Newsletter & Annual Report Fall 2025

Listening to the Mountain

My Friday Ritual

by Robin McCarthy

My work takes me all over the state, but I try to reserve Friday afternoons for my home office in Bucksport so that after lunch, I can head ten minutes out of town to the Wildlands with my dog. It's a simple ritual, one where the only contribution I expect of myself is to be present; to notice the things about the land that ask to be noticed, to rest my mind and move my body. Nothing more.



The land itself tells the story of investment across generations; of the Wabanaki people who have long cared for and welcomed others to this place, and of those who have since worked to protect it so others can glimpse that first peek at the bay on the way to Great Pond Mountain, or spot a lady's slipper on the way to Hay Ledges in spring. An owl crossing a path at Hot Hole Valley in the hour before dusk. The tree boughs heavy with ice and snow along Dead River Road. Each season leaves its mark, adds a little or washes away, and the ecosystem shifts itself slowly around it all.

For me, it's a valuable reminder that where we direct our time, money, curiosity, and presence determines not just our own fulfillment, but also builds a future for others. Walking these familiar paths, every footfall and pawprint is both temporary and part of a much larger story of care, connection, and balance.

I'm grateful to the land trust and the volunteers, donors, naturalists, and foresters who have made it possible, for their investments. It's become a vital component of how I find respite and inspiration in an increasingly busy and disconnected world. Thank you.





"I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want to own." *- Andy Warhol*



Conserving Land, Water and Wildlife Habitat for the Communities of western Hancock County, Maine

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Volunteers of the Year

Every year, we pick a Volunteer of the Year to recognize someone who's done a lot for the Trust. This year, we have two: **Carl Derian** and **Denise Michaud-Smith**.

Carl has been Board President since 2021 and has been part of the Trust much longer. He and his wife Mary have lived on Alamoosook Lake since 1987. He is a member of the Development and Finance Committees and spends a lot of time immersed in the details of the Trust, lending his business perspective and energy to many initiatives.

Denise has been teaching life science at Bucksport High School for 18 years. She's been on the board since 2022. She helped start the Iron Ranger project and leads many Monthly Meetups. She also creates opportunities for local students and teachers to connect with the Trust. Denise loves hiking Great Pond Mountain year-round and is working on hiking all the 4000-foot peaks in New Hampshire.

Both Carl and Denise bring different skills and lots of passion to the Trust. We're lucky to have them and thankful for all the work they do.





Thank you



VOLUNTEERS!

We want to acknowledge the many friends of GPMCT who donate their time and talent in a variety of ways – from trail construction and maintenance, to Board and committee service, to representing the Trust in the community. Thank you all!

From the President

Over the past year, we have collaborated with Frenchman Bay Conservancy (FBC), Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), and a committed conservation partner on important projects along our eastern boundary:

- Acquired 190 acres on the east side of Happytown Road
- Acquired 60 acres on Winkumpaugh Road, abutting the Wildlands on Hedgehog Hill.
- We are working on a trail easement on Happytown Farm that will protect a local farm while preserving wildlife habitat and a future trail corridor to connect the farm to the Flag Hill Trail.

On Verona Island, we are in the approval process for a wheelchair-accessible trail and interpretive signage highlighting the Penobscot Nation's history on the island. In the Wildlands, our forest rehabilitation efforts continue. This spring, we planted several hundred American chestnuts, Atlantic white cedars, and red oaks, as well as adding trees and shrubs to the Memorial Grove. We are taking part in a brown ash survey and seed collection project, a collaboration with the Wabanaki Nations and the State of Maine. In September, we hosted an event with foresters, basket makers, and ash/ emerald ash borer experts in the Wildlands.

Construction has just begun on an expanded parking area at the South Trailhead, to accommodate horse trailers and school buses, partially funded by a grant from the Maine Recreational Trails Program.

Trail work has been another major focus this year. Our updated Wildlands Trail Map, published this spring, is already out of date—thanks to our new trails!

- The extension of the Capstone Multi-Use Trail from the Connector Trail to Dead River Road,
- A new Picnic Trail from Dead River Road to the shore of the Dead River, and
- The all-new Mountain Brook Trail, linking Dead River Road to the starts of the Stuart Gross and Connector Trails.

