

Column #10

## **Celebrating Place: Anniversary Notes from BHHT**

### **Now what? The Next 25 Years**

By Jim Dow, Executive Director, Blue Hill Heritage Trust

What a summer to celebrate the Trust's 25 years of land conservation! Blessed with magnificent weather that highlighted the beauty of the Blue Hill Peninsula, our two 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, a gala party and auction in July and 'Mountain Day' in August, drew nearly 1000 people, all of whom enjoy and are part of this place. Many more celebrated with us through our expanded series of Walks and Talks programs, and on their own, enjoying the trails our Trust makes available to the public throughout the Peninsula. And, thanks to the Penobscot Bay Press, we have worked to draw still others into the celebration by sharing the Trust's story with the readers of the Weekly Packet through this weekly column.

Now, as the Blue Hill Fair marks the end of summer, it is time to look forward. Although we will do one last bit of celebrating at our 25<sup>th</sup> annual membership meeting on September 9<sup>th</sup> (at Kneisel Hall, at 5:30 pm - all are welcome), we are ready to shift our focus from the last 25 years to the next 25 years, from the work completed to the work to be done.

That work begins with stewardship - caring for what we have. Our success over the last 25 years means we have a lot of land to care for.

Our Trust holds more than 50 conservation easements on about 3300 acres of land. We have the responsibility to monitor those lands annually and when necessary enforce the use restrictions contained in those easements. This part of our stewardship job involves forming and maintaining working relationships with the 65 or so landowners with whom we share an ownership interest. That's a lot of relationships, and as we all know, good relationships take time and energy.

Then there is the stewardship of the lands we own- over 2200 acres. Taking care of these lands is often simpler than conservation easements lands because there is no shared ownership interest. Yet there are always things to be done, beginning with keeping the boundaries marked and sometimes extending to complicated issues such as right of ways with abutters or illegal dumping, not to mention monitoring the health of the ecological systems on the land.

Trails increase the stewardship burden dramatically. We currently have nearly 13 miles of trail, with more in the planning stages. Maintaining trails is a time consuming and sometimes expensive enterprise. Recruiting volunteer help is itself surprisingly difficult given people's busy lives. Yet providing walking opportunities throughout our landscape will continue to be an important part of our work.

Beyond the stewardship of the lands we have already conserved, there are the opportunities to conserve additional lands. We are far from done – landowners approach us regularly to discuss conservation options and we also approach owners of land that we know hold special conservation value. We have however become much more selective than we were in the early

days – that is a result of both our heightened awareness about the costs of stewardship and our belief in the value of strategic conservation planning. Going forward, we will be focused on “lands of special conservation significance” that provide benefit to our Peninsula community.

To fulfill our stewardship responsibilities and to continue to undertake new land projects, we will also need to keep our organization fresh, vigorous and focused. We will need to attract new financial resources and be open to new ideas and new approaches. The work we are currently doing to prepare our Trust for national accreditation is part of that ongoing and never-ending effort to build and maintain an organization that is effective, efficient and sustainable.

Most importantly, we will certainly need to expand the pool of people who are involved in our work, especially the younger generation. The special events this year, though celebratory, were based on this realization and have in fact helped attract the interest of new people. We intend to continue that outreach effort – there will be more trails and outdoor programs and community events - with a special focus on engaging young people. They, after all, will need to assume responsibility for this organization and this work in the future.

We have built a wonderful community organization over the last 25 years – an organization of people taking care of their place. I hope I am around to see what has been accomplished when the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary rolls around. Onward and upward!

*This is the last of our ten week series of columns. We are grateful to the Penobscot Bay Press for providing us this opportunity. We invite you to continue to stay in touch with our organization and its work through our website, [www.bhhtmaine.org](http://www.bhhtmaine.org), or by becoming a member and receiving our newsletter.*