



## Woodie Wheaton Land Trust

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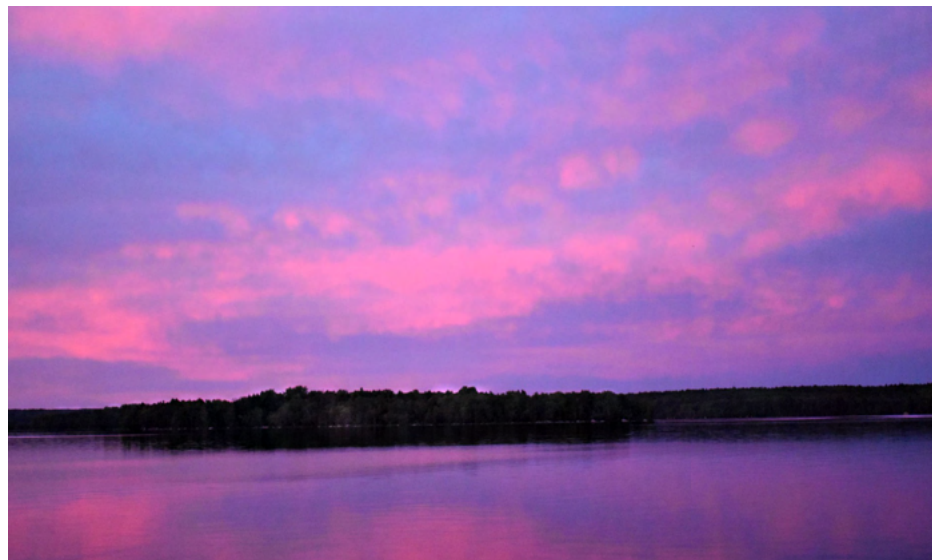
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Help us protect, preserve, and conserve the land and water in the Chiputneticook Lakes region of eastern Maine and western New Brunswick for the benefit of present and future generations.



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To promote conservation of the Chiputneticook Lakes



Issue 21, Spring 2021

## CAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION SAVE RURAL COMMUNITIES?

by Elbridge Cleaves, Past WWLT President

When asked to pen an article my first thought ran to the traditional belief that "man's needs and wants hold sway over those of nature." While some events of the past might have reinforced that aged philosophy, time, hindsight, and the plight of rural Maine have shed new light on the subject.

Economic development and conservation always had more in common than what seemed to have separated them. This statement has become especially acute as the future of our rural communities rests on the succession of the "grey" generation - whether in local education, private business, civic, religious, or volunteer-driven non-profits.

The history of land use in the East Grand Region has generally resulted in a static, if not an "orchestrated" landscape. Local populations have regressed and aged through outmigration, but temporarily stabilized. Farming is local agriculture. Development and conservation of shorelines have rendered many lakes built-out, fully protected, or a mix. (Summer homes, an influx of human and financial capital, tax base, the benefits of natural character). Conservation directed



philanthropy has enabled wildlife habitat restoration, protection of ecological values and guaranteed public access. Much forestland is held by long-tenured families whose business model is not development, rather timber management - policies augmented by large scale working forest easements and carbon sequestration. Protecting the environment, enforcement of land use regulations and stewarding our natural resources are pillars of responsible human behavior - absolute necessities for lasting economic success and conservation.

No! The crisis today is not about land or water, but people. Simply, there are not enough young people to sustain our rural communities and organizations. This crisis did not happen overnight, and neither will solutions. What insight do economic development and conservation have to offer?

Economic development can be defined as creating places where people want to invest, work and live. Conservation is the preservation, protection, and restoration of the natural environment and wildlife. A recent study in the Adirondacks found seventy (70) percent of alumni from small communities chose scenery, nature, and outdoor recreation as the most important attraction to moving home. Likewise, fifty (50) percent said lack of jobs was a major obstacle.

Continued on PAGE 6 ►



# See What Some of Our Directors Are Saying

about why they support WWLT!



"I grew up in Forest City and remember being a teenager when my dad, uncles, and many of the local guides were first getting the organization off the ground. This was long before we had the land trust center building or any of the accomplishments we do now. It started as a grassroots campaign born out of everyone's mutual passion for the local landscape and continues to be driven by those core values today. I am very proud of what we've done and honored to be working with a team of directors and members who share the same passion and work ethic as our founders. I'm motivated by the fact that our work is just as critical today as it always was. We're making a difference, and it feels great to play a small part in that movement."

