

Newsletter & Annual Report Fall 2026

Happytown Farm Easement

by Emily Lad, *Maine Farmland Trust*

In late August, Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) and GPMCT closed on an easement protecting Happytown Farm, a 55-acre organic farm in Orland.

Since the early 1980s, Karen and Paul Volckhausen have grown vegetables, raised livestock and poultry, and cultivated flowers using organic practices. Through their work with MOFGA, farmers' markets, MFT, and young farmers, they have helped strengthen the region's small-farm economy and food security.

As Karen and Paul planned for retirement, they struggled to find a successor until Angelica "Munch" Harwood, who had worked on the farm for five years, shared her dream of taking it over while keeping the Volckhausens on the land. With help from MFT and Land for Good, Munch has begun operating the farm under a rolling lease designed to help her build equity toward ownership. The conservation easement makes this transition financially feasible while protecting the farm for the future.

"It is not easy to give up our farm; it's giving up who we are and what we do," Karen and Paul said. "We are now assured that our land is protected and our farm will be a forever farm."



As part of the easement, there will be a trail linking Happytown Road to Flag Hill and GPMCT's extensive trail network.

Munch plans to continue the farm's organic practices while making fresh food accessible through WIC and EBT and keeping the property community-oriented. "I want to feed people and bring people together," she said, "sharing the woods and including the trails up to Great Pond Mountain."

A community tour just before the closing celebrated this shared achievement. Thanks to the Volckhausens' decades of stewardship, Munch's commitment, and collaborative conservation, Happytown Farm is positioned to serve the region for generations to come.

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FARMLAND TRUST





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

PO Box 338
Bucksport, ME 04416
207-469-6929
info@greatpondtrust.org
www.greatpondtrust.org

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New Board Members







Three new Board members joined us in 2026: **Soren Denlinger, Marcia Lizotte,** and **Phil Scott.**

Soren (left) lives in Blue Hill and does conservation planning for Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

Marcia, (center) with her husband Richard, is an Orrington resident, with a background in education, youth programs, and community service. She is president of TROT Maine, an equestrian club.

Phil (right) and his wife, Lindsay, are longtime Trust supporters and residents of Castine. After a career in capital markets in New York, he brings valuable experience and a passion for outdoor recreation to the Trust.

Our work relies on community members who care about conservation. Most board members begin by volunteering or joining a committee. Interested? Please contact us, we'd love to hear from you!

Volunteers of the Year

The Trust recognized **Carol Orlofsky** (right) as its 2026 Volunteer of the Year. She contributed more than 100 hours last year, maintaining trails, removing invasive plants, monitoring emerald ash borer traps, and maintaining the Memorial Grove. She serves on the Stewardship Committee.



Carol Bennatti (bottom right) received the ***Yellow Birch Lifetime Service Award*** for 33 years of dedication to the Trust. A founding member, she has helped lead the organization and shared her deep knowledge of the Wildlands with volunteers and visitors while advocating for the protection of more local lands, water, and wildlife. Both awards honor the volunteers' time, care, and commitment to the Trust's mission.



Thank you

Projects and Initiatives by Carl Derian, *President*







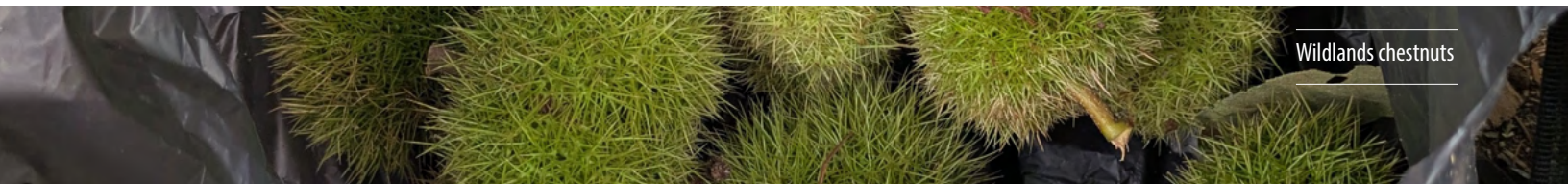
We've had another remarkable year at the Trust. While conservation is about permanently protecting land from development, it is also about preserving the character of our communities, protecting water and wildlife habitat, and providing opportunities to experience the outdoors.

