



## Leveraging Partnership into Community Connections

*Kacy Bailey, Executive Director*

As this year's 14th Annual Snowshoe Festival wrapped up, I began hearing feedback from several people about how enjoyable it was to see so many people together at the Community Dinner and Mellie Dunham Contra Dance, particularly the joy of seeing both new and familiar faces. While WFLT has sponsored the Mellie Dunham Dance for many years, this was the first year the event was co-sponsored by three local organizations – the Land Trust, Alan Day Community Garden, and the Fare Share Food Cooperative. By all accounts, the partnership among the three organizations yielded a wildly successful event and fostered even more community connections!

We have been thinking about partnerships over the past several years and how they have allowed the Trust to have a far more significant impact than it could alone. The most evident partnership in recent years is with MSAD 17 and Healthy Oxford Hills which created the Roberts Farm Experiential Learning Program. This program targets students in 5th grade across the school district for learning opportunities at Roberts Farm, with 220 5th graders visiting last school year. The program is expanding, with an after-school experience for middle and high school students and resources for teachers to build more outdoor and experiential learning into the curriculum. The Trust's purchase of Roberts Farm (2007-2009) allowed this program to flourish, but it required the dedication of many organizations to have the impact it currently has on the district's students. Look inside for more about changes coming for the classroom at Roberts Farm.

Our land conservation efforts have experienced a significant boost over the past five years due to our role as a land trust partner in the Sebago Clean Waters partnership. This coalition of organizations works to conserve forestland in the Sebago Lake watershed to protect water quality, community well-being, a vibrant economy, and wildlife habitat in the region. Not only does Sebago Clean Waters' Conservation Coordinator, Ruthie Clements, dedicate a portion of her time to our projects, but the coalition has also made hundreds of thousands of dollars available for critical conservation work. The funds are leveraged from multiple sources, which we could not otherwise combine independently.

We have also been collaborating with our wise and trusted colleagues at the other land trusts in our region to leverage the exceptional talent and deep experience into additional capacity for all of us. There are too many shared projects and grants to list here. However, one that is coming into fruition is a collective project among Greater Lovell Land Trust, Loon Echo Land Trust, Mahoosuc Land Trust, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, and to develop a new GIS (geographic information system) tool to plan for strategic conservation of climate resilient lands. See more inside.

There are so many more partnerships, collaborations, and shared goals to discuss. While all of these initiatives require time and dedication to ensure success, the results speak volumes and dwarf the kinds of results we could have alone. We thank you for all your support and hope you find these collaborations as crucial as we do.

## 2024 Espy Land Heritage Award Recipient: Lee Dassler



Lee Dassler. Photo: Kelli Shedd

Maine Coast Heritage Trust has named the Trust’s Development Director Lee Dassler as recipient of the 2024 Espy Land Heritage Award, an annual award that recognizes an individual, organization, or coalition for exemplary conservation efforts in Maine.

“Lee Dassler has been an inspirational leader at Western Foothills Land Trust, bringing enthusiasm, passion, humility, and determination to the work of land conservation for more than twenty years,” said MCHT President & CEO Kate Stookey. “She has connected countless people of all ages and backgrounds to the lakes, forests, rivers, and rolling landscape of the Oxford Hills area.”

Under Dassler’s leadership, WFLT has conserved more than 9,000 acres of

land across eight communities, securing public access for hiking, snowmobiling, flyfishing, and much more. The list of conservation successes includes the protection of over 2,500 acres of wildlife-rich forest and wetland habitats and more than 10 miles of frontage along the Crooked River, whose cold waters lure spawning salmon each year. Over the past decade Robert’s Farm in Norway has become a four-season hub and WFLT’s signature preserve, with an attractive network of trails, vibrant community gardens, popular seasonal events, and informative educational offerings. Most recently, the land trust has been a key partner in the effort to conserve more than 25,000 acres of the Chadbourne Family Tree Farms, ensuring traditional public access and

*(continued on page 5)*

## In Memory: Cindy Reedy and Bart Hague



Cindy Reedy

Cynthia Reedy was more verb than noun. With a degree in bioengineering, and a curiosity for everything else, Cindy taught at Hebron Academy for 35 years alongside her husband Brad Cummings. While living fearlessly with cancer, she agreed to be in charge of the Triathlon lunches and added her own flair to the project, hand labeling each competitor’s bag and bringing tablecloths and flowers from her garden.

