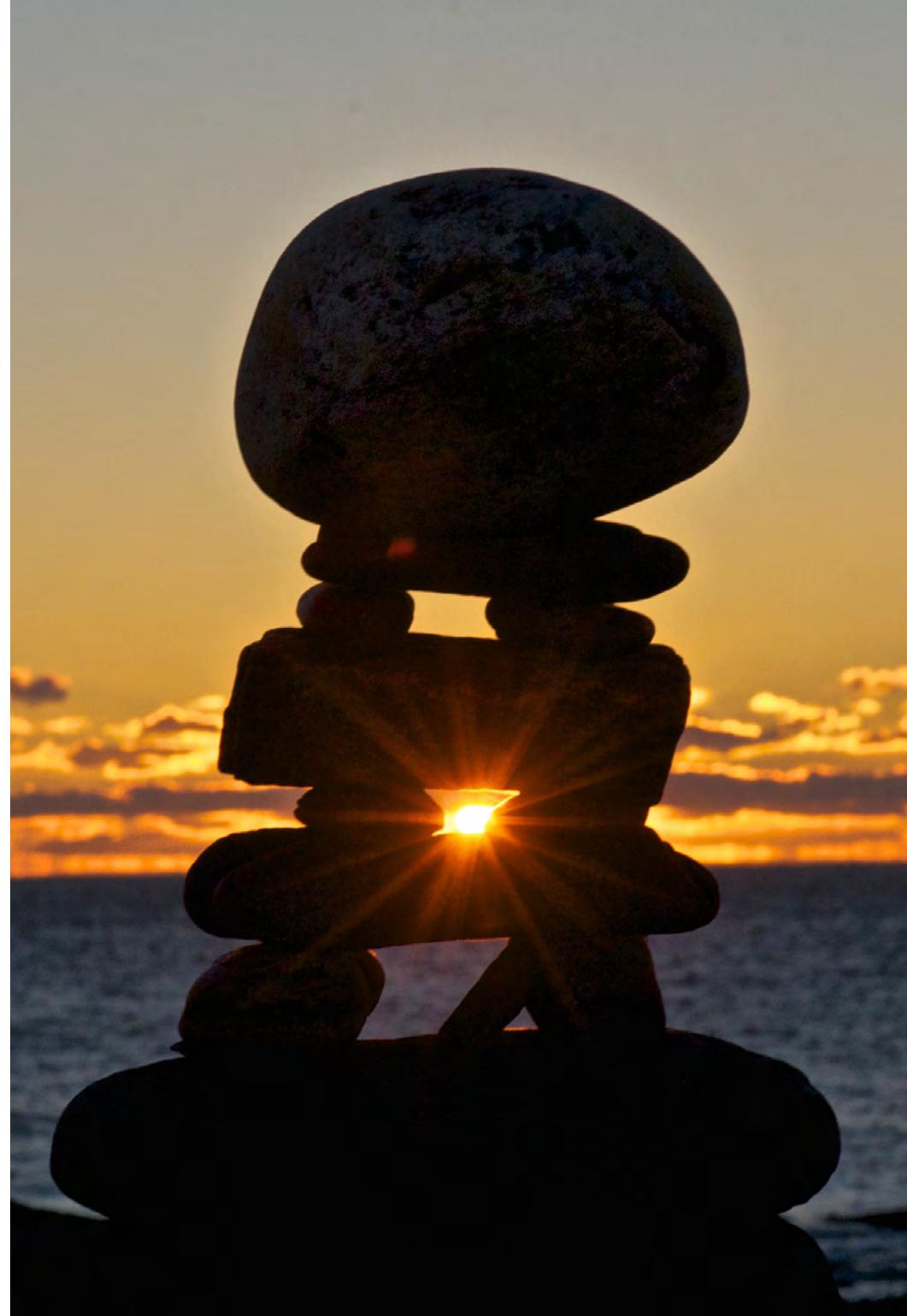
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*...conservationists have  
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to humanity.*

sets among her own colleagues at Maine Coast Heritage Trust: “We’ve been in a long gradual shift away from scenic easements over land you can see from a sailboat towards serving the needs of the people who live within that scenery. Many years ago, we added ecology to our initial focus on scenery, and now we’re building upon decades of experience being guided by ecology to adding community needs. I think it’s bringing us much closer to people and that’s good. But what’s most important is how it’s changing who we are and what we think about. That’s what’s exciting and will make us stronger. Some of us with MCHT believe in community conservation for “survival” reasons, meaning that land conservation simply won’t survive in 100 years unless there are people who love that land, and others see community conservation as fundamentally changing who we are and what we do.”