Thanks to our supporters, volunteers, staff, and partners, the Trust is making good on that vision. Some of the projects and initiatives we've been working on:

- With Frenchman Bay Conservancy, we are pursuing opportunities east of the Wildlands. We have accepted donations of more than 200 acres along Happytown and Winkumpaugh roads. With a new trail easement at Happytown Farm, these additions create a corridor of conservation lands connected to the Wildlands. We'll have more to announce as we continue to extend this corridor.
- In the Wildlands, we planted 500 trees, including American chestnuts, northern white cedars, cherries, and red oaks, as part of our forest restoration process, led by foresters Roger Greene and Malcolm Richardson. We are also taking part in a brown ash survey, seed collection, and protection program with Wabanaki partners and the State of Maine to understand and conserve this culturally and ecologically important tree.
- Along Valley Road, there are eight new and larger culverts and a new Trailhead parking area for 20 cars, a school bus, and two horse trailers. There's also a new kiosk and a vault toilet. In the spring, we will break ground on a new maintenance building we've been planning for several years.
- There is a new loop on the Hemlock Trail and the Erratic Trail alongside Valley Road is under construction. These improvements improve people's experience and help us manage increasing public use.
- On the Joost Family Preserve on Verona Island, a wheelchair-accessible, all-persons trail is nearing completion. With Penobscot advisors, next spring we will be installing interpretive signage to deepen visitors' understanding of the Penobscot Nation and its enduring relationship with this landscape.
- We hosted a speaker series, chainsaw safety workshops, volunteer events, hikes, paddle trips, and workshops with wildlife biologists, geologists, and native plant experts. This year, our annual Forestry Field Day focused on forestry research and innovations for professionals.
- With the Maine Outdoor School, we raised $20,000 for outdoor education programs for the Bucksport school system—an important part of our mission to inspire the next generation of conservationists.

Our staff and volunteers make it all work. I especially want to recognize our land manager, Malcolm Richardson, who is serving overseas with the Maine National Guard. We thank him for his service and look forward to welcoming him back.

I am proud of what we have achieved. I am equally mindful that our success depends on the generosity of people who believe that conservation matters. Thank you.



Wildlands chestnuts








Iron Rangers

We invited Bucksport High School students to paint the steel donation posts at trailheads in the Wildlands. These are the two latest ones:
Eastern Newt by **Lydia Carter** in the South Trailhead (left)
Taking Flight by **Marina** in the North Trailhead (right)

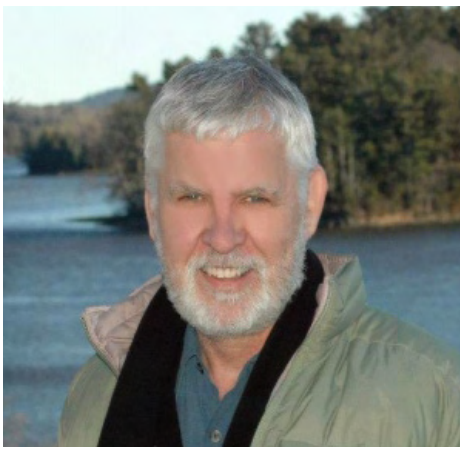
Points On A Map And Hours On A Clock

by George MacLeod, *Real Estate Broker and Advisor*

Most of us are conditioned to think about the land around us as a grid of privately owned properties defined by legal boundary lines. It's the map I follow most days as a real estate broker, on the ground, in the office, and in my head. Maybe there's a brief ocean view in my car windshield, maybe I swerve to avoid a bunch of deer or turkeys. Otherwise, life speeds up, passing between points on a map and hours on a clock.