We continue to engage the community with our Monthly Meetups and Views from Great Pond Mountain speaker series, often collaborating with others, including Blue Hill Heritage Trust, Maine Woodland Owners, Native Gardens of Blue Hill, Hancock Soil & Water Conservation District, Maine TREE, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to share knowledge and deepen connections across the region.

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers, generous supporters, and hardworking staff. It has been an inspiring year of growth, stewardship, and partnership. Together, we are ensuring that the Wildlands and surrounding landscapes are vibrant, resilient, and accessible for generations to come.

— Carl Derian



Forest Health and Squirrels

by Malcolm Richardson

The bulk of the Wildland's 5,200 acres were clearcut (or close to it) over twenty years ago by the previous owner. It has been my pleasure to steward this cutover treasure onto a path of species diversity, forest health. Part of our operating income will one day come on the back of a log truck. If I'm lucky, that will come in a few decades, and I'll retire satisfied.

In the meantime, I'm happy to report that the trees are growing and we're slated to make our first dozen dollars! Our crop tree release thinning will yield some usable firewood—donated to local wood banks and sold at cut-rate prices to those foolhardy enough to toil for six-inch beech in the middle of nowhere (me). These cuts are akin to weeding a garden: thinning the stand to give more resources to individuals with greater promise, improving overall forest health.

These thinnings have gone hand-in-hand with planting. You may have noticed the 1,000 unsightly plastic tubes across the Trust—each protecting young oaks, chestnuts, and cedars from self-interested herbivores. Once, before the blight, a squirrel could travel from the Atlantic to the Mississippi without leaving a chestnut tree. With time, volunteers, and donations, perhaps one lucky squirrel will again make the journey—from Bald Mountain Road to U.S. 1.



Malcolm, giving away the forest as Austin Shuver, FBC Director of Land Protection, looks on

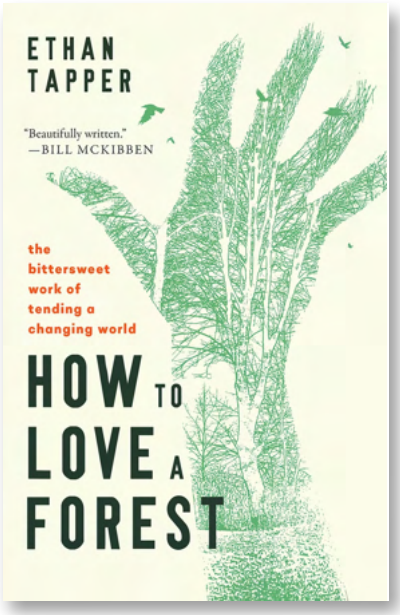


Iron Ranger

This past spring, **Casper Bruce** won a competition among Bucksport High School students to paint a mini mural on the Iron Ranger at the Dead River trailhead. We hope the thousands of visitors each season will stop to appreciate the mural and "feed the fish."







Book Review by Landon Fake:

How to Love a Forest: The Bittersweet Work of Tending a Changing World by Ethan Tapper

As a forester, forest advocate, author, speaker, and influencer, Ethan Tapper is beloved by many in the conservation world partly because he likes to do something most foresters do not: he likes to talk to people. "Most people are supporters of forest management. They just don't know it yet . . . because we as a forestry community haven't done a good job of sharing that story." He also promotes a kind of holistic forestry that is compatible with the goals of GPMCT and other land trusts. He embraces the whole of forest management: managing recreation, promoting deer hunting, controlling invasives, monitoring bird populations, thinning overabundant or undesired species, and commercial logging. He spoke at a "Views" presentation at the Alamo Theatre last spring.

On Instagram and YouTube, in a dirty orange cruising vest, Tapper talks about things like, "Can a skidder help heal a forest?" "Chainsaw Safety PSA;" "How do foresters stay warm in the winter?" If you memorized his dozens of articulate short videos, you probably could pass a forestry license exam. You would certainly have a different perspective on ecosystem management, and wool long underwear.

How to Love a Forest is a history of Tapper's difficult decision-making and hard labor in his 175-acre forest in northern Vermont. In a forest that "had no healthy trees at all and a world of problems that [he] will spend the rest of [his] life fixing," his despair eventually becomes love and hope.

Historically, his forest, once wrested from the hands of the Abenaki, was a simple commodity with resources to be exploited—either the trees, or once the trees were gone, as farmland, and later, a "kingdom lot" for a second home with a view. For Tapper, "the bittersweet work of tending a changing world" is to save not just a forest, but a forest ecosystem with all the species that depend on it—including us. He needs your help.