~ Jill Wheaton

"In 1960, when I was 11 years old, my father brought our family of five up from Connecticut to East Grand Lake in Forest City for the month of August. I immediately fell in love with the unspoiled, while yet accessible beauty of the area. The brightness of the stars. The sound of the loons breaking the deep silence of the night. The miles of fishing along the undeveloped shoreland of Spednic Lake, which was teeming with white perch and bass. Almost every year since then, I have made my way to our camp on the Arm of East Grand, driving 22 hours yearly from Michigan with my own family. Along with us, my siblings and their children and grandchildren treasure this area for the same reasons I fell in love with it 60 years ago. My 10 year old grandson talks all year about going to Maine. While, of course, there have been changes and major threats to the area, it still has managed to be a place that never fails to reconnect us to the deep natural beauty of the world. This is what the work of the WWLT is about—protecting this area to assure that long after we're gone, others will still be able to find a place in this world where they can hear the silence of night broken by the lone call of a loon. When my 10 year old grandson was an infant, I held him by the lake and wished for him that he would be able to do the same for his grandson someday. This can come true, but only if we take the time and energy, and resources now to make it come true. That is why I'm working with the WWLT."

~ Jamie Plunkett

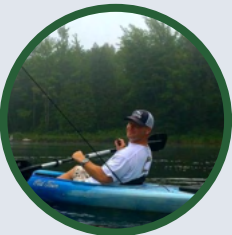
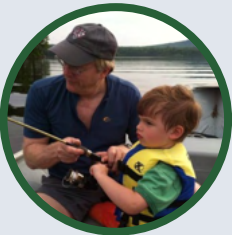


"I became involved with Land Trust because I believe in the WWLT's mission. The passion of the people that surround the organization is amazing! The people involved with the trust are my inspiration, be they from the town of Forest City, surrounding communities, or distant places. They are all extremely important and valuable."

~ Reginald Simons

"As a young boy growing up, my parents would bring my sisters and I to the area to visit with our extended family. My grandfather "Woodie" would sit me on his lap, in the stern of a Grand Lake canoe, and take us fishing on Spednic Lake. As I grew into my teens, my father then took me under his wing and taught me how to safely operate an outboard motor and navigate the area lakes in his own Grand Laker. It wasn't until I started having children of my own and bringing them up to camp in Forest City that I realized the memories they were making with their grandparents were so similar to my own experiences at their age. The only reason for that was the fact that the area had remained relatively untouched—absent of the severe development that has changed the landscape so dramatically in other regions of the country... lost forever. I felt it was my responsibility to get involved with WWLT to continue to steward and protect the area's pristine nature in the same fashion that my ancestors had done. Ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy the natural environment and make similar memories of their own."

~ Shane Wheaton



## We Want To Hear From You!

Your stories help WWLT raise awareness of the impact we have on the Chiputneticook Lakes region. When new prospective volunteers and donors are looking for an organization to get involved with, they want to hear directly from those who have done the same. This is why your input is so valuable. Please take a moment and share your story — How did you come to be a WWLT member? Why does our cause matter to you?

Please send your stories by mail, by email to [office@woodiewheaton.org](mailto:office@woodiewheaton.org) or by going to [www.woodiewheaton.org](http://www.woodiewheaton.org) and filling out the "Share Your Story" survey.

# Maine's "Public Lots" – A Giveaway Reclaimed

By: Thomas Urquhart

In 1783, Massachusetts held some 16 million acres in an ill-defined and largely unexplored territory known as the Eastern Lands. In a word: Maine (or all of it but the coastal plain). To the Commonwealth, it represented a source of revenue, either from direct land sales or from the taxes that settlement would bring. By 1820, six million acres had been sold or granted to settlers and speculators.

The basic unit for these transactions was the township, six miles by six or roughly 23,000 acres, laid out on a grid. Whenever a township was transferred, the government reserved four lots of 320 acres each to be held in trust for the town that was expected one day to rise out of the wilderness. When Maine became a state, this provision was included in the new Constitution—although it was soon simplified to a single lot of a thousand acres. These holdings were known as the "public lots."