Except on those days I volunteer as real estate advisor for Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust, which has been the pleasure of my professional life for over twenty years.

If I cross a wooded boundary line in the course of that work, I may not notice it, but deer trails are unmistakable and each one tells a story about where they feed, where they hide, and where they go to die.



The mud we walk through feeds a network of tiny streams that flow downhill over granite ledges. Those streams support hundreds of seen and unseen species as they widen and cascade through beaver flowages. Eventually they fill Winkumpaugh Stream, drinking water for the City of Ellsworth. Last year GPMCT staff, volunteers and one of my selfless clients permanently protected more than 1,000 acres of that watershed.

GPMCT's work doesn't always show up on the map or in our windshields, but when that deer or those turkeys do, or when we turn on the tap for a drink of clean water, we should remember where they all come from.

Connecting the Dots by Landon Fake, *Executive Director*



Canoeing off Verona Island

Sometimes when I explain my role to someone new to land trusts, I summarize it in a single sentence: "I raise money, buy land, then raise more money to take care of it." Of course, I don't do it alone, but I keep the wheels turning.

People also ask how we "acquire" land. Mostly, we do it the old-fashioned way: we buy it, usually at fair market value. Acquisition is almost always driven by opportunity. We identify parcels that are ecologically, scenically, or logistically significant, or unusually large. Sometimes land owners approach us, sometimes the land comes on the market and we respond; other times we approach the landowner directly. It often takes months or years—we are in the tenth year of working on one project with a local landowner.

Not that long ago, buying land was unusual for Maine land trusts. Often a landowner wanted to donate a parcel, and the trust accepted it. Why not? It was free. That is why many land trusts today manage dozens of scattered preserves—little green polygons scattered on a map. Some are jewels, providing nearby neighborhoods with access to small summits, water frontage, or a quiet forest walking loop.

However, that strategy was never feasible for GPMCT. We don't have the capacity to maintain dozens of separate parking lots, trail networks, boundary lines, and signage. Although little islands of protected land can be individually important, it is more valuable to have large, connected chunks of land that comprise as many of the natural communities and ecosystems of Maine as possible. As we edge up toward 5400 acres of contiguous land, we are getting there. It still takes plenty of parking lots, outhouses, rerouted trails, and property taxes (yes, we pay property taxes), to open them to the public, but imagine managing 100 fifty-acre preserves.

Sometimes this approach to protection has surprises. A year ago I got a good news/bad news phone call from a landowner whom we had been working with for a year. The bad news was he couldn't sell us the 185 acres; the good news was that his accountant wanted him to donate it.

And this month we will close on a project that started three years ago with Jim and Janice Curry. They are donating a beautiful 31-acre parcel bounded on two sides by 2 tributaries to Branch Lake and abutting the 185-acre parcel mentioned above, with access from Winkumpaugh Road. Gifts of land, when they fit into the larger context of our ownership, are a blessing. The Currys have been Trust supporters for 15 years and have always felt the need for more conservation in Maine. We are deeply grateful for their gift, which will link to other properties, continuing our eastern corridor.



199 Young Naturalists

by Hazel Stark, *Co-founder, Maine Outdoor School*

What can we learn from nature? During the 2025–26 school year, Bucksport students explored that question through 40 hours of Maine Outdoor School programming funded by GPMCT with support from the Quimby Family Foundation, John Sage Foundation and the Maine Community Foundation. Hands-on, standards-aligned sessions connected nature, science, and creativity through observation and interactive activities that sparked curiosity, built teamwork, and deepened understanding of the natural world.

Learning extended beyond the classroom, too. Third and fourth graders visited the Wildlands for games, hiking, and guided observation.

In all, the program reached 199 students and 11 teachers in grades three through five.