Our forests are hard to love. The one in your backyard or favorite preserve has in its history a clear cut, perhaps a livestock pasture or crop field, high grading (taking only the healthiest trees) at least once, its soil chemistry changed by acid rain, the loss of thousands of native species, including birds, mammals, microbiota and insects, and crippling invasives. Chestnut and elm trees are gone; beech, ash and hemlock will be soon. We will continue to damage what is left of these forests with further destructive practices, including—and this is at the core of Tapper's message—doing nothing.

"We need to have a diversity of different approaches, and passively managed forests are part of that. However, as

Continued on page 9





A Year of Community Gatherings

by Derek Cole

Across about 40 events, we hiked, biked, paddled, and gathered throughout the Wildlands and beyond this past year. Connecting with our community is at the heart of our mission—our events demonstrate why our work matters, inspire advocacy for the Wildlands, and bring together new and longtime supporters.

Our ***Views from Great Pond Mountain*** series brought authors, experts, and the **Maine Outdoor Film Festival** to local businesses like **Alamo Theatre** and **Naiad Brewery** for evenings of stories, conversation, and appreciation for the outdoors. **Monthly Meetups** got us outside year-round, from snowshoeing to hikes up Great Pond Mountain to catch the sunrise, all led by our dedicated Board and Committee volunteers. The year also featured the **Wildlands Summit Run**, our 32nd annual trail run.

We partnered with like-minded organizations on events like **Penobscot Region New England Mountain Bike Association** rides and a mushroom walk with the **Natural Resources Council of Maine**. **Preserving Ash, Protecting Traditions** was a workshop with **Ash Protection Across Waponahkik, Downeast Audubon, Native Gardens of Blue Hill,** and **Maine TREE**, where Wabanaki basket makers and several forestry experts shared information and highlighted the essential link between culture and conservation. See Zoe Albion's informative article on our website.

We also thank **Blue Hill Heritage Trust** and **Maine Woodland Owners** for helping to bring author, influencer, and forester **Ethan Tapper** to a sold-out presentation.

Thank you to everyone who attended, volunteered, or hosted. Your energy and support make our outreach possible.



Growing For the Future: A Tree Nursery at Home

by Yvonne Hicks

Maine's forests, including those in the Wildlands, are facing multiple threats that will diminish the tree population in the near and distant future. This past summer's unprecedented and ongoing drought, along with an increase in harmful insects and tree diseases, is part of increasingly disruptive meteorological changes related to the changing climate.

It is hard to miss the impact on our forests and unfortunately, natural regeneration alone is not going to stem future losses.

Our first priority is the suppression and removal of invasive species. Additionally, reforestation with directly sowed seeds and planted seedlings is key to speeding up regeneration.

Forester Malcolm Richardson's ongoing American Chestnut project uses directly sown chestnut seeds in selected areas. This is a quick, economic way to plant trees, but has a high mortality rate.

Planting nursery-grown seedlings allows us to select only the more robust specimens. This was my primary motivation in starting a tree nursery at my home. Initially, I started growing Red and White Oaks from acorns, from several locales to ensure genetic diversity. Slowly, I'm adding more species, including Wild Cherries, Eastern Red Cedar, American Hazelnut, Shagbark Hickory, American Elm, and Red Maple.

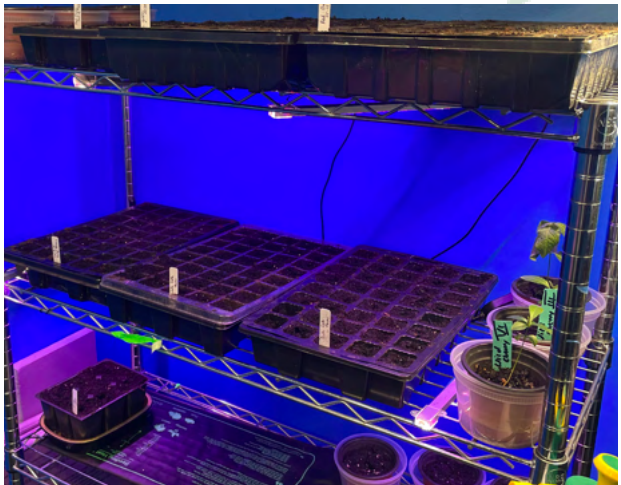
Growing trees from seed can be challenging. Using the vast amount of research available, I've been able to optimize the germination and growing conditions for each species. Seed quality also plays a significant role. This was a hard lesson in my first trial of Wild Cherry. Poor seed quality made it necessary to research embryo recovery strategies using plant cell culture techniques. With my professional background in tissue culture, I was able to secure some funding and establish a small cell culture setup to use these techniques in the future.