Bart Hague never stopped working for the health of Maine’s waters and lands. Following a career in resource and landscape protection including 20 years with the nascent EPA office in Boston, Bart used his passion and understanding of public policy in his retirement to assist many Maine organizations including the Maine Congress of Lake Associations, Western Foothills Land Trust, the Waterford Comprehensive Planning Committee, and the Upland Headwaters Alliance. Bart helped form the latter with partners which has since grown into Sebago Clean Waters, a partnership of 11 organizations working together to protect a forested Sebago Lake watershed.

Together with his wife Mary Ann, Bart donated conservation easements protecting 475 acres of working forest and farmland as well as significant river and pond frontage, at their farm in Waterford. Bart’s dedication continues to inspire a broad community of conservationists.



Bart Hague



## Coach's Loop's First Winter

Thanks to a creative design team, resolute online shoppers, intrepid assembly and installation volunteers, and a nearly heated workspace at Light's Out Gallery, the dream of Coach's Loop, 3k of trails illuminated by solar LED lighting, was manifest before snowfall this winter. The results were delightful. Approximately 200 motion activated solar LED lights, perched on galvanized poles, grace the sides of Akers Field, lower Stephens, Rust, and Libby from the parking area to the view. The lights turn on as you approach and off a few seconds after you ski by some have said reminiscent of the frozen food aisles at Hannaford). Looking through the woods while skiing, seeing lights turn on one at a time on distant trails evokes tracing the flight of lightning bugs on a June night.

To share the experience of skiing beneath the lights those who don't have their own equipment, the warming hut was staffed until 7 PM on Fridays for "Friday Night Lights". While our skiable winter was extremely short this year, skiers who work or study during the day were able to get in their kilometers thanks to the lights. Our thanks again to everyone who donated to "Coach's Loop". Thanks also to the LL Bean Maine Land Trust Grant Program and to the Maine Coast Heritage Trust.



Photo: Stacy Cramp

## 14th Annual Snowshoe Festival Success

This year's 14th Annual Snowshoe Festival festivities kicked off with a community dinner and contra dance on Friday evening at the Norway Grange where community members and visitors alike gathered to enjoy a night filled with laughter, music, and local fare provided by Alan Day Community Garden and Fare Share Food Cooperative. The event, a festival weekend tradition honoring the late fiddle player and snowshoe maker, Mellie Dunham, celebrated for its warmth and camaraderie, was a sell-out success, underscoring the strong community bonds and the shared love for regional traditions.

The following day, the festival continued with traditional snowshoe races, drawing over 40 racers and over 100 participants and spectators from the local area and beyond. Participants of all ages took to the trails, demonstrating the sheer joy of snowshoeing through Roberts

Farm's picturesque winter landscape.

A highlight of this year's festival was the inaugural chili contest and beer provided by Norway Brewing Company. Various local eateries put forth their best recipes in a bid to win the coveted "People's Choice" award. Fittingly, it was Norway Brewing Company that ultimately took home the award. Visit their tap room to see the hand-carved Nordic Slojd spoon crafted by local artisan, Ian Lindstrom, on display until next year's winner takes it home!

The success of the 2024 Norway Snowshoe Festival and the community dinner and dance is a testament to the collaborative spirit of the Western Foothills Land Trust, Alan Day Community Garden, Fare Share Food Cooperative, and Norway Brewing Company. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all participants, volunteers, and sponsors who made this event possible.



Top: Racers hit the trails at Roberts Farm Preserve at the Snowshoe Festival races. Bottom: Seth Gallant performs in the Norway Brewing Company beer garden. Photos by Cait Bourgault



## #NATIONALTRAILS DAY®

Trail Blazing Work Party  
Sat. June 1st, 9 AM - 12 PM  
Twin Bridges Preserve

Western Foothills Land Trust is celebrating National Trails Day on June 1st with a trail blazing work party Twin Bridges Preserve in Otisfield. We will meet at the trailhead parking area on route 117 at 9 am to begin re-blazing the existing trail system and installing updated signage. Stewardship Director, Alyssa Andrews, will be on hand to assign trails and provide assistance. All skill levels are welcome. Wear sturdy foot-ware, long pants, and work gloves. Bring water, your favorite bug juice, and a lunch to enjoy afterwards. Anyone interested in helping out is encouraged to email [info@wflmaine.org](mailto:info@wflmaine.org) to let us know you are coming.