In Their Own Words:

"The kids loved the interactive games and learned a lot from them. Sometimes they didn't even realize they were actively learning about something. I saw the kids carry the information they learned throughout the following weeks and talk about it to me or to other classmates." — Teacher

"I was extremely satisfied with the program and our Naturalist Educator was knowledgeable about the topics and was an expert teacher. Thank you for providing my students this opportunity." — Teacher

"What can we learn from nature? That it helps us live, eat, breathe, learn. It's fun, calming to be in. That trees are different from each other." — Student

Thank you to everyone who supports GPMCT. Your generosity makes these outdoor learning experiences possible for Bucksport students.



Did you know?

The name **Great Pond Mountain** probably comes from the ***Great Pond*** (Alamoosook Lake) in the ***East*** (Narramissic) River. This map was created around 1820, when Maine became a state. In 1839, ***Orphan Island*** became ***Wetmore Isle,*** and in 1861, the town incorporated as ***Verona***.

Alamoosook has been interpreted to mean ***the dogs*** or ***the red ochre place***.

Ash Seed Collection: A critical step for species preservation

by Ella McDonald

Maine still has an opportunity to safeguard the future of its ash trees. By collecting and preserving seeds from all three native species (White, Green, Brown/Black), conservationists can help ensure that ash remains part of our forests and cultural traditions—even as the emerald ash borer threatens to eliminate an estimated 95% of Maine's ash trees by 2040.

The Ash Protection Collaboration Across Waponahkik (APCAW) is collecting Maine ash seeds for long-term storage and restoration. Black ash seeds are especially important because the species produces seed only every five to eight years. APCAW's ash field guide explains how to plan collections.

This year, GPMCT worked with APCAW to monitor ash flowering. Although few viable seeds developed at monitored sites, a search on private land in Orland found four seed-bearing trees, each with more than 3,000 viable seeds.

Trust staff Lewis Marston and volunteers Carol Bennatti, Carol Orlofsky, Jennifer Riefler, and Ella McDonald collected some of the area's first seeds. Half will be stored long-term at the APCAW lab; the remainder will go to Passamaquoddy Nursery for growing trees for restoration and cultural uses. Some may also enter federal storage, potentially making this the first Maine black ash seed collection held there.

Growing young black ash beneath older trees may also help keep ash on the landscape: emerald ash borers tend to attack older trees first, giving younger trees time to mature.

Have black ash seeds to donate?
Contact APCAW at apcaw-group@maine.edu or Passamaquoddy Nursery at tyler.everett@maine.edu. The nursery requests at least 310 seeds per tree.

Ella is a PhD Student in the School of Forest Resources, University of Maine.









In Remembrance: Al Beeson

1952 - 2026

by John Paul LaLonde

Colin "Al" Alexander Beeson helped shape Maine's forests, including the lands around Great Pond Mountain. With a degree in Forest Engineering from the University of Vermont, Al spent 39 years in Maine's forest products industry, designing thousands of roads and water crossings for timber companies. He worked with engineers, biologists, and other professionals to develop durable solutions that maintain fish passage.

After retiring, Al advised the Trust and other organizations on infrastructure improvements that make the Wildlands more accessible to visitors. He worked as a contractor for the Trust but often neglected to submit invoices.

Al's priorities were his family, the woods, his work, and sports. A devoted husband, father, and friend, he was respected for his leadership and appreciated for his dry sense of humor. Despite multiple forms of cancer, he continued to walk, bike, work out, and golf with remarkable courage and positivity. His motto was to "put one foot in front of the other."

Al's legacy lives on in his family, the forests he helped shape, and the people he mentored. At the Trust, his contributions will continue to support the land and the community he cared about. He is deeply missed.

A Year of Community Gatherings



Liam Riordan faciliting a conversation with Natalie Michelle and John Bear Mitchell.

Denise Michaud Smith, Lewis Marston, Jennifer Riefler, and others hosting a volunteer day in the Wildlands.

