MOMENTUM CONSERVATION

The Value of Hunting, Fishing, Trapping, and Harvesting Timber Sustainably on Conserved Land

SEBASTICOOK REGIONAL LAND TRUST

Organization: Sebasticook Regional Land Trust

Challenge: Bridging Conservation and Culture in Rural Maine

Solution: Nuanced approaches to stewardship and education



Case Study 2025, Gus Silverman; all photos courtesy of Sebasticook Regional Land Trust

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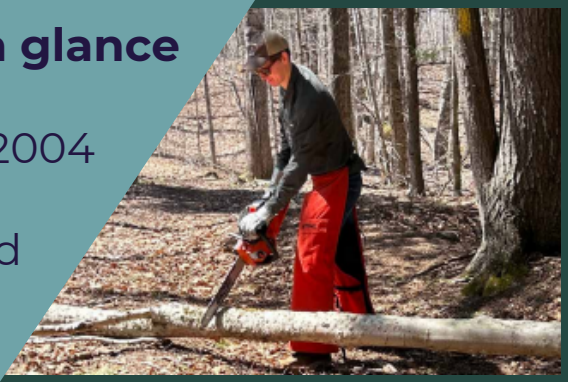
Organization at a glance

Established 2004

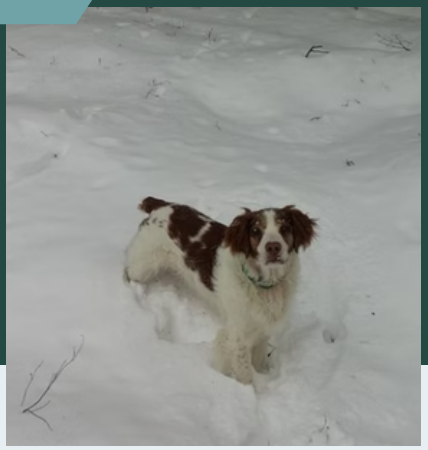
1 staff, 8 board

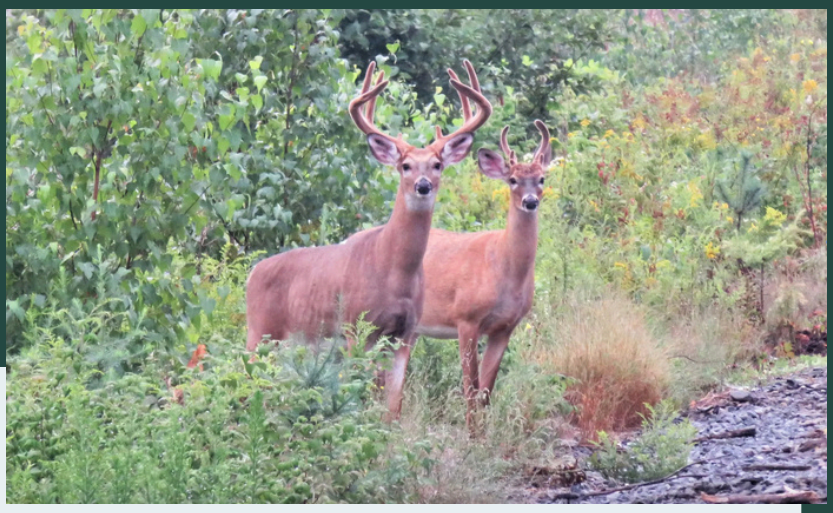
Unity, ME











Their Story:

Sebasticook Regional Land Trust (SRLT) began in 2004 as Friends of Unity Wetlands, a grassroots group with a bold vision: to protect a landscape that supports both people and nature. That vision continues today across more than 4,000 acres through land protection, habitat restoration, and education.

Executive Director Cheryl Daigle, a UMass Amherst graduate with a background in the social science of wildlife conservation and a Master of Science in Ecology and Environmental Studies from the University of Maine, brings both academic insight and lived experience. Influenced by hunters, trappers, fishers, her work with the Penobscot Nation on river restoration, and the writings of the late anthropologist Richard Nelson, she is helping shape SRLT's mission to center both cultural access and ecological care. Cheryl shows how conservation can include a wide range of voices.

SRLT takes a hands-on approach to stewardship. On select properties, the trust allows responsible hunting, fishing, trapping, and sustainable forestry. It partners with local loggers and removes invasive species while supporting natural regrowth. Hunting is sometimes frowned upon by conservationists, but as Daigle notes, "Good relationships with hunters can lead to more eyes on the land... more people looking out for the land," citing times when hunters reported misuse and helped protect the properties.

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A Positive Impact on Community

Meaningful land stewardship must include a range of voices and reflect the diverse ways people interact with the land.

Culturally - Hunting and fishing are more than recreation — they are ways of life. Indigenous and rural communities rely on the land for food, tradition, and identity. Allowing for these traditional uses of conservation land reflects honoring a deep-rooted, multigenerational bond with the land.

Ecologically - Hunters can help to manage over populated species like deer, and sustainable timber harvests can promote a healthy forest management system targeting mixed age growth important to biodiversity. Trappers and hunters offer deep environmental knowledge and support conservation through license fees.

Economically - Local timber harvesting sustains rural livelihoods while providing supplemental income to the land trust. It also keeps wood sourcing local, avoiding offshoring the environmental costs. Fishing, trapping, hunting and foraging support local food systems and reduce costs for consumers and producers.

Rural Accessibility

Access means more than trail signs and parking lots. It means allowing the practices that rural people rely on — hunting, fishing, and small-scale harvesting. These users also support conservation through licenses and fees. Daigle emphasized that people from outside rural areas sometimes see the land only as a place for recreation or spiritual escape. In contrast, rural residents view the land as essential to survival, identity, and livelihood.

Challenges

Balancing conservation goals with uses like hunting, fishing, and timber harvesting is a steady challenge. These activities are deeply rooted in rural identity and local economies, but they can conflict with outside views of what conservation should mean. The land trust works to protect ecological health while keeping land accessible to people whose families have relied on it for generations. This involves dealing with regulations, building strong relationships with local hunters and loggers, managing recreational use, and sometimes illegal or exploitative use of the land. As access to private land declines, land trusts play an increasingly important role in preserving both the land and the ways people connect with it.

Learnings for Other Land Trusts

Be Open:

Be open to dialogue with hunters, fishers, and others with lived experience. Their perspectives can shape more grounded, holistic land management and use policies.

Respect Cultural Knowledge:

Respect hunter and foragers experiences and cultural knowledge. They are stewards, and their involvement can strengthen ecological outcomes.

Build Relationships:

Opening lines of communication with diverse users leads to better land use, deeper care, and shared responsibility.

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