Growing trees and planting them has been a rewarding experience and I look forward to providing trees to ensure a healthy, diverse forest in the Wildlands.

Yvonne is a farrier, biologist, and Stewardship committee member.







Maine Outdoor School

With the Maine Outdoor School and support from the Maine Community Foundation, we welcomed several classes of RSU25 students to the Wildlands. Students gain practical skills and explore the outdoors while building teamwork and problem-solving abilities.



Students identifying trees





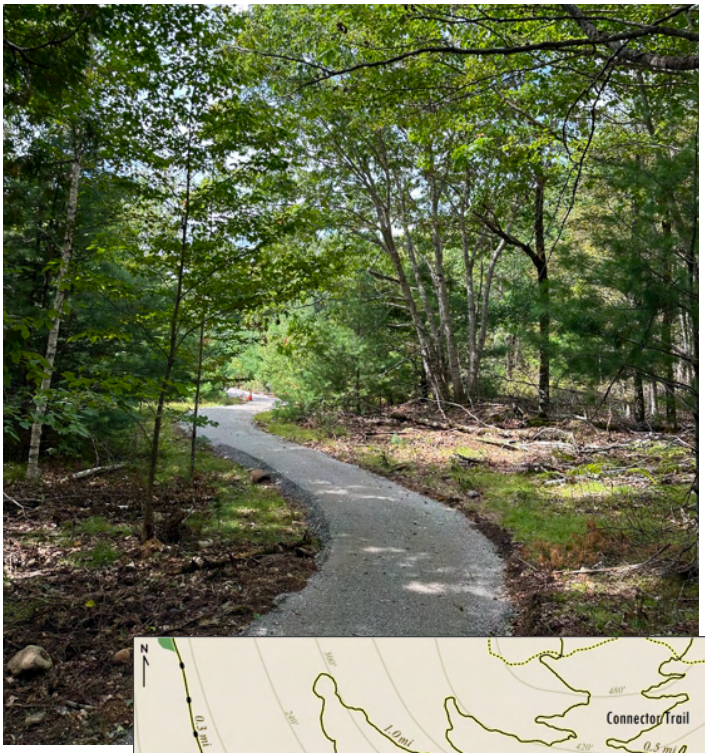
Rich Pinault, Volunteer

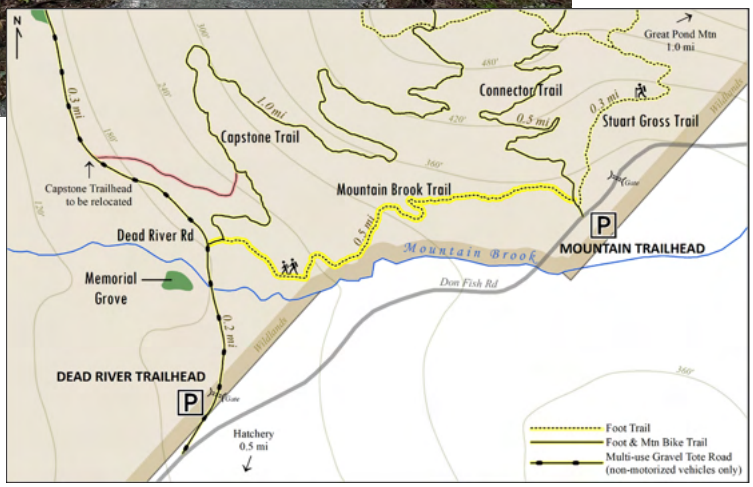
by Lewis Marston

If you frequent the Hemlock trail from Mast Hill Road, chances are you have met **Rich Pinault**. Whether he is clearing blow downs, checking for invasive plants, or simply enjoying the trail, he always greets you with a smile. He is constantly improving the trail surface and enhancing the views, providing a unique glimpse into the natural beauty that surrounds Dead River. As we grow and improve our trail network, it's the dedication of trail adopters that makes it possible. When you visit the Hemlock trail, take a moment to notice the magic of the place, and appreciate Rich's work. And know that you can be part of this important group of adopters. Just shoot me an email.



