MOMENTUM CONSERVATION

MAHOOSUC LAND TRUST

Bringing Conservation to the Backyard in Western Maine

Organization:
Mahoosuc Land Trust

Challenge: Engaging visitors of land trusts as collaborators to make change in the world

Solution: Habitat for All program - educating and inspiring locally



Case Study 2025, Emma Gillespie; all photos courtesy of Mahoosuc Land Trust

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Organization at a glance

Established 1989

5 staff, 15 board

Bethel, ME







Their Story:

Mahoosuc Land Trust was founded in 1989 as a community-based conservation organization with an emphasis on safeguarding the forest in the Mahoosuc Region, a critical habitat for wildlife in Western Maine. Since its founding, Mahoosuc Land Trust has conserved 25,000 acres of land through both publicly accessible preserves and conservation easements. Today, Mahoosuc Land Trust continues to combine land protection with recreation, climate resilience, and community engagement, making conservation accessible from forest trails to backyards.

In 2018, Mahoosuc Land Trust was grappling with the question: how can we encourage more people to come visit the land and use our trails? Mahoosuc has always believed that their work lies at the intersection of conserving large forests and local backyards, so they sought out a way to more closely connect conservation with community. The solution was the Habitat for All Program and Garden, which invites visitors to learn gardening and conservation skills while cultivating a sense of connection to the land. The program and garden highlight the beauty in being inspired by nearby nature and taking action at home

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Habitat For All = Education Inspiring Change

The Habitat For All Garden serves as a bridge between conserved land and private backyards. It allows for visitors to use the skills they learn and make small changes in their own lives. For example, at the vegetable garden people can learn about different varieties of fruits and vegetables, how to grow and harvest them, and participate in specific garden-related workshops led by experts. Additionally, the garden and programming engages with people of all ages and backgrounds, aiming to spark a love for nature in any and all people across Maine. These personal interactions are the core of the garden's impact, showing people that they are capable of making the change they hope to see. When it comes down to it, fundamental gardening really can change the world through its community building, carbon capturing, engagement of members and friends, and the knowledge that can be passed.

Beyond the garden, The Habitat for All Program also includes other educational programming such as webinars, walks and outings, and festivals. One highlight is the Monarch Festival, a two-day culminating educational event in late August. The festival is completely free and family-friendly, with the goal of teaching people of all ages that small actions can add up to make a big difference. The festival combines fun with education, specifically focusing on pollinators and how we can reimagine our backyards as mini-ecosystems for wildlife. Initiatives like this, where a child can plant a seed or watch a Monarch butterfly take flight, create those "a-ha" moments that spark a connection to nature and inspire the next generation of changemakers and conservation leaders.

Challenges

These educational programs and the Habitat for All Garden are truly an inspiration and model for how land trusts should be engaging visitors. One challenge is how to get these resources to people who may not know about them or be actively seeking outdoor education opportunities. Love of land and the outdoors is not reserved to just those in the conservation community, but stretches far beyond. It is how to reach beyond this community that can pose a challenge. This work is so important that the more people it can reach, the more we can work towards a more sustainable future.

Learnings for Other Land Trusts

Hands on Learning Fosters a Love of the Land

By hosting educational events it allows visitors to leave with tangible skills, which in turn instills a renewed sense of connection to the natural world. Being inspired by nearby nature shows people that they can be helpful in their own backyards. Additionally, it promotes the idea that anyone, regardless of experience, can take small but meaningful actions to live more sustainably.

Low-Barrier Programs Broaden Impact

Mahoosuc's festivals are of no cost which lowers barriers to participation and invites equity and inclusion into the conservation space. It also allows Mahoosuc to engage with a wider and more diverse community across the state of Maine. The more people that Mahoosuc can reach and educate, the more these skills and practices will be shared and implemented. These no-cost events are truly the cornerstone of conservation efforts, where small individual changes create ripple effects that ultimately lead to large impacts.

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