Either way, the future looks interesting. Changing human behavior is the hardest task of all because it involves changing how people see things, starting with themselves. Maybe the excitement I hear in many of these conversations, even amidst so many challenges and uncertainties, is this possibility of personal and collective transformation.

Angela Twitchell asks us all to be open to something new: “Our work is not just about people or just about nature. We feel our purpose is to make people’s lives better through nature. What we’re doing isn’t conservation 1.0 or even 2.0 but a spectrum. Let’s all be open to trying something new and reasonable and attainable, and then talk about it. Let’s take risks. Not every land trust or conservation group needs to do community conservation, some should stick to ‘bucks and acres’, that’s conservation too! We need to be meaningful and authentic no matter how we do it.”





## CHAPTER FIVE

## Commitment and Creativity

EXPLORING NEW MEASURES  
OF SUCCESS

In 1993, The Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust had one staff member, an annual budget of \$37,000, and 400 members when they decided to buy the 320-acre Crystal Spring Farm. Imagine the risks that this small group had to take on in that moment: they were not farmers, they didn't know that world, and there were only a few examples in the entire country of land trusts operating farms. And then there's the money: to buy Crystal Spring Farm would take 18 times their annual budget.

"The easy thing would have been to buy Crystal Spring Farm" Angela Twitchell told me, "put an easement on it, and sell it to a gentleman farmer. That would have been such a loss for our community, such a loss for us as an organization even though we may have met all of our conservation goals."

They took a bigger risk, which was to buy and own Crystal Spring Farm. "We made the decision with no money in the bank," Angela told me, "400 people showed up one night to talk about the future uses of the farm and that's when we learned the single most important lesson of the whole effort: we're not in this alone. Buying Crystal Spring Farm introduced us to the farming community, and over time gave us credibility with that community. We had relationships that led us to do more

out of a sense of belonging to them. We started a farmer's market that is now in its 16th year with 44 vendors and 3000 people out on a summer day. Taking those risks made us a meaningful part of people's lives. Folks think about us weekly. We need to be meaningful in people's lives, not just at the annual meeting, but in their everyday lives."

Today, Crystal Spring Farm hosts one of the largest farmer's markets in Maine and has transformed the land trust. Angela told me, "Community conservation has made us much bigger. 700 members came to us from that one project." 15 years after that first acquisition of a portion of the farm, the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust had grown enough to step up to the plate a second time, raising almost twice as much money as before, tripling their annual budget and growing their membership to over 1,000 families. Though today they are one of the larger land trusts in Maine, they didn't start that way. "Lack of big bucks has made us closer to the community." They continue to fund their basic operating costs from membership donations from the community and look to foundations to help them take on projects that will grow their land-and-people vision.

"All of the challenges relate to capacity, money, planning; not will or desire. It takes staff to be in a relationship with the community, not just doing events. And once you start, there are endless opportunities to meet a community's need. It's hard every day to make the budget work. We have important community programs that are core and need to keep going."

Theresa Kerchner of Kennebec Land Trust in central Maine is a thoughtful person with the unusual capacity to work gracefully at different scales. Her conference room table is piled high with mailings,

and I get the awkward feeling being there that I'm keeping her from a more important task of getting them stamped and out the door, but she can switch gears easily and talks with me about history and what she's observed from working for so many years in her own community:

"I first worked in Maine as a teacher in several classrooms and helped develop oral history projects for students and seniors in our community. These interviews taught me a great deal about my own home. We live in a community with nine lakes. Our students learned that many seniors in our town didn't know how to swim because their orientation was so closely tied to their farms. The farms and woodlots provided their family income, their food, their identity. In the beginning, I didn't see how important that was. One of the 'History Helpers' said to me, 'Why would you take good land and lock it up?' Later, after coming to work for the land trust, I realized every one of these people deeply loved our community but none of them were members of our land trust. Land trust people were seen as advocates for recreation, and came from an income level and way of life that allowed that. The oral histories helped me to ask myself, 'What is the message of conservation and why hasn't it resonated with more Mainers?' Honestly, the land trust does 'preserve' some land, but we've also made a much larger effort to recognize the relationships that people have with the land."