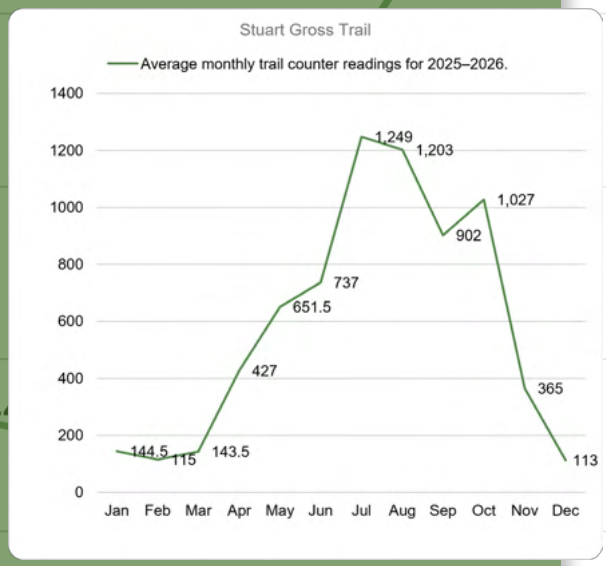




Joost Family Preserve: John Copeland of Kennebec Trails has finished the wheelchair-accessible trail and we'll be working on installing a series of interpretive signs this spring.

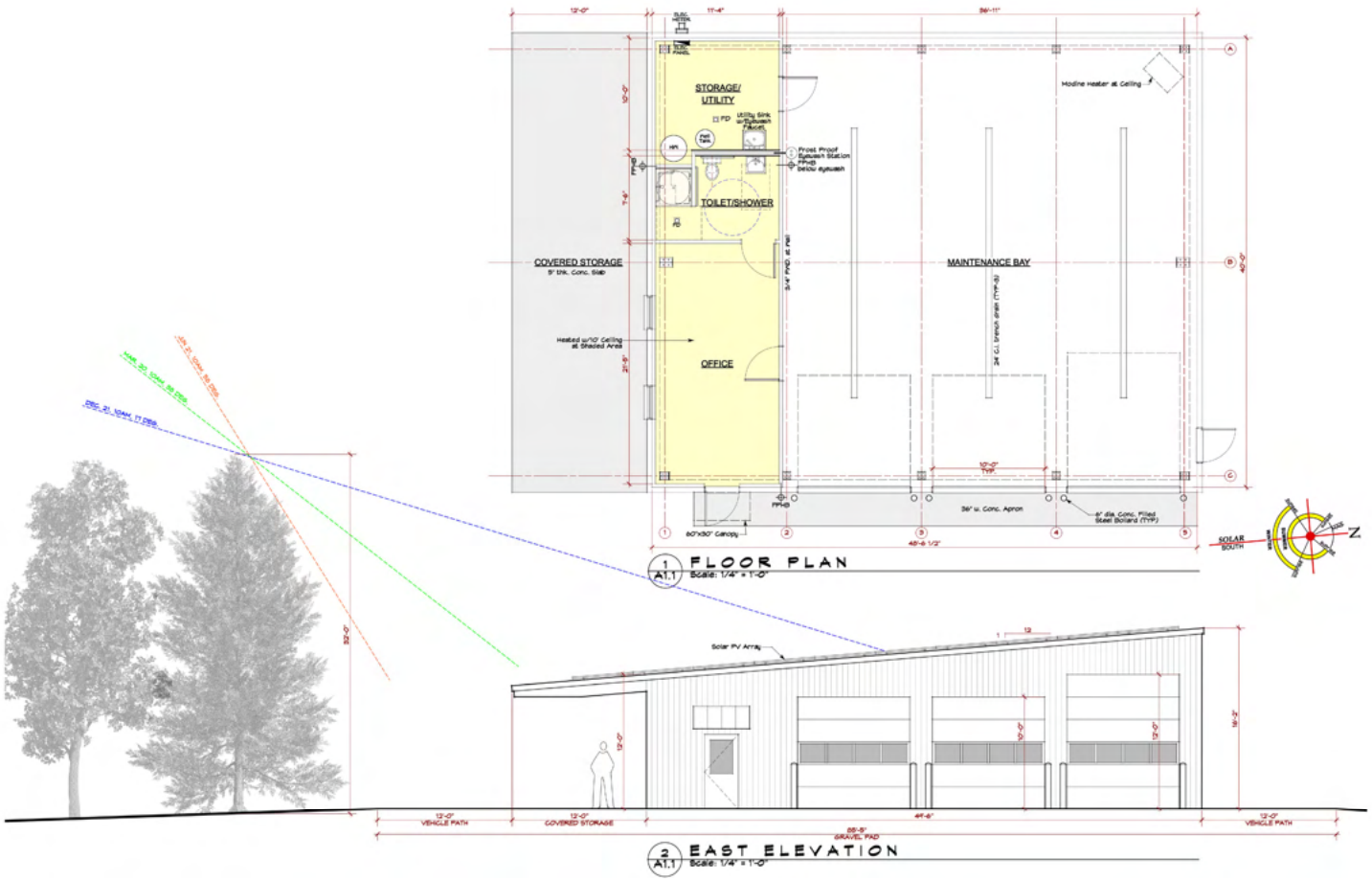
The Trust has received critical support for its mission from the Maine Community Foundation, Quimby Family Foundation, John Sage Foundation, Windover Foundation, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Castine, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the USDA, Maine Tree Farm Program, and the Penobscot Estuary Beneficial Environmental Project Trust.

