

# LAND TRUSTS WORK FOR MAINE



## WHAT IS A LAND TRUST?

Maine boasts more than 80 land trusts, community-supported, non-profits that have permanently conserved more than 2.9 million acres - 14.7% of the state. This network of privately-owned properties offers many of the benefits people have come to enjoy on Maine's public lands, including access to the outdoors for traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, snowmobiling and wildlife observation, but that's just the beginning. Land trusts also ensure access to thousands of miles of recreational trails; provide land for sustainably managed working forests, farms, and waterfronts; protect valuable wildlife habitats; and present community programming that enhances the lives of families throughout Maine.

### Maine Has Very Little Public Land

One reason Maine has such an active land trust community is because Maine has the lowest percentage of public lands among all states in our region. At 6.9%, it is also one of the lowest percentages in the country.

Most states rely heavily on government, at all levels, to acquire and manage public lands to meet the needs and desires of their citizens to secure public access to the outdoors, support natural resource-based industries, protect wildlife habitat and safeguard public drinking water supplies. In Maine, where government land ownership is low, land trusts have stepped up to help meet these public goals through the acquisition of more than 700,000 acres of private conservation land, sometimes with public funding, but often without any government support.

Maine land trusts are also national leaders in the use of conservation easements. When public conservation benefits are secured with easements, protected properties remain privately-owned and on the tax rolls. Easements are the tool that have been used to protect more than 75% of the land conserved by Maine land trusts.

#### Percent of Public Land, by State

*Maine ranks last in New England*

1. New Hampshire	20.5%
2. Massachusetts	14.9%
3. Vermont	14.7%
4. Connecticut	12.8%
5. Rhode Island	11.6%
6. Maine	6.9%

*Based on numbers from "Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data" a 2020 Congressional Report and information collected from state websites, including individual State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans. Public lands are defined as conservation properties owned by Federal, State, or local governments.*



In many parts of the country, the burden of public access to the outdoors is mostly the responsibility of government and taxpayers. In Maine, our more modest network of public lands is complemented by a privately-funded land trust system that provides many additional places where we can hunt, hike, fish, snowmobile, ATV, picnic, birdwatch, walk our dogs, and enjoy nature—usually for free.



Hikers enjoy sunset views at Loon Echo Land Trust's Baldpate Preserve in Bridgton. Photo Courtesy Loon Echo Land Trust

This report includes a snapshot of the work being done by land trusts across the state and their impact on

- › Expanding Public Access to the Outdoors
- › Benefiting the Tourism Economy
- › Supporting Rural Economies
- › Strengthening Our Local Communities

For more information on Maine's land trust community, and the work of specific land trusts in Maine, visit [www.mltm.org](http://www.mltm.org).

## EXPANDING PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS

Maine’s network of more than 80 land trusts has significantly increased public access to the outdoors for activities including hiking, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ATV riding, bird-watching, boating, and sightseeing. Based on a survey completed in 2024, Maine’s land trust conserved lands offer the following outdoor recreational amenities:



**2150 miles** of hiking and walking trails



**685 miles** of ATV riding trails



**1200 miles** of mountain biking trails



**1080 miles** of snowmobiling trails



**239 miles** of beaches/swimming areas



**2.76 million acres** of land open for hunting



**232** boat launch sites

### Enhancing Public Lands

These recreational amenities available on land trust conserved lands are part of a larger network of conservation lands in Maine, which includes State Parks and Public Lands, State Wildlife Management Areas, Acadia National Park, the Appalachian Trail and other federally-protected properties, and municipal parks and other green spaces. A great example of this can be found in southern York County, where Mount Agamenticus forms the



Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust helps to manage Dodge Point, a state-owned public property that links with land trust and town-owned conservation areas between Newcastle and Boothbay to form a larger wildlife and recreational corridor.

centerpiece of a 15,200-acre recreation and conservation area where land trust preserves, municipal parks, state wildlife management areas, and private conserved lands seamlessly connect to the benefit of resident flora, fauna, and outdoor enthusiasts. The region boasts 40 miles of trails used by an estimated 30,000 visitors each year for snowmobiling, mountain biking, ATV riding, and hiking. These lands are overseen by a steering committee with representatives from the Towns of York and South Berwick, York Water District, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Great Works Regional Land Trust, York Land Trust, and Kittery Water District.

With so many recreational amenities to offer, it is not surprising that land trusts throughout Maine are busy partnering in different ways with innkeepers, guides, outfitters, local chambers of commerce, and others focused on making Maine a more desirable place for visitors to explore. Here are some examples from around the state:

## Southern Maine

**Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust (BTLT)** is supported annually by more than 110 local businesses, including water sport companies, restaurants, hotels, and inns. BTLT's Farmers Market attracts more than 2,500 shoppers each Saturday during peak months, supporting over 40 local farmers and food producers and generating upwards of \$1 million in sales per season.



