

Land trusts to merge to form Downeast Coastal Conservancy

Great Auk Land Trust (GALT) and Quoddy Regional Land Trust (QRLT) have announced a merger of their organizations to form the Downeast Coastal Conservancy (DCC). This move results from years of collaboration and careful consideration of the benefits a merger would bring to local conservation and recreation initiatives in the Downeast coastal region. GALT and QRLT collectively bring over 40 years of conservation success to the DCC as well as a strong local membership and an active volunteer corps.

"Now's the time for a larger, more sustainable force in the region," says David Dowley, president of QRLT. "There is a sense of urgency we all feel about conservation today. And, with our resources pooled, we will become a more vibrant, visionary organization better able to serve our communities and steward our conserved lands."

Based in Machias, the Downeast Coastal Conservancy will focus its conservation efforts on the area of Washington County south of Route 9. This includes some of the richest estuaries on the U.S. eastern seaboard, the watersheds of the major Downeast rivers and numerous undeveloped islands in the Gulf of Maine — resources that are key to maintaining the health of the region's environment and also its economic base of tourism, agriculture, forestry and fishing.

"The Downeast Coastal Conservancy is committed to making our conservation work more meaningful in a way that reflects the traditions and needs of our local communities," says Tom Boutureira, executive director of Great Auk Land Trust.

"Our region has unique natural and cultural resources vital to the local economy and our way of life. Conserving this working landscape and areas of high ecological importance, promoting the region for tourism, and improving public access and recreational opportunities will be high priority for the DCC. Local land trusts play an important role in community planning and economic development, and we are pleased to serve this region in that capacity."

The mission of Downeast Coastal Conservancy will be the conservation of natural habitats and resources of the watersheds and communities of coastal Washington County for present and future generations. It will manage the stewardship and protection of almost 4,000 acres and more than 40 miles of shoreline in Downeast Maine. Conservation easements and fee-lands currently held by QRLT and GALT will be held by the Downeast Coastal Conservancy.

Now president of QRLT, David Dowley will become chairman of the board of DCC. Les Coleman, currently the president of GALT, will serve as president. Tom Boutureira, executive director of GALT, will be the executive director of the Downeast Coastal Conservancy. Alan Brooks, a QRLT founder and long-time executive director, will also join the staff and will assist with the merger transition, then work part-time on land protection and stewardship projects. All members of Quoddy and Great Auk land trusts will automatically become members of Downeast Coastal Conservancy when the merger is completed.

Local & Regional

Merger creates new Down East conservancy

BY SHARON KILEY MACK
OF THE NEWS STAFF

MACHIAS — Two Down East conservancy groups that have been operating for decades as separate entities with nearly identical goals are planning to merge.

Great Auk Land Trust and Quoddy Regional Land Trust will become Downeast Coastal Conservancy once their members vote on the merger in August.

Both groups were grass-roots efforts that began when their charter members were discussing issues while sitting around kitchen tables, Tom Boutureira, executive director

of Great Auk Land Trust, said this week. They now have a combined 42 years of experience in saving Down East resources.

Boutureira will become the director of the new conservancy. "It is a challenge and it's really exciting," Boutureira said.

He said the merger, which mirrors a national trend among small land trusts, will allow for greater efficiency and a new focus on the entire Down East watershed. Boutureira said administrative redundancy can be eliminated with the merger and allow the staff more time to specialize in land protection. The Downeast Coastal Conservancy mission will be the

conservation of the natural habitats and resources of the watershed and communities of coastal Washington County and the main office will be located in Machias. Quoddy Regional Land Trust's Whiting office will become a field office.

Previously, Great Auk Land Trust focused on the region from Steuben to Beals to Jonesboro in southwestern Washington County, while Quoddy Regional Land Trust emphasized the area from Machias to Lubec to Calais.

The merger will meld Quoddy Regional Land Trust's 45 protected properties of more than 2,800 acres and more than 22 miles of saltwater and freshwater shore

on Cobscook and Passamaquoddy bays with Great Auk Land Trust's 26 properties of more than 1,100 acres and more than 20 miles of seacoast in Greater Pleasant Bay in addition, Quoddy Regional Land Trust also manages Cobscook Trails and Great Auk Land Trust helps manage the Pigeon Hill Vista and Recreation Preserve in Steuben.

Maine's conservation community is hailing the merger. "The Down East conservation opportunities are so vast and challenging that a new approach is needed," Michael Terrault, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in Maine, recently said. "This is a bold step that will create an

operating framework that will survey lead to greater conservation accomplishments."

Boutureira said the two groups have been collaborating for years, and both memberships appear to be greatly in support of the merger.

"Merging these two strong institutions will help ensure that the conservation goals that led to Great Auk's formation 20 years ago will continue to be realized into the future," said Les Coleman, president of Great Auk Land Trust.

In a similar message, David Dowley, president of Quoddy Regional Land Trust, said, "With our resources and revenues pooled, we will emerge as

a strong, vibrant and visionary organization better able to serve our communities and steward our lands."

Boutureira said the Downeast Coastal Conservancy's role "can be part of the community's development and tourism.

"The state has a tradition of public use of private lands. As that shifts, the land trust can work with towns. After all, what is a conservancy? Is it really just dollars and acres? Or does it reflect our values, does it reflect our working waterfronts and community needs?"

bdmp1stheide@nyfairpoint.net
255-0618