### NORWAY Triathlon

July 13, 2024  
Registration Is Open!

Pennesseewassee Park,  
Norway, Maine

More info:  
[www.wflmaine.org/norway-triathlon](http://www.wflmaine.org/norway-triathlon)

The Norway Triathlon is a United States Triathlon sanctioned sprint triathlon that combines swimming, bicycle riding, and running.

All proceeds of the Norway Triathlon will benefit Western Foothills Land Trust to support their mission of the conservation and preservation of native ecosystems, farm and forest lands, watersheds, and scenic landscapes for the benefit of wild and human communities in western Maine.

Click to register on RunSignup

# 2024 NORWAY TRI

## Roberts Farm Classroom Upgrade: Out with the old and in with the new.



This spring, the modular classroom buildings that have served the Roberts Farm Experiential Learning Program for over a decade will be removed from Roberts Farm, and the school district will be building a new classroom building. Construction will move rapidly over the spring, summer, and early fall to complete the project. Funding comes primarily from MSAD 17's American Rescue Plan Act funds, with assistance from the Trust and generous grants from the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation and the New Balance Foundation. Educational programs will continue at Roberts Farm during the construction period. A new 24-foot yurt will offer indoor space for students during this period and will be available for WFLT programs in the future. We are proud to be a partner in this program and can't wait to see the next phase.

## 2024 Espy Land Heritage Award Continued

sustainable forest management well into the future.

“Lee has left an immeasurable mark at the land trust over the past two decades,” said Carl Costanzi, WFLT President. “She took the organization to greater heights, embracing new initiatives as diverse as working with the local school to advance education, partnering with downtown businesses to enhance the local economy, making free Nordic ski equipment available to expand access to the outdoors, and supporting Portland Water District efforts to safeguard the headwaters of Sebago Lake.”

“Perhaps Lee’s most enduring impact in the Western Foothills has been her effectiveness in bringing together diverse people from across the community in support of land conservation outcomes designed to improve the day-to-day

lives of people and families,” explained Angela Twitchell, MCHT’s Land Trust Program Director. “She has been a warrior for community conservation, providing guidance, direction, and example for land trusts across the state to emulate.”

In honoring past President Jay Espy with this award, MCHT’s board of directors created a fund that awards \$5,000 per year to a conservation charity in honor of that year’s Espy Land Heritage Award winner. This year, Lee will be directing the financial award to Western Foothills Land Trust and the McLaughlin Garden to honor two Board Presidents Andrea Burns at the McLaughlin Garden, and Bob Van Nest at WFLT.



Development Director, Lee Dassler taking a spring ski day!

## WFLT Board of Directors and Staff

### Staff

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## Call for Volunteers!

Are you passionate about nature and community service? The Trust is seeking enthusiastic volunteers to support our conservation efforts for the community. We have a variety of opportunities available, including office assistance, mailings, the Norway Triathlon on July 13th, invasive species removal, and trail maintenance work. Your contribution, whether behind the scenes or out in the field, will make a significant impact. To join our volunteer team, please visit [www.wflmaine.org/support-us](http://www.wflmaine.org/support-us) and fill out the online volunteer form. Get involved today and be a part of something truly meaningful!



## Turning to New Tools to Evaluate Lands for Protection

After a summer and early winter of floods and a lack of skiable snow this winter, the impacts of climate change have become increasingly undeniable. Land conservation efforts play a pivotal role in ensuring opportunities for biological communities (including us humans) to continue to survive and thrive in an uncertain future. Since the Trust's founding in 1987, it has focused on conserving the iconic landscapes of western Maine, focusing on open space, agricultural lands, water bodies, and wetlands. As the land trust and the available tools for analysis have matured, the land trust can incorporate more technical analysis into evaluating prospective conservation lands.

Since about 2021, the land trust has been using The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool to evaluate various metrics related to climate change. The Nature Conservancy's tool, made available in 2016 after years of development, comprehensively maps resilient lands and significant climate corridors across eastern North America. It introduced the land trust to the concepts of climate resiliency (lands with the capacity to maintain species diversity and ecological function as the climate changes) and climate flow (the ability of species to move from area to area without being blocked by human land modifications or natural impediments, such as upslope or riparian blockages). While this tool has been enormously helpful in bringing climate considerations into the land trust's conservation decision-making process, it doesn't capture local priorities.

