

October 2013

Dear Members,

We want to let you know that a significant change is underway in local land conservation efforts, a necessary evolution bred by success.

The Board of Directors of Blue Hill Heritage Trust (BHHT) and the Board of Trustees of The Conservation Trust of Brooksville, Castine and Penobscot (TCT) have agreed that the two organizations should merge, creating one local land conservation organization for the seven towns on the Blue Hill Peninsula.

This is by no means a sudden decision. The two organizations, both looking ahead to the challenges of sustaining small organizations and of keeping the promises of perpetual conservation for the lands that they each hold, have been discussing this possibility for the last several years. Given their overlapping service areas in Brooksville and Penobscot, the demographics of Blue Hill Peninsula and their mutual desire to continue conservation work at a high standard in an age of national land trust accreditation, it simply made sense to join forces.

The merger will result in one local land trust, the Blue Hill Heritage Trust, serving Castine and the six other towns on the Blue Hill Peninsula. The membership, operations and programs of the two trusts will be merged. The result will be more efficient and sustainable conservation in our local communities.

TCT, founded in 1978 as the Castine Conservation Trust, was one of the first local land trusts to exist in Maine. It was a far-sighted undertaking, and a successful one. Over the course of the last 35 years, during which its name changed to The Conservation Trust of Brooksville, Castine and Penobscot (TCT), the Trust has acquired a diverse portfolio of conservation lands that includes 34 separate properties totaling 983 acres.

Since its founding, TCT has relied on a corps of volunteers to accomplish its work. Its volunteers have not only regularly worked with landowners to conserve this land through gifts or purchases of land parcels or conservation easements, but they have also attended to necessary annual stewardship responsibilities, including monitoring and enforcing conservation easement restrictions and building and maintaining trails for public use. In addition, they have performed the many and various tasks that are required to keep a membership organization successfully functioning, including annual community fundraising events (a lobster bake in Castine and a chicken barbeque in Brooksville) and membership drives.

While the work of TCT has steadily moved forward, the external environment in which the Trust has operated has changed significantly since its early days. The demographics of its service area have made it increasingly difficult to find volunteers willing and able to serve on its Board of Directors or to shoulder the necessary workload. Meanwhile, the business of land conservation has become more complicated as laws, regulations and national standards for land trust operations have evolved. The changes in property ownership from those people who originally granted

conservation easements to subsequent generations or new owners have presented new challenges and complications. In particular, an awareness of the nature and extent of the perpetual stewardship obligations that come with each parcel of conservation has steadily grown with time.

Blue Hill Heritage Trust, founded in 1985, also began as an all-volunteer organization. However, its early awareness of the complexity of the growing land conservation business and the challenges ahead resulted in the hiring of full-time professional staff twelve years ago. It has continued to develop the capacity of its organization over the years and has been recognized as one of the leading local land trusts in the state. Recently, having protected over 100 properties and more than 6200 acres, it went through a multi-year national accreditation program to help ensure that its organizational practices and capacity were consistent with national standards and adequate to meet its future obligations. Through its active engagement with both statewide and national land trust organizations, its staff and Board of Directors have also become aware of the potential advantages of merging small organizations into larger ones as a strategy to help local land conservation efforts both endure and evolve. Given Blue Hill Heritage Trust's long-term relationship with TCT, it has a particular interest in helping TCT's legacy continue.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust, a statewide conservation organization that, like BHHT, is nationally accredited, has agreed to assist the merger. MCHT is deeply interested in the continuing success of these conservation partners as key players in the overall conservation movement. It also has a particular interest in the future of TCT's land portfolio because it has assisted with many of TCT's land conservation projects. MCHT also owns and manages various conservation properties in TCT's service area.

A primary question in the merger discussions has been how to ensure the effective long-term stewardship of the lands that TCT has already protected. The three organizations are all committed to honoring this perpetual responsibility. Together, they have decided that the best solution is to allocate future ownership and stewardship responsibility for those lands between Blue Hill Heritage Trust and Maine Coast Heritage Trust. Some of TCT's lands and conservation easements will be transferred to Blue Hill Heritage Trust and others to Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

There are many items on the "due diligence" list that must be accomplished before this merger can be finalized, including raising some additional stewardship funds to help support the long-term care of the TCT lands. Both organizations, with the help of MCHT, will be working together over the next several months to attend to these necessary and important details.

We are excited by this new step forward. By joining together enthusiastically, we will continue a legacy of thoughtful and effective land conservation by TCT and BHHT that provides enduring public benefits to the communities on the Blue Hill Peninsula, including a wide assortment of trails and publically accessible lands for us all to enjoy.

Sincerely,

Mary Barnes  
President, Board of Directors