Last year, under the leadership of our fantastic volunteer trail supervisor Gary Fogg, a small group comprised of devoted volunteers, the Land Trust’s Bowdoin intern, and our seasonal steward invested hundreds of hours re-routing trails, updating blazes, installing new signs, stabilizing stream crossings, and much more at Cathance River Nature Preserve in Topsham. The main goals of this effort were to: (1) simplify the trail system and facilitate longer hikes; (2) connect to an adjacent trail to extend the hiking experience; (3) enhance ecological conditions (i.e., move trails away from wet areas); and (4) reduce ongoing maintenance needs.

While some minor work remains to be done, major changes are complete. You can now follow the Cathance River Trail (white blaze) along almost the entire river frontage. The Cathance River Trail (CRT) takes a jog inland east of the Rapids Trail to avoid low areas prone to spring flooding, but it returns to the river near the Clay Brook bridge, where the CRT continues on adjacent conservation land.

The Highland Trail (blue blaze) journeys through upland sections of the Preserve and can be accessed from Hiker Parking and the Ecology Center. It joins the CRT in two locations and can be used to create a hiking loop. Yellow blazed trails function as connectors that create shorter hiking loops or lead to destinations such as the Class 4 rapids (in spring) and the gorge at Barnes Leap.

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I n 1985, a group of neighbors in Pennellville mobilized to protect the special quality of this historic district on Middle Bay. This coming together of community in support of a special place was the birth of the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust. Thirty years later, we have evolved to a sophisticated organization that is innovating and collaborating to protect our community’s most important resources and connect people to them.

The success of our core work to protect special places over the past 30 years is visible everywhere – in iconic views of farm fields, woodlands, and bays that sustain us as we move through our communities – and in backland properties that protect the unique ecology of our region.

But our mission and work have matured over time. We strive to enrich the communities we serve by providing public access to conserved natural areas for recreation and natural resource-based activities, supporting and strengthening our local farming economy, collaborating with local governments and community organizations, and offering many different ways for people to connect with land and natural resources. You will read about many examples of this work in the following pages. And, we have upgraded our practices to meet high national standards for land trusts.

Since 2010, we have conserved 750 additional acres of land and multiplied our community programming: establishing the community garden; initiating the regional Local Farms-Local Food program; launching our Young Explorers program; enhancing the farmers’ market at Crystal Spring Farm; and offering numerous special events and outdoor recreation opportunities.

As our membership grows, (now over 1,000 households), we are increasingly focused on connecting with the community that supports us. Through a partnership with Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program in the Community Garden and introduction of electronic benefits transfer at the farmers’ market, we are promoting good nutrition for needy families. New educational programs like Young Explorers are introducing the next generation to nature appreciation. For the Land Trust, 30 years of promoting quality of place and enriching our community is not just a legacy. It is an exciting and ongoing work in progress.

**A letter from the Land Trust’s Board President, Brad Babson**

There are as many beautiful, inspiring, and productive natural places in our community as there are community members to enjoy them. Our thirty years and 2,300 protected acres are one measure of our leadership and success in land protection. But the future health of our landscapes and resources requires more than traditional land conservation and stewardship. It demands broader and deeper community engagement – fostering a culture in which people relate to and care for the land that sustains us. To us, sustainable conservation is many things: a farmer who is able to pass on a successful business to the next generation; a young child amazed by creatures hiding under a log or in the marsh mud; a busy adult having a moment of quiet respite on a local trail; a young adult developing a sense of civic responsibility and personal accomplishment through volunteer work; and small businesses thriving from the support of visitors who enjoy the look and feel of our unique region.

Your Land Trust is working hard to build connections – emotional connections between people and the places they love, geographic connections between protected landscapes,
and social connections between our neighbors – whether they have common interests or diverse viewpoints.

We hope you will join us and connect with your community in some of the following ways:

- Visit the Saturday Farmers’ Market at Crystal Spring Farm, stock your refrigerator, and support local farmers;
- Join us for a bird, mushroom, tree, butterfly, or other nature walk and learn about local flora and fauna;
- Sign up for a plot at the Tom Settlemire Community Garden (TSCG) and grow your own food;
- Join the Common Good Garden crew at the Community Garden and grow food for our local food bank;
- Walk, snowshoe, or ski on our 17 miles of trail and appreciate the natural world in our own backyard;
- Get involved in the Merrymeeting Food Council and support collaboration to improve our local food systems;
- Participate in Young Explorers and help the youngest among us discover the wonder of the natural world;
- Attend one of our films, forums, or book readings to learn and meet other curious folks; and
- Volunteer on our trails, in the office, or at an event and help us strengthen community through conservation.