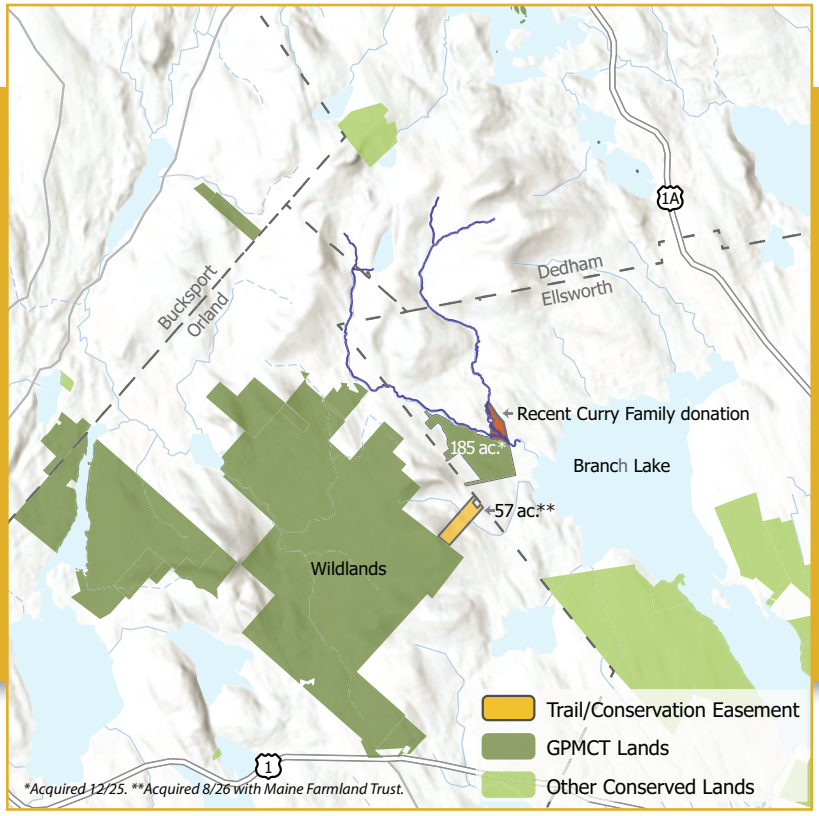
Users by the Numbers



New Maintenance Building

The Trust recently contracted Ray Wight to build a 2400 square foot Maintenance and Storage building just inside the gate at the South Trailhead. We raised money for this in our capital campaign 4 years ago and will finally be able to store the tractor and its implements under cover as well as am ATV, bandsaw mill, etc. Construction will begin this spring.





