

# Northeast Land Trust Consortium



Summer 2009 Q&A

## CONTACT:

THOMAS S. CURREN, Director, Northeast Land Trust Consortium

603.677.2402 | [tcurren@pewtrusts.org](mailto:tcurren@pewtrusts.org)

TRACY A. MACK, Esquire, Senior Officer, Philanthropic Services

215.575.4703 | [tmack@pewtrusts.org](mailto:tmack@pewtrusts.org)

Unlike many other regions of the country, most of the remaining uninhabited wild areas in the Northeast are not publicly owned, but rather privately held properties. Currently, millions of acres of forests, meadows, mountains, lakes and streams are changing hands at an unprecedented rate. Land that has been informally set aside by family owners for generations now faces the prospect of development. In 2006, The Pew Charitable Trusts launched the Northeast Land Trust Consortium (NLTC) to protect these vital landscapes. We recently spoke with Thomas Curren, director of the Consortium, and Tracy Mack, Esq., senior officer with Pew's Philanthropic Services division, about this project.

## **QUESTION: *What is a land trust and what does it do?***

As the name implies, a land trust is a nonprofit organization that takes private land off the market and holds it for a specific use. In a lot of ways, a land trust is like an outdoor library or museum—it is a collection of natural resources that are valued, catalogued, cared for and kept available for future generations.

In the case of the Consortium, we mostly work with Northeast landowners to acquire wildlands with the purpose of keeping them wild. In some cases, we also acquire farmland to protect it from development. Our trusts extend into perpetuity, meaning the land that we own or control can never be used for things like tract housing, factories or strip malls.

To date, land trusts have protected more than 4.2 million acres in the Northeast. Trusts around Squam Lake in New Hampshire, for example, have protected nearly 40% of the Squam watershed adjacent to the 700,000-acre White Mountain National Forest.

But much remains to be done. In Maine alone, conservationists have targeted 5 million acres—more than twice the size of Yellowstone National Park—for the permanent protection of wildlife, clean water and recreational resources.

## **QUESTION: *How is land targeted for preservation?***

Land trusts set priority targets for conservation in their area, and actively work to conserve land by purchasing it outright or securing conservation easements from the land's owners. Land trusts also care for the parcels they own and easements they hold to ensure they remain forever preserved and protected.

The types of land that qualify for protection include natural habitat for wildlife, fish and plants; watershed areas like lakeshores, wetlands, rivers and streams; productive agricultural land near cities; and scenic landscapes – particularly those with local community, cultural or historic significance.

More than 1,600 land trusts across America are helping private landowners and municipalities build a green infrastructure of conserved lands that will support thriving natural and human communities. These groups also help educate the public and advocate for the need to conserve land. They can work with landowners in tailoring a conservation plan for their specific situation and financial circumstances. They also will help determine the property's conservation value and future stewardship potential.

**QUESTION: *How does the Consortium operate and what have you accomplished?***

There are 580 separate land trusts in the Northeast, each with its own unique characteristics, goals and targets. The Consortium identifies potential conservation deals with the highest value to protect wildlife, farmland or some other important attribute. We then work closely with local trusts to raise the capital necessary to acquire the land. The guiding principle is that by working as an umbrella organization to a group of robust local and regional organizations, we can create a conservation whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Northeast Land Trust Consortium is also an example of philanthropists working together to leverage finances for the permanent protection of natural resources. Donors can designate funds for one or more of the Consortium's conservation projects, and Pew matches \$1 for every \$5 raised. Donors benefit from Pew's financial match, and the local land trusts gain access to Pew's seasoned conservation staff and its ability to produce scientific and cultural assessments, develop management guidelines and conduct effective outreach.

To date the Consortium has collaborated with over 130 philanthropists and numerous land trusts to raise nearly \$20 million that is protecting some 400,000 acres of critical land in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

**QUESTION: *In these economic times, why should land conservation be a concern?***

The remaining undeveloped lands of the Northeast protect important wildlife populations and key water supplies. They also represent productive agricultural lands close to city markets as well as some of our most cherished historical and culturally sensitive areas. Their loss would be devastating to plant and animal life, people and future generations of Americans.

The current downturn in the financial markets has led to lower land prices—in some cases making conservation projects possible when they never have been before. This has created a prime opportunity to work closely with passionate and dedicated people who cherish the land around them – hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat, clean water resources and public recreation opportunities in the Northeast. Equally important, when land is kept undeveloped to serve its natural purpose, significant savings can be generated. As one example, fresh water filtered through wetlands is significantly less expensive to treat and deliver as drinking water.

**QUESTION: *What happens to the land once it is preserved? What do donors and the community receive from these protections?***

Land held by the Trust is protected from development by carefully constructed and legally enforceable ownership deeds and conservation easements, backed up by solid stewardship and monitoring plans. The Northeast Land Trust Consortium projects all contain an element of public access for recreational use. This convergence of benefits – permanent protection with continued access for human enjoyment – both ensures a lasting legacy for philanthropists who support land acquisition and cultivates an intergenerational appreciation for our natural resources.

**QUESTION: *How do I support Pew's land conservation work?***

There are numerous ways to participate in the act of preserving land for the benefit of the environment and future generations. They range from direct land donations, to financial contributions, to conservation easements, to “bargain sales” that bring cash and tax advantages to the landowner. Perhaps the most important thing to know is that several options exist, and Pew can help individuals customize a plan that best meets their philanthropic goals.

For questions or more information about Pew’s Northeast Land Trust Consortium, or other land preservation campaigns that Pew is conducting around the globe, visit the Pew Web site ([www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org)) or contact:

- Thomas S. Curren, Director, Northeast Land Trust Consortium: 603.677.2402 or [tcurren@pewtrusts.org](mailto:tcurren@pewtrusts.org)
- Tracy A. Mack, Esquire, Senior Officer, Philanthropic Services: 215.575.4703 or [tmack@pewtrusts.org](mailto:tmack@pewtrusts.org)