But settlers for these future towns turned out to be hard to find. Along Maine's eastern border, a hundred-mile swathe, six townships wide, had excellent soils for farming. Otherwise, the interior remained forested wildlands penetrated only by lumber interests. To these, the policy of selling off state-owned land continued, township by township, until by about 1875 it was all gone.

Every one of those townships—now owned by, first, timber and then paper companies—included a thousand acres belonging to Maine. Beyond Augusta's control, the public lots became a haven for squatters and timber pirates. The sensible thing would be to sell them to the owners of the township, but the Constitution prohibited that. Instead, the state sold the rights to harvest the timber and grass growing on them, those rights to expire if and when the township was incorporated. For a century, the public lots were regarded by the landowners as all but theirs, with the state only too happy not to have to worry about them.

In 1972, however, a journalist for the Portland Papers got wind of the issue and proceeded to draw readers' attention to the public lots. There were 400 of them. At a time Maine was buying high-priced land for public recreation, shouldn't it be getting the benefit of the 400,000 acres that it already owned?

All agreed that the lots belonged to the state and also that it had sold the rights to log them a century before. So what were the state's rights in the land itself?

An assistant attorney general did a deep dive into the records. His boss tried to bury his report. The public smelt a rat. Then a new AG released the report. A legislative committee began to look at ways to terminate the grass and timber rights. At that, a group of paper companies and private landowners sued the state. Maine countersued.

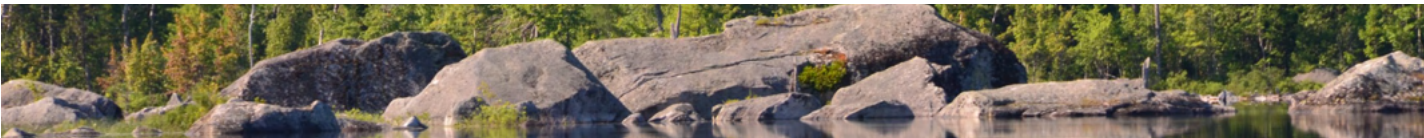
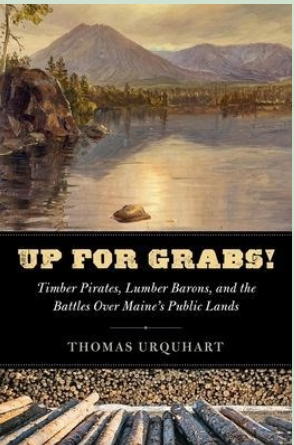
The case went on for ten years until Maine's Supreme Judicial Court found in favor of the state. Through lengthy negotiations and ingenious trades with the landowners, the newly formed Bureau of Public Lands (BPL) consolidated hundreds of the scattered 1000-acre lots into several large tracts of land. These include Maine's most magnificent landscapes, such as Scapan Lake and Deboullie Mountain. Accessible to the public for recreation, the BPL also manages them for both timber and wildlife through a nationally acclaimed multiple-use protocol.

As a conservation success, the creation of the Public Reserved Lands rivals Percival Baxter's celebrated gift to the people of Maine, Baxter State Park.

### About Thomas Urquhart:

Former Maine Audubon director *Thomas Urquhart* is the author of *For the Beauty of the Earth* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004). He has written extensively on Maine's natural resources for such publications as *Down East Magazine*, *Audubon*, *Habitat*, and *Port City Life*. He lives in Portland, ME.

To learn more about the history of Maine's Public Lands, check out *Thomas Urquhart's* new book, *Up for Grabs! Timber Pirates, Lumber Barons, and the Battles over Maine's Public Lands* (Down East Books), which is now available.





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## 2020 Chiputneticook Circle

WWLT's Chiputneticook Circle program recognizes the commitment of our most generous members who makes gifts of \$1,000 or more during the course of a year. Chiputneticook Circle donors provide critical annual support that allows WWLT to continue to protect and preserve eastern Maine's and western New Brunswick's exceptional places. By contributing to WWLT as a Chiputneticook Circle member, donors show their commitment to significantly supporting WWLT now and into the future.