We believe an essential part of conservation is connecting people to the region’s most beautiful and cherished places as well as to neighbors, human and wild. We want our region’s beautiful landscapes to be accessible to and valued by our community for generations to come. We hope you share our excitement about this work and will join us in this goal.

BRUNSWICK-TOPSHAM LAND TRUST EVENTS

2014 was the Land Trust’s busiest event season ever, and 2015 is gearing up to be even busier.

The Land Trust is increasing efforts to provide the community with opportunities to learn, connect with neighbors, and establish lifelong bonds with the natural world and local landscape. Our events are designed to entice everyone to get outside and experience nature in many ways.

Some of the events we are planning for 2015 include:

- Forest Inventory Growth monitor training
- Spring Birding Extravaganza!
- Foraging for Fungi
- National Trails Day walks and trail stewardship
- Summer Young Explorers’ Meet-ups
- Blueberry Festival
- Trail building at Kate Furbish Preserve and elsewhere
- An Evening in the Garden (at Tom Settlemire Community Garden)
- Farm-to-Farm Ultra Run
- Family Fun Day at the Saturday Farmers’ Market at Crystal Spring Farm
- Winter Solstice Celebration

We strive to offer diverse events to interest everyone in our community. Most events are free. We are able to provide these wonderful experiences thanks to dedicated community experts who volunteer as program leaders, key partnerships with other organizations, and the amazing natural resources of our region. You, our members, make all of this possible and we are so grateful for your unwavering support. If you wish for specific events or activities, we would love to hear from you. The wishes of our community are the focus of this work! Feel free to contact lee@btlt.org with comments or ideas.
Ellen Rodgers Joins Land Trust as Financial and Administrative Manager

We are pleased to announce that former volunteer Ellen Rodgers has joined our staff! Ellen worked in finance and consulting in Asia and New York and owned a yarn shop in Brunswick. With her background in finance, project management, and business ownership, Ellen brings a diverse set of skills to the Land Trust and makes it possible for program staff to focus on our core work of land protection, stewardship, and engaging the community in conservation.

What originally brought you to the Land Trust?
When deciding where to volunteer, I thought about what makes me happy. I have lived in many exciting places, but Brunswick feels like home. I love that I can hike a river trail, watch grazing sheep, and shop at the farmers’ market – all within biking distance of my house. The Land Trust is an integral part of what makes Brunswick special to me, so I decided to offer my skills there.

What has surprised you most about working here?
I have been surprised by the power of optimism and collaboration in our work. We achieve our mission – whether engaging the community through outreach, maintaining trails, promoting local food production, or conserving land – through the ongoing positive approach and collaboration of members, volunteers, and staff. The Land Trust community is a miniature ecosystem of sorts – it works, and I am happy to be part of it!

Local Trails Get a Makeover! Stewardship Program Flourishes
Continued from page 1

In the decade since the trails were created, the forest has reclaimed areas that were harvested some years ago. As you meander through this lovely area enjoying cottongrass in the bogs and kingfisher chatter along the river, you would never guess that Topsham’s bustling commercial area is only two miles away! If you haven’t visited the Preserve recently, it’s a great time to get re-acquainted – especially in spring when the rapids are impressive!

Many thanks to recent visitors to the Preserve for your patience while we implemented these changes, particularly changes to trail names and layout. It is virtually impossible to undertake changes to trails without some confusion, but we hope you will find the new trails simple to navigate and lovely to experience!

In 2000, John Wasileski, Highland Green’s founder, and John Rensenbrink, Chair of the citizen’s group Topsham’s Future, orchestrated an agreement to protect a spectacular piece of land bordering a remote-feeling stretch of the Cathance River in Topsham. Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust joined these discussions shortly thereafter, and in 2001, agreed to hold an easement on the 230-acre Cathance River Nature Preserve. Thus began a productive partnership between the Land Trust, Highland Green, and Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA – which was born around the same time with the mission of encouraging use of the Preserve for education).