Bucksport High School students spent 35 hours and 20 days building barred owl nesting boxes for the Wildlands.





Mountain Brook Trail

The Mountain Brook Trail, our "red carpet" to the Wildlands' network of trails, was finished this fall by John Copeland and Steve Thomas of Kennebec Trails. They also designed and built a new alignment for the bottom of the Connector Trail, making it more sustainable and enjoyable. It's a great example of modern trail construction that is beautiful, sustainable and a window into an intimate part of the geography.



Book Review (cont.)

much as many of us forest-lovers would love to believe that . . . every forest could just be left alone and be okay, we need to acknowledge that it's not an appropriate strategy for most. We can't let the importance of having some areas be passively managed keep us from doing what we need to do to care for forests actively— even when that means making tough decisions to take care of them . . .."

You may not like some of his prescriptions. He uses pesticide on thirty acres of invasive barberry so that a diverse understory can thrive. He drives his own skidder and other heavy equipment in the service of managing his forest back to health. He embraces some commercial harvesting, to bring in revenue to be reinvested in the forest. He taught himself to hunt because humans are the only apex predators who can manage the overpopulated deer that drastically decrease the regeneration of trees. Tapper's relationship is the traditionally Indigenous one: he is not separate from or master of, but a keystone species of the forest, using its resources in a sustainable way.

"I have learned that the steps on the path toward a better world are often counterintuitive, uncomfortable, and strange. I have learned that what is simple is rarely true, and what is necessary is rarely easy." As land conservation evolves and confronts the uncomfortable, strange, and difficult, Tapper is in our corner—not always with answers, but with an exhortation to act.

Broadleaf Books, September 10, 2024, ISBN-13979-8889830559
Available at Bookstacks in Bucksport and from other booksellers

Note: this appeared in slightly different form in the Mahoosuc Land Trust's 2025 Summer Newsletter

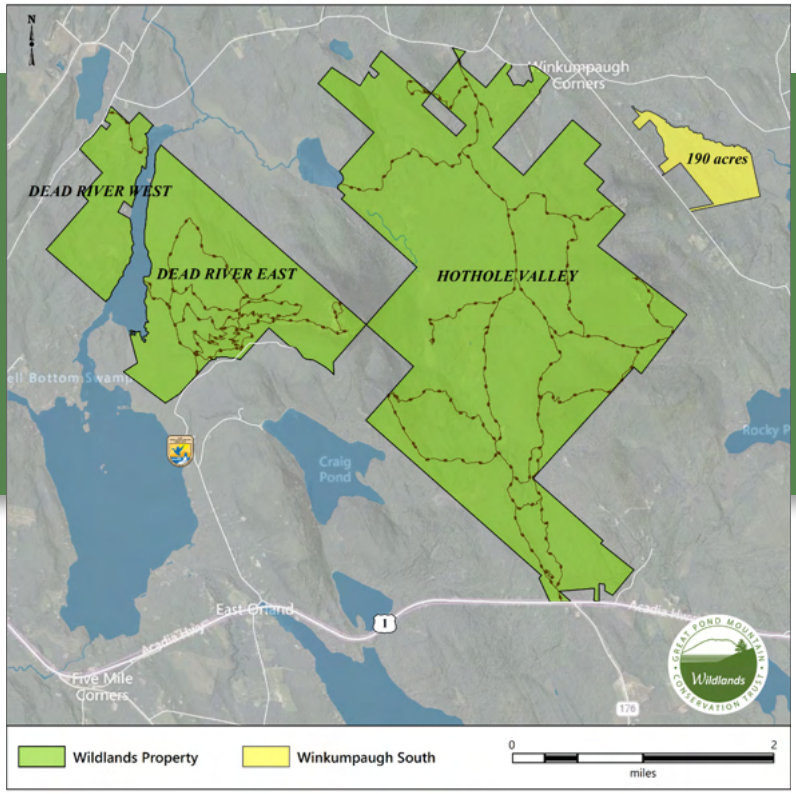


Trail-work volunteers work to narrow the path and prevent erosion. Pictured (L–R): Carol Bennatti, 2022 Volunteer of the Year; Jennifer Reifler, 2010 Volunteer of the Year and 2024 Yellow Birch Service Award recipient; Rich Pinault (4th from left); and Denise, 2025 Volunteer of the Year (far right).