Indeed, the Kennebec Land Trust has honored that. In a land of lakes, they've built the partnerships, and are working on skills and resources to keep a forest economy strong. How does a small land trust hope to do that? Theresa sees the big picture and is committed to applying her organization

to larger levers for change. For example, one day five years ago, Theresa was in the office studying the maps of their completed projects within the larger landscape of her region and a pattern "hit me in the head like a 2x4."

**Skills of Community Conservation:**

- Ability to work effectively between worlds ...being an edge walker, cultural competency.
- Understanding of how power and privilege shapes conservation and access to nature.
- Nuanced view of the world not being for us or against us.
- Strong alignment between board and executive director.
- Learning organization committed to inquiry and taking risks inside and outside.
- Willingness to acknowledge and talk about unintended consequences.
- Patience.
- Listening for what is said and not said, who is in the room and not in the room and why.
- Thinking bigger picture, seeing the patterns of how things are connected. TNC calls this "situation analysis"

"We need to find a new strategy. We're not going to get to where we want to be on a landscape level through "land protection" alone. After 26 years of hard work, we've protected 1.2% of the land. We have 1000 members, about 1% of the households in our region. That's not good enough. I can't say enough about the importance of what we do but if we're only measuring our success by acres conserved, we're not getting anywhere very fast. We need to consider other strategies. We can't realize our vision alone. My passion and challenge is to try to figure out how to learn from the past and to build upon that. There's no doubt that our state over-harvested our forests in the past, but could we do it

differently now? I want to try to build a sustainable forest economy that could parallel the success of the local food movement.”

Theresa made the commitment to meet face-to-face with all the people who she suspected would be needed to create a sustainable forest economy. It was the guys on the skidders and the associations who represent them that she sought out. She developed partnerships with the Maine Forest Products Council, with the Maine Forest Service, with the NRCS. “We met with all of their executive directors individually. We figured it out as we went along. There was no road map. My goal was simply to find the organizations that had clout and vision and partner with them. I’ve been given a lot of freedom. I’m not micro-managed by my board. They allow me to take risks. They see how we are strengthening the organization by broadening it.”

#### Practices of Community Conservation:

- It usually provides public access in a manner that is welcoming to regular and new users.
- Ability to work effectively between worlds ...being an edge walker. Cultural competency.
- It’s responsive to a community need.
- It connects people to place and often people to people.
- It values other peoples’ experience of place and/or their needs.
- It connects people to people.
- Builds local leadership and capacity.
- Requires collaboration for action, and there is a possible spectrum of involvement.
- Implemented through local, community based organizations. Often the land is a starting place to build stronger relationships and change.

Kennebec Land Trust has developed a partnership with the Maine Forest Service, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, GrowSmart Maine, The Nature Conservancy, the Northern Forest Center and with the economic development group, Coastal Enterprises Incorporated (CEI) to form the Local Wood Initiative. The shared mission of the Local Wood WORKS partners is to advance forest-based local economies and support the long-term conservation and sustainability of Maine’s woodlands. They’re teaching more than a 100 school kids every year about sustainable forestry and they’re annually bringing together the landowners, foresters, loggers, processors, state agencies, conservation groups, artisans and students who can together create a more durable and healthy local wood economy. Theresa tells me, “We will protect wild places forever. Half of the funds we’ve raised over the last 28 years have gone toward protecting those wild places. We still value that tremendously, but we also aspire to reach our neighbors – which we can’t do through talking about ecology alone. The tension I feel is that every land trust wants to be a well-run nonprofit and that puts me on this treadmill where it’s hard to think about the big picture and to form unlikely partnerships. There is a tension between having easement base-line reports and having productive, diverse partnerships that transform who we are.”

It’s valuable to explore the “tension” that Theresa feels between being “a well-run nonprofit” and “thinking big picture.” Theresa is successful; few can doubt that. Tension, I suspect, comes when one feels quite successful – that you’re making progress in addressing the big picture issues – and yet you question how to measure these accomplishments. That’s tension.

Most acknowledge that what conservation is attempting to do today is much bigger than the number of acres, or easements, or even ballots cast. And yet, these are the much easier things to count and we fall back on them even when the portrait they paint of us is incomplete and even shallow. When Robert F. Kennedy was running for president in 1968 he described the challenge this way:

“The GNP does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it tells us everything about America except why we are proud to be Americans.”

Conservation, too, needs new measures of success that can better guide our work toward achieving the relationships that we are most proud of accomplishing. These new ways of describing and measuring conservation success exist.<sup>10</sup> There are tools to help describe and measure the social benefit that can arise from providing access to land, stewarding land differently, bringing different groups into relationship with each

<sup>10</sup> *Wholemeasures.org* lays out the most ambitious tool for evaluating conservation's relationship to community. It was adopted in various ways by hundreds of different land trusts around the country and for food systems nationally. Newer efforts at evaluating the social benefits of conservation are being created in Alaska by the Southeast Sustainable Partnership, and at the national level with the Land Trust Alliance. An excellent, must-read account of the role that evaluation plays in social change is *The Social Profit Handbook* by David Grant. Available through Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

other, acting with fairness and equity in mind, growing the number of households who participate as a percentage of the whole community, counting the percentage of economic activity that is derived from the communities “protected” lands, gauging increase and decrease in leisure time that the community spends on the “protected” lands and the percentage of people who earn some livelihood from land.

The challenge is not finding or creating these measures, but committing across a system to using them. As Theresa is expressing, it's very hard to act in isolation and feel successful. This is the frontier for community conservation in Maine: to shift the question from How much land can we protect for how much money? to What is a whole community and how do we get there together? It requires all of us to envision together what success looks like, and to commit to realizing that vision with shared purpose and diversity of means and resources.



*The challenge is not finding or creating these measures, but committing across a system to using them.*

CHAPTER SIX  
**Being in Service**

HOW DOES CONSERVATION  
 SERVE US ALL?

There are times for certainty and there are times for inquiry. Both take courage and strong leadership. Much of what is being accomplished in Maine right now arises from people and organizations capable of moving gracefully between these two forces to create new possibilities for themselves and their organizations. Here are some of the questions that have caught my attention recently:

What are the patterns of contemporary life that most affect conservation? Can we shift our attention from protecting the pieces to begin to address the patterns? In Alaska, they ask, “What is the pattern between the mining that pollutes our rivers and the cruise ships that pollute our communities? How do we conservationists address that pattern? Theresa Kerchner is asking her organization to think about a big question, What’s the pattern of the relationship between cheap, imported wood products and the loss of cultural identity and loss of wildlands in central Maine? How might we use our power and privilege to model new patterns for the way we would like our communities to be? How do we ensure that our power and privilege doesn’t reinforce the old patterns that we are attempting to resist?

**Questions that can Transform a Conservation Organization:**

- What have been our greatest achievements?
- What are the pros and cons of our culture of success?
- What have been the unintended consequences of our success?
- Are there differences between who we are as conservationists and the community we aspire to serve?
- What are our ideas for reconciling these differences?
- What’s the current dominant story of our organization?
- Who do we want to become as an organization, and how are we growing into that?
- How well do our existing tools, abilities and resources match the needs of the community with whom we are in relationship?
- How do we better recognize how our own cultural norms may make it hard for us to connect with those who are different from us? How does this limit our ability to be good partners and/or allies within the community?
- What training and support do we need to get to the future we want?

What have been the unintended consequences, good and bad, of our conservation work? What can we learn from these? Recognizing upfront the possibility of unintended consequences makes conservation more durable and makes conservationists more accessible.

Posing such questions gathers the energy needed to transform people, organizations and movements. At the core of this powerful inquiry is a single question: When does conservation serve all of us?

Can we include all Mainers in this question? Can we include our children's children? Who gets the majority of conservation's time and attention? To whom is conservation work most obligated? Is it the board of directors of each land trust or conservation group who own it? Who are they? Is it the individual donors and the foundations that fund conservation who owns it; who are they? Is it the willing landowners who grant the conservation easements who own conservation; who are they? When one is brave enough to ask who really owns the work, then the next question becomes, 'who does conservation serve?' How are the answers to these questions the same and how are they different, and why might that matter today?

There are no right answers, just indications of different perspectives and desires for connecting conservation to community. In Maine, I've heard a full-range of responses from "we serve willing landowners and that's who gets our attention" to "we serve all the people in our region and we want them to feel ownership of conservation." It's an enormous shift in perspective and focus for a conservation group to believe that its obligations and purpose are not to its donors or its members or its partners, but to every person who could possibly benefit from a relationship with the fruits of land and nature.