In 2004, Highland Green staff and CREA volunteers designed and built five miles of trails at the Preserve making this wonderful area accessible to the local community. Over a decade has passed since then, and the partners recognized that a decade is a long time in the life of a trail! Bridges and other structures were beginning to need replacement and the trails needed some tender loving care.

We started meeting with our partners last year to discuss a long-term management plan for the trail system at the Preserve and evaluate opportunities for improvement. This collaboration is reaping benefits – significant improvements at the Preserve are almost complete!

Check Out New Improved Trails at Cathance River Nature Preserve!
Tom Settlemire Community Garden Continues to Thrive and Opens for its Fourth Season in 2015

Located within biking distance of downtown Brunswick and adjacent to our trail system, the Tom Settlemire Community Garden (TSCG) is both a beautiful space and an educational community resource where visitors are welcome. We hope you will take an opportunity this season to visit the garden – to help out or just to enjoy the lovely space.

The Labyrinth in the Wood

First Parish Church and the Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust are working jointly on creating an outdoor labyrinth that will be located off of a Land Trust trail near the Tom Settlemire Community Garden. The location is lovely, set gently into the wooded area, but with clear views of the fields.

The outdoor labyrinth is being created in honor of Susan Fitzgerald—a strong Land Trust supporter and the long-time Children’s Education Director at First Parish Church. She is also our neighbor at Crystal Spring Farm and has been dreaming about an outdoor labyrinth in Brunswick for many years.

A labyrinth is a single path that winds around itself, drawing participants into a center space. The ancient practice of walking a labyrinth has been known to nearly all cultures across the globe. Many find that journeying to the center while following a path serves to quiet the mind and open the heart. Some use walking a labyrinth for relaxation, others use it as prayer. Still others use it as meditation in pursuit of a deeper tranquility. Walking this trail, following its turns while maintaining an awareness of the center, can remind one of the journey through this life.

We will be providing you with more information about the labyrinth in coming weeks, but if you would like to learn more or make a contribution to the labyrinth project, please email Angela Twitchell at angela@btlt.org or call 729-7694.

Clockwise: The Winter Garden Workshops draw large crowds with their diverse lineup of gardening topics. Dedicated volunteers make this garden possible. The annual Taking Root Plant Sale is the Garden’s biggest fundraiser, and a great opportunity to purchase unique and beautiful locally sourced plants. Produce harvested for Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program in the first three seasons totals over 6,000 pounds.

COMING UP AT THE GARDEN:
Taking Root Plant Sale: May 30, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
Start the growing season at the Garden’s biggest fundraiser of the year. Donations and volunteers needed.
More information is available at www.btlt.org/tscg-event
Spring is Coming... We Promise!
And so is the Farmers’ Market!
2015 Season: May 2 - November 7

Join us for another great year of fantastic food and diverse goods from our talented local farmers and producers!
As we enter our 16th season, watch for...
• Three wonderful farms joining our array of vendors
• Great music, superbly curated by musician Craig Hensley
• The fourth annual market poster, free with a $60 membership to the Land Trust
• The return of our popular Market Money program, enabling market purchases by SNAP recipients and credit/debit card users

While often cited as one of the best markets in Maine, success has brought some challenges. One of the market’s significant assets is the setting – the Land Trust’s Crystal Spring Farm. As a working farm, space for the market is limited. We continue to innovate to improve the parking layout to ensure the safe flow of people and cars within that space. This year, we are implementing the following policy to help in this ongoing effort:

MARKET OPENING TIME: Starting this year, the customer parking lot and market green will not be accessible to the public until 8:30 AM. Please arrive no earlier than 8:30 AM, and consider biking or carpooling to market whenever possible.

We love the market and know you do too! Please respect and support our new policy which will allow vendors and market staff to set up undisturbed, maintain safety, and optimize use of parking spaces.

Thank you for your cooperation! We are excited about the upcoming market season and look forward to seeing you in May!

2015 Market Poster Created by Land Trust Member, Robin Brooks
This year’s poster features a lovely, colorful market scene created for the Land Trust by long-time member Robin Brooks. Robin “is inspired by the natural world and loves to play with a variety of materials and processes.” She has taught art for many years and was one of several local artists featured in the Land Trust’s 2014 Plein Air event at Thornton Oaks. Her work can be seen at galleries in the region, including the Harlow Gallery in Hallowell, and on her website: www.robinbrooksart.com.

