

Protecting Maine Land to Preserve a Community's Traditions



This document is part of a series of case studies that build upon the data and insights presented in “Land conservation helps local economies grow: New England-wide analysis shows gains in employment follow gains in land protection,” published in 2019 and authored by Katharine Sims, Amherst College; Jonathan Thompson, Harvard Forest, Harvard University; and Spencer Meyer, Harvard Forest, Harvard University.

Protecting Private Land for Public Access

Historically, most of the land in Grand Lake Stream, ME and the surrounding area was privately owned, but generally available for public use. It was never guaranteed, but an unspoken understanding with the landowners that the people who relied on the land could use it. Some built businesses based on this access, centered around activities like guiding, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and more.

When longtime landowners started selling off their land, access was no longer guaranteed and potentially not even possible if new owners were to develop the land or drastically change land-use practices. For those who relied on the land for business, it became clear that they'd have to either own the land outright or arrange for permanent, guaranteed access. Aside from businesses, it was also concerning for local citizens, who enjoyed the land for recreational purposes. As a result, the Downeast Lakes Land Trust was formed and planning began to find a way to protect the land for future use as a community forest.

Community Support for Land Conservation

Supporters quickly joined the cause and those involved knew they wanted to keep the forest as it was—a working forest. A particularly important voice of support came from the Woodland Pulp paper mill in nearby Baileyville. As the largest employer in the county, Woodland Pulp's support signaled a boost in local buy-in for protecting the land, and preserved 600-900 jobs that depend on a steady supply of local wood fiber. Other businesses in the area, like lodges and guides, benefitted from the land conservation and were able to protect their jobs as well, all because open access was maintained.

“Practically speaking, we figured if we were going to do the things we had been doing, continue in the future, we'd have to do something about it. We'd have to basically own the land or guarantee access to it,” — Steve Schaefer, Downeast Lakes Land Trust Development Committee Chair, Founding Member, and Former President



West Grand Lake / Downeast Lakes Land Trust

Establishing the community forest benefits people who live in the area and also attracts new residents and visitors. And creating this type of green space was well received by the community—a 2017 survey of more than 400 residents and visitors found that many respondents who were new to the area moved there or traveled specifically because of the amount of protected conservation land.

Did You Know?

The Grand Laker canoe was developed in Grand Lake Stream. It's recognized throughout New England as a symbol of the community, and the traditional way of building them by hand is known to just a handful of craftsmen now. These canoes are built and repaired almost exclusively with cedar and ash harvested for free from the community forest.

Boosting the Local Economy with Jobs

Conserving the community forest has both created new jobs and protected existing ones. The Downeast Lakes Land Trust employs several people and offers opportunities for contractors and other employment roles related to maintaining the land. Along with the jobs

protected in the paper, guiding, lodge, and travel booking industries, protecting this land allows nine sporting camps to remain open, supplies craftspeople with access to raw materials, and provides an allowance of up to four cords of hardwood for every household in Grand Lake Stream.

Access to Open Space

While traditional activities like hunting, snowmobiling, and guiding remain popular in the area, the community is also embracing new uses for the land:

- Mountain biking trails that offer year-round sporting opportunities
- Increased access points for watersports and camping
- New hiking trails and interpretive trips
- Business-sponsored trail races
- Nature therapy

Finding Funding with Added Benefits

Securing funding to protect this land was a long and complex process, drawing upon federal and state programs, private funding, and carbon offset credits over a 15-year period, with help from the New England Forestry Foundation. The major key to gaining financial support from local residents was that the plan to protect this land came from people like them—not a national organization. In fact, most of the project's funders embraced the idea of local residents solving local problems to preserve the area's traditions and way of life. Those involved in the deal introduced funders to local life, showing them old traditions through literature, meetings, and guided tours of the area and its natural beauty. Another key to funding success was the land trust's commitment to pay property taxes on the conserved land, even though as a nonprofit, they weren't required to do so.

The final piece of funding to complete the project came from carbon offset credits. Because the land was already being managed sustainably to grow more trees, it allowed the land trust to generate revenue while meeting forest management objectives. This funding source has also had an unexpected positive impact on the community, in that

it created interest among local landowners to use their own land for carbon offset credits.



Grand Laker Canoe / Downeast Lakes Land Trust

Looking Ahead to Protect Land and Jobs

The community and Downeast Lakes Land Trust plan to continue working to support the local economy through land conservation, but to do so, they are interested in new sources of financial support—young people. The group is working to connect with younger generations to build philanthropic relationships and understand what motivates them to donate. As part of these efforts, the land trust hopes to fund a modest headquarters with a classroom and resources to promote education and outreach to help educate local residents of all ages about the benefits of protecting land.

Community Economic Benefits

- Preserved 600-900 jobs at the local paper mill
- Increased wood fiber supplies
- Ensured open access crucial to the lodge and guide businesses
- Increased tax revenue and employment opportunities

“Everything we do is viewed through the lens of how it’s going to affect the community. The community and the land trust felt that the only way to achieve our economic goals and community well-being was to have direct ownership of the property.” — David Montague, President & CEO of the Downeast Lakes Land Trust

Local Stories, Regional Impact—The research that informs this document found compelling connections between permanent land protection and positive impacts on local economies throughout New England, and this series was developed to show what these findings look like in individual towns. For more information about how conservation affects local economies across New England, see the full study at <https://bit.ly/CSConFi>.

Highstead is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the New England landscape and achieving the Wildlands and Woodlands Vision. Mailing address: PO Box 1097, Redding, CT 06875. 203.938.8809 www.highstead.net