Join the Stuart Gross Legacy Circle!

A planned gift is one of the most impactful contributions you can make to GPMCT

Choosing to support GPMCT by joining the **Stuart Gross Legacy Circle** will ensure that conservation in Hancock County continues for future generations. Contact us to learn more.



The Dragon on Happytown Road: 190 acres donated to the Trust this fall. Management plans are in process.

2024 - 2025 Annual Report

Revenue, Expenses, Allocations

for FYE June 30, 2025

Support & Revenue*

Donor Support	$410,986
In-kind Contributions	$3,895
Merchandise Sales	$392
Events	$8,544
Interest & Dividends	$50,734
Unrealized Appreciation of Investments	$138,504
Funds Released from Restrictions	$273,960
Miscellaneous Income	$2,928
Total Support & Revenue	**$615,983**

Expenses & Allocations

Land Protection and Stewardship	$281,433
Education & Outreach	$3,044
General & Administrative	$93,459
Fundraising	$58,825
Total Expenses	**$436,761**

Change in Net Assets

Net Assets – June 30 2024	$8,656,747
Net Assets – June 30 2025	$8,835,969
Change in Net Assets	**$179,222**

Major Reserved Funds By Type

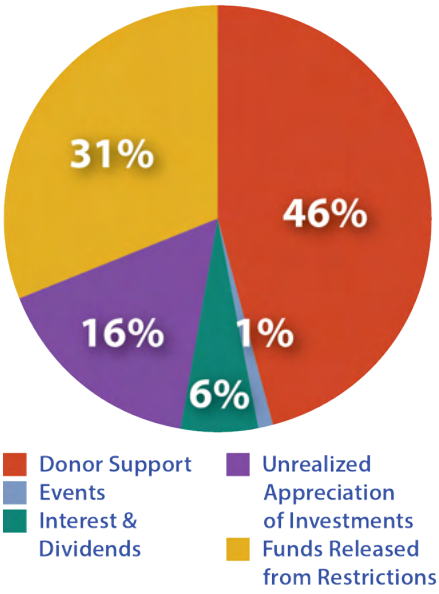
Permanent Endowment	$300,415
Wildlands Stewardship	$1,182,150
Land Acquisition	$201,283
Total Major Funds	**$1,683,848**

Change in Net Fixed Assets (Excluding Land)

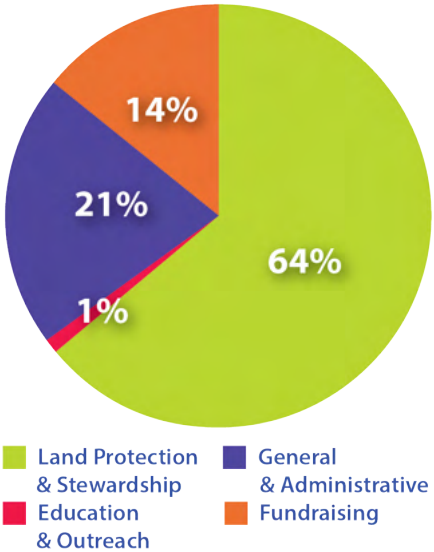
Fixed Assets - June 30, 2024	$448,990
Fixed Assets - June 30, 2025	$452,637
Change in Fixed Assets	**$3,647**

**Includes grants & endowment annual distribution*

Support & Revenue



Expenses & Allocations



PO Box 338
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For donation & other information:
greatpondtrust.org

GIVE TO GREAT POND MOUNTAIN CONSERVATION TRUST

Your donations support the **Wildlands**: 5,000 acres of mountains, woods, and water managed for wildlife habitat, sustainable forestry, and public recreation.

- ❑ Individual: $35
- ❑ Family: $50
- ❑ Finder: $100
- ❑ Trailblazer: $250
- ❑ Mountaineer: $500
- ❑ Summit Club: $1,000

Name(s) _____

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Mail checks to: *GPMCT PO Box 338 Bucksport, ME 04416*

Set up recurring donations through your bank or give online at greatpondtrust.org • Thank you!