We are grateful for her unfailing enthusiasm for our work and for the beautiful custom image she created to promote the market this year.
Making Local Food Connections

Over the next few months, BTLT’s successful Local Farms–Local Food (LFLF) collaboration with the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust (KELT) will be undergoing a bit of a change. Since 2011, BTLT has partnered with KELT in an innovative collaboration to conserve farmland, increase local food production, and promote a more resilient food system in the southern Midcoast region. BTLT and KELT are broadening the scope of this program, to think more expansively about the region’s local food scene. Over the past few months, we have been working with community members and local organizations, including Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program (MCHPP), Midcoast Economic Development District, and Access Health, to form the Merrymeeting Food Council for the southern Midcoast region.

Our region has an exceptionally vibrant food and farm scene that many people are working to maintain and enrich. The Merrymeeting Food Council will bring together these diverse groups and individuals, help community members better understand the local food system, and provide a forum for discussing and promoting innovation and efficiency in our local food economy.

The ultimate goal of the Food Council is to get more local food onto the plates of all local residents. We aim to achieve this by reducing redundancy of effort and finding and filling gaps in our region’s food system. We want our food system to promote environmental and economic health, provide affordable, healthy food for everyone in our community, and ensure a safe, prosperous living for food system workers.

The new Merrymeeting Food Council is one of 12 councils in Maine that are either established or forming. There are approximately 200 such councils nationwide. Food council priorities and focus vary. For the Merrymeeting Food Council, an important initial focus will be researching the various models (Massachusetts, Vermont, and other regions of Maine have very effective food councils), and then collectively deciding which best suits the needs and goals of our community.

An extremely important part of this work is feedback from community members. We need to know what works, and what does not, in our local food system. We need to take inventory of available resources and identify gaps. BTLT and KELT staff, our partners, local food advocates, and volunteers will be conducting research over the next 4-6 months. Please share your ideas about how our food system could be improved. Your input will help guide the Merrymeeting Food Council’s focus.

To introduce the concept of a food council to the community and get people thinking about food systems, we sponsored a four-part film series that ran in February and March in Brunswick, Topsham, and Bath. The films were well attended and participants provided wonderful insights about issues requiring attention. Many thanks go out to farmer Joe Grady of Two Coves Farm, investor Paul Skydell, long-time farmer and local food advocate Tom Settlemire, Mary Turner and Ethan Minton from MCHPP, Ben Slayton from Farmers’ Gate, and Brett Richardson from We Compost It! for leading discussions following the films. Thanks to those who attended, provided input, and expressed interest in participating in the Council.

A food system is everything needed to get food from the field or ocean to consumers and beyond. It includes farmers, processors, transportation, grocery stores, restaurants, waste management, municipal government, emergency food providers, and many others. In addition, a food system impacts virtually every aspect of our society, ranging from the environment, to the economy, health, and community.

Everything You Read Here Was Made Possible by Your Generous Support!

There was a lot of good news from the Land Trust’s 2014 membership drive:
• A record number of new members (154) joined us last year
• We surpassed the 1,000-household mark!
• We feel momentum building as we reach toward our goal of 1,500 households. You can help us reach this goal! If you have friends, neighbors or family who appreciate the Land Trust’s work, ask them to join you and become a member. You, our members, make this work possible and we can’t thank you enough for your votes of confidence in our work!

In a recent new initiative, in 2014 we launched two new giving societies – Community Partners and Business Partners. These giving societies support the work of the land trust at a high level, committing to give $1,000 or more annually. These commitments provide an extra degree of financial predictability and greatly facilitate our program planning. In the pilot year of our Community Partners initiative, we are grateful to welcome 30 members to this group. The Business Partners initiative has just been launched, yet already we can thank the following businesses for joining this group and supporting our work:
2015 Annual Meeting

30 Years of Conservation: BTLT and the Evolving Land Conservation Movement

The Annual Meeting for all members will be June 23rd at 5:30 at the Topsham Public Library. The agenda will include Elections of Board members, and a presentation by Jay Espy, Executive Director of the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation.