

The Conservation Trust to merge with BHHT

Weekly
Prochet
12.12.13

*34 parcels and
easements to be
transferred to two
land trusts*

By ANNE BERLEANT

BLUE HILL—Two local land trusts with holdings throughout the Blue Hill Peninsula and surrounding towns will become one, when they complete a merger in March 2014.

The Conservation Trust of Brooksville, Castine and Penobscot will join with Blue Hill Heritage Trust to complete the merger.

"It's been several years on a slow boil," said Jim Dow, executive director of BHHT, after the December 6 announcement. "We're committed to it."

When The Conservation Trust was founded in 1978, as the Castine Conservation Trust, it was one of only nine local land trusts in Maine.

"It was a big deal," said Dow.

Over its 35 years, the Trust changed its name while acquiring 34 parcels and easements in the towns of Brooksville, Castine and Penobscot.

"The community has been very generous to The Conservation Trust over the years," said Maynard Forbes, TCT board chairman. "But for a volunteer board, [managing the properties] has been more than we can handle."

Forbes said several TCT board members are interested in serving on the BHHT board. Dow agreed: "Some of their board members will come to our board."

The Trust will transfer eight properties, along with its total monetary assets of approximately \$150,000 to BHHT.

The specific properties being transferred are Dunc's Meadow, Greenbie Natural Area and the wetland parcel at its north end, and Hatch Cove Preserve in Castine; the Weinland Nature Study Area and Sherm Perkins Park in Penobscot; and the Snow Natural Area, Ferry Landing in Brooksville. The \$150,000 monetary transfer will be used to maintain the properties.

Meanwhile, a "quiet campaign" to raise money for future stewardship and easement monitoring of the transferred properties has already raised half of its \$350,000 goal, the amount BHHT calculated would be needed, Dow said.

The Renee Henderson Natural Area in Castine and other TCT holdings will be assumed by Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

The merging of the two land trusts was years in the making, said Dow and Forbes, and came to the forefront when TCT was offered 273 acres on Wallamatogus Mountain in Penobscot in 2010.

"We turned to Blue Hill Heritage Trust to see if they were interested in partnering," said Forbes. "As discussions continued it became more and more apparent that [merging] was the best option."

"There are a lot more rules and regulations than there were 35 years ago when the Conservation Trust was first formed."

Federal regulations for conservation land include monitoring easements, land surveys and maintenance regulations.

BHHT became accredited by the National Land Trust Commission in February of 2013, a three-year process. It employs three paid staff members, including Dow.

"The conservation business is a dynamic, ever changing," said Forbes. He plans to volunteer as an advisor or adjunct to the BHHT.