The Trust would like to express gratitude to the following  
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# CAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION SAVE RURAL COMMUNITIES — CONTINUED FROM PG. 1

These findings in the Adirondacks mimic results from planning in the Greater East Grand Region--focus on youth who have an affinity for “home” and develop access to broadband. A local pilot project entitled, “Young Adults and Youth”, is designed for youth who are here or wish to return to find work and be productive citizens. Broadband, the doorway to rural revitalization, is in the planning phase. Success will depend upon citizen support, funding, and persistence.

Those involved in economic development and conservation must take seriously the aging-out plight of rural Maine. Times of conflict cannot overpower the challenge to focus our resources on area youth. Local place-based education cannot do the job alone. The entire community needs to be invested in what will give rise to the love of “place” and “mentors” who share those same values. Together we can sustain a rural way of life and respite in the Greater East Grand Region.

~ **Elbridge Cleaves** is a past president and current advisor to the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust. He is a retired forester and a life-long resident of Weston who has a keen interest in land use, rural economies, and conservation.

## WWLT’S 1ST CALENDAR!

This summer, the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust will have 2022 calendars available to purchase. The calendar features the photographic work of the late Dr. Bob Ellis. Bob was a native to Houlton and had a camp on East Grand Lake in Peters Cove. Vision was the key to his approach to life. While also an optometrist, Bob found great joy in photographing nature. As a long-time member and supporter of the Woodie Wheaton Land Trust, we are pleased to honor him and his work with our first WWLT calendar.

To pre-order your 2022 WWLT Calendar, call WWLT at (207) 448-3250, send an email to [office@woodiewheaton.org](mailto:office@woodiewheaton.org), or send a check by mail to WWLT, 2 Grove Rd, Forest City, ME 04413.



## 2021 SUMMER EVENTS

Providing exciting and engaging educational events is extremely important to the WWLT. They bring people together to help build a sense of common purpose in support of conservation. We are very optimistic about our 2021 Summer Speaker Series & Events and believe we will be able to hold all of our events safely. We are listening to the public health experts and our local officials and will continue to follow all state and federal guidelines to ensure our summer events are safe.

We love providing these events, but we love keeping our community safe even more. Please follow the *Woodie Wheaton Land Trust* on Facebook or check [www.woodiewheaton.org](http://www.woodiewheaton.org) for any changes or cancelations to the summer events schedule.



## We Need Your Eyes

By: Dale Wheaton, Director & Lands Committee Chair



Anyone who reads this newsletter has a special fondness for certain little places. We become intimate with them, and it becomes personal. We care about them.

Perhaps you worry that an area of natural beauty, of tranquility, may someday succumb to the surveyors’ ribbons and be lost forever to land conversion. You may be annoyed by humanity’s lack of conscience when the landscape is scarred. Or, maybe you just love your own property—the woods, the lakeshore, the brook, the nature trail—and realize you are not going to live forever to protect it.

Those of us who live in the Chiputneticook Lakes fully understand that our area is largely unspoiled because we are far from the population centers—on both sides of the border. Large numbers of people, the pervasive desire to turn real estate into a commodity, and the norm whereby personal interests trump all social concerns for Mother Nature, do not quite dominate thinking in our communities. Not yet. Although the seeds are ever present.

The Woodie Wheaton Land Trust was organized because a few people saw how many modern changes, always undertaken in the pursuit of personal benefit or profit, were destroying the wildness and natural beauty of places we all held dear. Sometimes these were little places, like a remote cove. Other times it was the natural landscape itself, which defines our very love for this area. A few people win; many people lose. And the beat goes on.

We have accomplished much in 27 years, protecting shorelines, wildlife habitat, water quality, and public access for everyone to enjoy. But there is so much more to do if we just look around and take notice of what we have and see the risk of losing it. That is why our land trust needs you to tell us about your special places, concerns, hopes, and ideas.

Talk to us! We are just ordinary folks like you with a passion for the natural values that surround us. And we wish to be better informed. There are so many neat places that you know about and care about that we are simply unaware of.

The point is, we may be able to help. Conservation and preservation are what we do. We provide a vehicle to find permanent land solutions that benefit everyone. It is not just about owning property. There are numerous land options available, instruments that can allow you to continue to own your land while reducing your taxes—now and forever. It all begins with a conversation.

We need your eyes, and we need to hear your voice. Together, we can do good things.