Photo courtesy Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust

## Midcoast Maine

**Boothbay Region Land Trust** reports over 67,000 annual visitors to its preserves – that's a number that is roughly the population of Portland. Their preserve guide is the most requested brochure at the Boothbay Harbor Region Chamber of Commerce, featuring 23 preserves covering nearly 1,600 acres, and over 35 miles of family-friendly hiking trails.



Photo courtesy Boothbay Region Land Trust

## Downeast Maine

**Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT)** partners with 40 Grand Lake Stream guides who bring clients to their Downeast Lakes Community Forest. DLLT also invites a dozen area lodges and inns to direct their guests to fish, hunt, hike, boat, and enjoy other forms of outdoor recreation there, including over fifty miles of club-maintained snowmobile and ATV trails.



## Northern Maine

The **Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC)** welcomes professional guides to its 114,000-acre Maine Woods property in the heart of Piscataquis County's 100-mile wilderness region. AMC also employs 16 full-time staff, one of the largest employers in the county, a team dedicated to ensuring this world class landscape sustains local communities through four-season public recreation and responsible forest management.



## Western Maine

**Mahoosuc Land Trust's (MLT)** conserved lands support outdoor recreation, tourism, and dozens of local businesses in western Maine. More than 50,000 people a year head to MLT's most popular trailheads or participate in the organization's Habitat for All Garden, Monarch and Homegrown Food festivals, birding trips, educational presentations, and hands on workshops. Many local businesses give to MLT's Business Partner Program to support this critical work.



Paddlers explore a quiet shoreline in the 57,000-acre Downeast Lakes Community Forest

## SUPPORTING RURAL ECONOMIES

*Maine land trusts also conserve working landscapes*



Photo by Bridget Besaw

Land trusts have completed projects in all sixteen counties that benefit important Maine-based industries such as forest products, fishing, and agriculture. These conservation efforts bolster local economies and support jobs, especially in rural parts of Maine.



Maine Tree Farm awarded their Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year Award in 2023 to Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust for their exemplary forestry practices.

### Land Trust Conserved Working Lands

- » More than 86% of the acres land trusts have conserved (2.53 million acres) are working forestlands
- » 40,700 acres of working farmlands
- » 10 working waterfront properties
- » More than 50 access sites for clamming, worming, and commercial fishing.



## STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES

In addition to welcoming visitors to public preserves, Maine land trusts serve communities in many other ways.



### Partnering with Local Schools

Tens of thousands of Maine students participate in land trust-sponsored education programs each year! Land trusts partner with local schools to create outdoor classrooms, promote field trips, and engage students of all ages in hands-on learning opportunities.



### Maintaining Municipal Parks and State Lands

Maine land trusts act as key partners with municipal and state governments in developing, maintaining, and monitoring hiking trails, boat launch sites, picnic areas, and other outdoor recreational amenities enjoyed by visitors on public lands around the state.



### Improving Water Quality

Many land trusts collaborate with local governments and private landowners to restore wetlands, monitor water quality, improve fish passage, and implement other practices to protect rivers, streams, lakes and ponds, and to safeguard clean drinking water.



### Connecting with Nature

An estimated 90,000 people attend land trust events in Maine every year. Activities range from guided walks for senior citizens, to “learn to fish days” for youth, to outdoor concerts, to beach clean ups, and everything in between.



### Building Climate Resilience

Land trusts around Maine work closely with state, regional, and local partners, community and business leaders, and the public to address the growing challenges posed by the state’s changing climate. These activities include helping communities adapt to large storm events, connecting and restoring habitats to facilitate species migration, sequestering carbon across the landscape, and long-term scientific monitoring to inform future policy discussions.

## LAND TRUSTS: A PRIVATE SECTOR ANSWER TO MEET PUBLIC NEEDS

Maine has one of the most active land trust communities in the nation, with more land trusts per capita than any other state. Collectively, Maine's 80+ land conservation organizations have conserved a little more than 2.9 million acres of the state.

- › 2,200,000 acres: privately-owned lands with legal agreements that limit development and protect natural resources. Most are managed as working forests, available to the public for hiking, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities.
- › 718,000 acres: lands owned by land trusts as natural areas, scenic landscapes, working lands, and destinations available to the public for traditional outdoor recreation.

### Most Lands Remain on Tax Rolls

All public land in Maine, the more than 1.3 million acres of conservation areas owned by Federal, state, and local governments, is exempt from paying property taxes. Since Maine land trusts provide similar public benefits as those enjoyed on government-owned properties, many land trust conserved lands are also eligible for property tax exemption. However, Maine's land trusts keep nearly 93% of the 2.9 million acres they have collectively conserved on the local property tax rolls.



Members of the Pulpit Rock Trail Blazahs enjoy fall foliage views from Patterson Hill in Lovell.



Photo by Chris Bennett

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To learn more and find a land trust near you, go to [www.mltm.org](http://www.mltm.org).