

# THE CONSERVATION FUND

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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**Photos & Map:** [bit.ly/3gdmXkB](https://bit.ly/3gdmXkB)

### **MAINE'S BETHEL COMMUNITY FOREST GROWS BY 532 ACRES**

*Inland Woods + Trails and The Conservation Fund partner to expand community recreation, prevent fragmentation of historic working forest*

**BETHEL, Maine (Nov. 21, 2022)** — The Conservation Fund today joined Inland Woods + Trails to announce an expansion of Bethel Community Forest, growing the protected forest by more than 50% to over 1,500 acres. The newly conserved 532 acres will provide increased community recreational trail access and enhanced protection for important deer wintering habitat, while it continues to be sustainably managed for timber to support local mills.

This land acquisition will help advance a longstanding community vision for a trail system in and around the Bethel area that will connect Sunday River through the village and schools to Mt. Abram. Moreover, the expansion protects part of the former Chadbourne Tree Farm's iconic and historic working forest landscape in western Maine from fragmentation and development.

“These lands are so important to the community,” said **Gabe Perkins, executive director of Inland Woods + Trails**. “My organization exists because 20 years ago there was a community gathering where people talked about their vision for recreation in the area. That is the foundation for our existence. And this project is our part of continuing to articulate that vision for a year-round, connected trail. And if we grow more trees and bring more trees to market? All the better.”

The Conservation Fund, a national nonprofit land trust dedicated to environmental solutions that make economic sense, purchased the land in 2020 through its affiliate White Pine Forest, LLC in partnership with the Malone Family Land Preservation Foundation and with a loan from the [Richard King Mellon Foundation](#) through the Fund's [Working Forest Fund](#)®. The Fund transferred the property to Inland Woods + Trails earlier this month.

**Tom Duffus, the Fund's vice president and northeast representative**, additionally noted the expansion of Bethel Community Forest and similar conservation efforts in the community will greatly benefit the region's appeal as a recreation destination.

“Ownership and management of forests like these for the community and recreation is the future for rural economies like Bethel,” he said. “On behalf of The Conservation Fund, I thank all who were involved — and all who continue to be involved — in realizing the community's vision.

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Bold accomplishments such as this one show us what can happen when neighbors and partners rally around a shared vision.”

The Inland Woods + Trails purchase was made possible thanks to support from two anonymous donors, who made significant gifts toward the Bethel Community Forest expansion, as well as a grant from The Conservation Fund’s Oxford County Land Conservation Grant Program in partnership with The Stifler Family Foundation. These and other community gifts matched significant funding provided by the USDA Forest Service’s Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (Community Forest Program). Notably, the U.S. Forest Service twice ranked and funded the Bethel Community Forest expansion as its top Community Forest Program priority in 2018 and 2021.

“The addition of 532 acres of land to the Bethel Community Forest utilizing the USDA Forest Service’s Community Forest Program demonstrates once again the great power of partnerships to conserve valuable forest land for future generations,” said **Robert Lueckel, USDA Forest Service deputy regional forester**. “This addition will strengthen and expand recreational opportunities, protect critical wildlife habitat, drinking water sources and will complement previous conservation efforts.”

Maine’s congressional delegation including Sen. Susan Collins, Sen. Angus King and Rep. Jared Golden — who represents Oxford County — ensured that federal funding supported this project. Moreover, the Community Forest Program has remained funded every year by Congress thanks to the support of Maine’s congressional delegation.

“Whether they’re providing a place for a quiet hike or sustainably supporting our forest products industry, Maine’s woods are among our state’s greatest assets,” said **Sens. Collins and King and Rep. Golden**. “The Bethel Community Forest is a strong example of the benefits and promise of conservation. This expansion will improve recreational opportunities, preserve wildlife habitats, and protect traditional logging use. We are grateful for the work done by The Conservation Fund and Inland Woods + Trails to make this project possible, and we are proud to have helped secure funding for the exciting expansion.”

The lands added to the Bethel Community Forest through this expansion include 2,500 feet of Chapman Brook, which serves as Bethel’s backup water supply; 640 feet of Twitchell Brook with more than one acre of mapped wild brook trout habitat; and roughly 121 acres of deer wintering area. The trout and deer habitats are priorities for protection as identified by the state of Maine. Additionally, the land contains priority habitat for more than two dozen U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Priority Trust Species including the American woodcock, killdeer, bald eagle, peregrine falcon and red-shouldered hawk.

Historically, the former Chadbourne lands in Maine gained prominence in 1634, when William Chadbourne arrived from England at the direction of King Charles I to establish a sawmill on the Wabanaki homeland. Across the ensuing 400 years and 12 generations, the family’s tree farm supported the livelihoods and economies of communities throughout the region.

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The Conservation Fund's 2020 acquisition of over 15,000 acres including the Bethel Community Forest parcel has provided time for it and multiple partners — such as Inland Woods + Trails, Mahoosuc Land Trust, Western Foothills Land Trust, Greater Lovell Land Trust, the state of Maine, U.S. Forest Service and others — to raise the funds needed to permanently conserve the forests. Approximately 1,300 acres of former Chadbourne lands were permanently conserved in December 2021 through a conservation easement held and stewarded by Mahoosuc Land Trust, and nearly 500 acres have been conveyed to Western Foothills Land Trust to date, with more to come.

The balance of the former Chadbourne lands, which total over 12,000 acres, remain with White Pine Forest, LLC while the Fund and its partners assemble additional conservation funding.

Said **Sam Reiman, director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation**: “The Foundation has a long history of investing in Maine’s forestland and waters to protect habitat, support outdoor recreation, maintain the state’s wood basket for sustainable timbering, and to promote sustainable community development. This project advances all of those goals, benefitting current and future generations in Bethel, and conserving a precious national resource.”

Learn more about the existing Bethel Community Forest at <https://woodsandtrails.org/bethel-community-forest/>.

## **About The Conservation Fund**

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect more than 8.5 million acres of land, including 485,000 acres in Maine. [conservationfund.org](https://conservationfund.org)

## **About Inland Woods + Trails**

Based in Bethel, Maine, IWT has conserved nearly 1,000 acres, and is dedicated to creating permanent protection for recreational trail corridors for economic growth and prosperity by connecting communities through the development, maintenance and promotion of a multi-use recreational trail network. [www.woodsandtrails.org](https://www.woodsandtrails.org)

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