Jim and Janice Curry Donation

"Over the course of our time, the Winkumpaugh acres have provided our family enjoyment and many memories. Although it's bittersweet, we are pleased to pass on the guardianship of this land and the critters it supports to Great Pond Mountain Trust, knowing all will be protected and be available for the enjoyment of others."



2025 - 2026 Annual Report for FYE June 30, 2026

Support & Revenue

Donor Support Including Grants (Restricted)*	$810,672
Interest & Dividends	$59,393
Unrealized Appreciation of Investments	$203,129
Annual Investment Draw	$36,506
Miscellaneous Income	$1,487
Total Support & Revenue	**$1,111,187**

Expenses & Allocations

Land Protection and Stewardship	$310,187
Education & Outreach	$16,738
General & Administrative	$115,264
Fundraising	$59,206
Total Expenses	**$501,395**

Change in Net Assets

Net Assets —June 30 2025	$8,835,969
Net Assets —June 30 2026	$9,809,016
Change in Net Assets	**$973,047**

Major Reserved Funds By Type

Permanent Endowments	$333,262
Wildlands Stewardship	$1,245,535
Land Acquisition	$230,222
Total Major Funds	**$1,809,019**

Change in Net Fixed Assets (Excluding Land)

Fixed Assets - June 30, 2025	$452,637
Fixed Assets - June 30, 2026	$721,726
Change in Fixed Assets	**$269,089**

Conservation Land

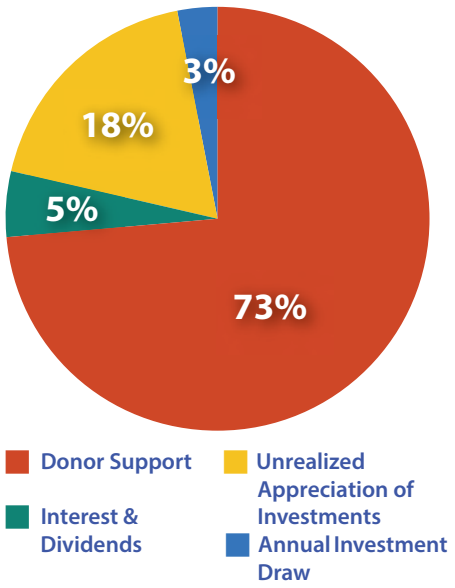
Land June 30, 2025	$5,652,635
Land June 30, 2026	$6,029,273
Change In Conservation Land*	**$376,638**

FY 26 Capital Expense

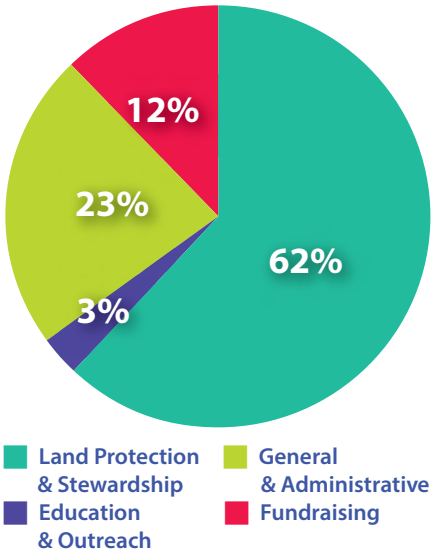
Equipment	$11,514
Land Improvements	$202,839
Land Improvements in Progress	$90,700
FY 26 Total Capital Expense	**$305,053**

** Includes Donated Land: $370,000*

Support & Revenue



Expenses & Allocations



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For quick access to donation & other information::
greatpondtrust.org

GIVE TO GREAT POND MOUNTAIN CONSERVATION TRUST

Your donations support the **Wildlands** and other preserves: 5,500 acres of mountains, woods, and water managed for wildlife habitat, sustainable forestry, and public recreation.

❑ Individual: $40 ❑ Finder: $100 ❑ Mountaineer: $500

❑ Family: $60 ❑ Trailblazer: $250 ❑ Summit Club: $1,000

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

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