Perhaps the broader the response to the inquiry of who owns conservation and who is it obligated to serve, the more prepared the organization is to do community conservation.

When conservation groups and land trusts have an inclusive vision for whom they serve and who owns their work, powerful new frameworks emerge to guide them. Here's an unscientific snap-shot in time to look

at what these frameworks sound like so far: <sup>11</sup>

*"It's time for us to prioritize different people's stories of land and relationship to land. Let us ask for the honor to be allowed into their story and stop trying to make them part of our story."*

*"Our goal now is to create an unbreakable link between people and place."*

*"We are the people of this place and we carry with us the moral authority of knowing that no one in our community has been left out of our efforts to protect our home."*

*"Our constituents should be heard from not spoken for."*

*"We are very consciously now trying to create a leadership team that is diverse enough to help us co-create the best ideas and practices that meet the needs of the people we want to serve."*

*"Privilege creates privileged spaces. We want to change who we primarily talk with. We are searching for a conscious way of measuring the diversity of our conversations."*

—

<sup>11</sup> These statements are direct quotes from land trust and conservation leaders primarily from Maine, but including Alaska, Vermont, Ohio, California, West Virginia and Michigan collected during a series of 14 workshops I co-facilitated with Judy Anderson, Ernie Atencio, Deb Bicknell and Danyelle O'Hara between 2012 and 2015.

*“We recognize that there are old narratives to our work that don’t serve us anymore.”*

*“We see pretty clearly now where our language and our dominant story puts up walls that keep us from our dreams.”*

*“Maybe the money, the years of chasing money, has made us inaccessible to others with whom we need to be in relationship.”*

*“I can see how the legal structures that we’ve worked so hard to create and defend have made us rigid and less able to have an open conversation with others about possibilities.”*

*“The failure to hear different perspectives jeopardizes all that we’ve done.”*

These are the voices of leaders who care deeply about conservation, have dedicated their lives to it, and who want to build upon years of legal, financial and scientific achievements by learning how to have even greater impact. Some within conservation will call this mission creep, and others will call it innovation. How do we serve those who need us most, including animals, plants, places and people?

Our conservation movement has been defined for 100 years by a powerful ethic of “holding actions” to stop things that are “bad” and we are now being called upon to offer a constructive future for what is good and possible.<sup>12</sup> An introspective land trust leader in her fifties told me recently, “I come from a profession defined by action, persistence and

speed. It’s easy – in service to our great mission – to become so self-focused to stop listening to voices other than our own and to imagine we have all the right tools. I want us to be bold and I want us to say what we care about. But I also want to demonstrate the courage and the humility to listen to new voices, to take them in, and to try to become something new and more vigorous.”



*“I want us to be bold and I want us to say what we care about.”*

Angela Twitchell is not fearful of these changes: “My primary goal is for us to stay well connected enough to our own community to know what they need next, what the next Crystal Spring Farm might be for us and for them. The name ‘Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust’ no longer describes who we are. Holding land in trust is not all that we do anymore. What we do is much bigger. If you’re becoming something new it’s silly not to think about your name. Telling the story of why we might one day change our name is a really positive thing to share because people here had a hand in making that change.”

<sup>12</sup> *The activist and Buddhist scholar, Joanna Macy, offers up in her many books and teachings a valuable analysis of the three forms of activism that she feels need to be in place to create long term positive change. These are holding actions, constructive alternatives and personal transformation. Conservation has very successfully addressed the holding actions and is now beginning to become a movement that offers a response to the others.*

BEING IN SERVICE

In 1950, Scott Nearing wrote, “it takes initiative, it takes gumption, it takes a certain amount of daring to leave the rut and cut out a new path.” Today, Maine is cutting out a new path. It is caring for a vigorously healthy natural landscape and attending to the hope that every Mainer, those who arrived first and those who arrived last, can have a relationship to this place by building a practice of conservation that arises from where our lives intersect. Conservation is helping to create a culture in Maine where we are reminded, everyday, what it means to walk in the shoes of your neighbor and to neighbor well.

*How do we serve those  
who need us most...  
including animals, plants,  
places and people?*