In September 2023, with a grant from an anonymous donor, five area land trusts\* hired Rhumblin, a GIS consulting firm located



Photo: Jerry Monkman

in South Bristol, Maine, to analyze the collective service areas of these five organizations to advance climate-informed land protection. This service area is 1.5 million acres, stretching from Sebago Lake to the Mount Washington Valley, and is part of North America's largest intact area of temperate forest.

This GIS work did not create any new data sets. Instead, it builds upon the existing work of others, including The Nature Conservancy and state and national datasets, by filtering this data through the collective priorities of the five land trusts to arrive at a new way to classify prospective conservation properties. The outcome of this project is an interactive mapping tool that identifies climate-resilient focus areas for each of the land trusts, along with corridors between these areas, which can help each land trust evaluate the climate advantages any particular property offers. The tool is being finalized this spring, and we are very excited to use it for new projects.

\* Greater Lovell Land Trust, Loon Echo Land Trust, Mahoosuc Land Trust, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, and Western Foothills Land Trust

## Oxford Forest Preserve



Oxford Forest Preserve. Photo: Lee Dassler

On February 15th, the Trust purchased an 83-acre tract of land, to be named the Oxford Forest Preserve, located between Allen Hill Road and the Little Androscoggin River, near Oxford Elementary School. This parcel is one of the former Chadbourne Tree Farm properties acquired in 2020 by White Pine Forest, LLC, a partnership of The Conservation Fund and the Malone Family Land Preservation Foundation.

Situated close to the town center, this land stands as a beacon of outdoor engagement for the community, particularly benefiting the students of Oxford—an area recognized for its limited access to such resources. The property boasts an impressive 1,056 feet of frontage

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## Heartwood: Sustaining a Strong Core

It is well known that periodic showers are better for our forests and gardens than singular, driving rains. Reliable, gentle waters directed at the roots promote healthy growth, more resilient to passing storms or periods of drought.

The same dynamic exists with non-profits like Western Foothills Land Trust. Non-profit corporations rely in part upon the generosity of donors to sustain their growth. The Trust encourages supporters, accustomed to giving once or twice a year, to become monthly donors. We are calling this program Heartwood as it is the central supporting core of the organization.

You set the amount that you would like to donate each month and the rest is simple. You will receive a monthly digital recognition of your gift, and a hardcopy letter at the year's end, with our thanks and recognition for your tax purposes.

Visit [www.wflmaine.org/heartwood](http://www.wflmaine.org/heartwood) and follow the steps to select your donation amount and enter your contact information.



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Diana Arcadipone

## Thank You Warming Hut Crew!

The Roberts Farm Warming Hut and Nordic Center was managed seamlessly seven days per week (including Friday nights!) this season by our Winter Programs Coordinator, Lauren Olson. Our thanks to Lauren and to our generous and welcoming ensemble of hut volunteers: Jennifer Brown, Paula and Christopher Easton, Joan Frost, Kat Grier, Annie Kern, Deven Luther, Cecelia Maher, Mitchel McGary, Patty Miller, Cindy Mingle, Jordan Rowell, and Linda and Tim Seeling.

We had over 350 individuals and families borrow Nordic ski and snowshoe equipment this winter, 14 participants in our Nordic ski clinics, 17 person and pup teams at the skijor clinic and races, and a whopping 53 participants in the January and February biathlons.



Left: All smiles after the February Nordic Ski Clinic with Sarah Carter (R).  
Right: Skijor teams pose for a post race photo at the height of the winter season!

## Oxford Forest cont.

along the Little Androscoggin River, providing river access for serene nature observations and recreation. This feature enhances the value of the parcel, making it an ideal setting for a variety of activities including hiking, snowshoeing, backcountry ski touring, mountain biking, fishing, equestrian pursuits, and snowmobiling on the ITS 89 trail, which is maintained by local snowmobile clubs.

The Trust has plans to build a parking area, install a trailhead kiosk, and further develop the recreational trails with an official opening planned for later this year. We extend our gratitude to The Conservation Fund who, through its partnership with an anonymous foundation, provided more than half of the purchase price for the parcel. Other project partners include: the Land For Maine's Future Trust Fund, Maine Community Foundation, the Northern Forest Center, an anonymous donor, and individual donors.



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Photo: Nathaniel Liu

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