



# The Newsletter of Presumpscot Regional Land Trust

Engaging with communities to conserve, steward, access and enjoy local lands and clean water

Spring 2021

## Fish Migration at Mill Brook Preserve: GOOD FOR THE FISH, FUN FOR ALL

It's that time of year again. The largest migratory fish run from Casco Bay will pass through Mill Brook Preserve typically beginning in late May. Tens of thousands of alewife swim from the ocean through the Presumpscot River, and then up Mill Brook into Highland Lake—an amazing journey of 11 miles through numerous rapids, changes in elevation, and countless other obstacles.

Alewife are present in many rivers in Maine, but are not easily visible in their natural habitat. This is what makes Mill Brook Preserve in Westbrook so special. Several narrow rapids force the fish to wait their turn to ascend. This results in amazing “viewing pools” where tens of thousands of fish school. Every few seconds, one or more fish dramatically climb the mini-falls to continue their trek to the lake, where they spawn.

This natural spectacle becomes more popular each year. Enthusiasm has built through word of mouth and through feature stories in the local papers, in Maine Magazine, and even in National Geographic (see our News webpage). Thousands of visitors now hike the trails to catch a glimpse of the fish.

As interest in the migration has expanded, we have added measures to ensure the safety of visitors, the safety of the migrating fish, and the quality of the water itself. We've made numerous improvements to the hiking trails and recently completed a new bridge. We'll add barriers around viewing pools to make it clearer that people and dogs need to stay on the trails and out of the water. We also plan to increase signage, and coordinate a fish migration ambassador program (see the volunteer opportunities section).

Viewing the fish migration through Mill Brook Preserve is one of the most incredible wildlife experiences in Greater Portland. We are working hard to ensure the fish can successfully migrate while allowing you to enjoy this awe-inspiring experience every spring.

The improvements are made possible by the Maine Land Trust Network Covid Relief Grant, Westbrook Recreation and Conservation Commission, Cornelia Warren Community Association, Business Partners, and Land Trust Member Support.



Mill Brook Preserve





# Letter from the Executive Director

I walked Mill Brook Preserve recently and was delighted to happen upon the joyous chorus of hundreds of peepers and wood frogs singing out their mating calls. I smiled knowing our Land Trust is forever providing these conserved lands for wildlife to thrive and for people to experience nature in this quickly growing region west of Portland to Sebago Lake.

Over the last year, the number of people taking the opportunity to walk, run, bike, and explore with families and friends on our preserves and trails has increased exponentially. We are so glad to provide this essential community need with 1,840 acres of forever-conserved lands in 16 preserves that provide over 25 miles of trails.

As the population in our region continues to grow, we are talking with a dozen different landowners in Gorham, Gray, Standish, Westbrook, and Windham about forever conserving high value land for wildlife habitat, working farms, clean water, and outdoor access. And great news: we have one new conservation project to share in this newsletter, the Steep Falls Village Preserve and trails project. I hope you will consider supporting this project.

This winter we reached a new milestone: we achieved national accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance, joining 446 land trusts from around the country (about one-third of all land trusts). Accreditation strengthens individual land trusts and America's land conservation movement. The national accreditation seal offers the assurance that a land trust has the systems in place to keep the promise of forever conserving land.

In addition, we have been a leader this winter in revitalizing the Mountain Division Alliance, a coalition working to expand the rail-trail from Portland to Fryeburg. Ten miles of this rail-trail is part of the Sebago to the Sea Trail. In our region, five miles of the rail-trail already exists in Gorham and Windham, and we are actively working to expand it west into Standish, and east into Windham and Westbrook. Stay tuned for more updates soon.

As always, we will continue the land, water, and wildlife stewardship programs that ensure our preserves are protected for wildlife and available for the public to enjoy. All of this would not be possible without the ongoing support from 100+ volunteers, business partners, foundations—and most importantly, our 350+ member families.

*Happy Adventuring,*  
Rachelle Curran Apse, Executive Director

## Presumpscot Regional Land Trust

Engaging with communities to conserve, steward, and provide access to local lands and clean water for current and future generations to enjoy.

We are a community-based nonprofit primarily serving Gorham, Gray, Standish, Westbrook, and Windham. We hold 1,840 acres of conserved lands with 16 free public access preserves that include trails and water access. We conduct water quality monitoring on the Presumpscot River watershed and we coordinate the Sebago to the Sea Trail, a 28-mile trail from Standish to Portland. Learn more at [www.prlt.org](http://www.prlt.org).

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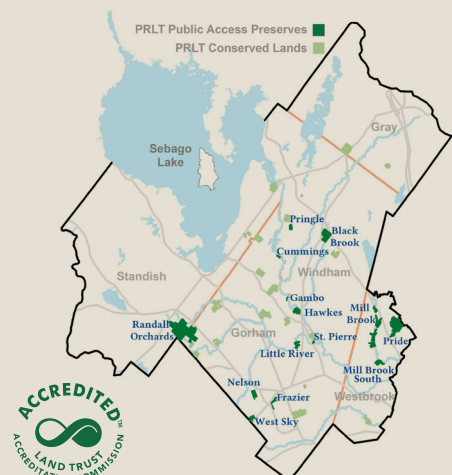
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**Rachelle Curran Apse,**  
Executive Director

**Toby Jacobs,**  
Stewardship and Outreach Manager





# Connecting Families to Nature Close to Home

Outdoor spaces have always been important for kids to learn and enjoy nature, and this was never truer than in 2020. We had more visitors on our conserved lands than ever before. This past year we set up a new scavenger hunt and fairy and gnome village at Mill Brook Preserve. In the coming year, we plan more improvements to make our preserves and trails destinations for families to spend time together outdoors experiencing nature.

## New Trail, Scavenger Hunt, and Fairy and Gnome Village:

### BLACK BROOK PRESERVE IN WINDHAM

Black Brook Preserve in Windham is one of our most popular preserves, and we are continuing to improve the trails and offer new features. We've established a new one-mile Family-Friendly Loop. The loop starts at the main trailhead. Look for the bright "Family Friendly" on the trail signs to stay on course. The trail passes through the main attractions of this conserved land, including evergreen forests and meandering streams.

To highlight these features and provide fun educational activities for our young visitors, this spring we are creating a scavenger hunt and a "village" for fairy and gnome homes. This past fall, we added these same features to Mill Brook Preserve (see our Mill Brook Preserve webpage) and received positive feedback from families, who asked us to expand this program.

The scavenger hunt and fairy and gnome village will be permanently maintained, and you will see them both on updated maps of the Preserve. Our May event will be a weeklong independent event highlighting these new features at Black Brook Preserve.



Black Brook Preserve

## New Family-Friendly Trail Officially Open:

### GORHAM CROSS TOWN TRAIL

The first piece of the Gorham Cross Town Trail is now a reality: a three mile out and back family-friendly trail built on the old York and Cumberland Railroad bed (rail was removed 70 years ago). The flat trail is perfect for walking and biking and can easily accommodate a stroller. This section runs from the Gorham Industrial Park (Hutcherson Drive) west to New Portland Road (at Tink Drive) with parking at both ends of the trail. The Cross Town Trail is managed by the Town of Gorham. We worked jointly with the Gorham Recreation Department and the Gorham Conservation Commission to open this trail. Future phases will expand through downtown Gorham connecting to our Frazier Preserve trail.

## Coming Soon:

### NEW STORY WALK AT HAWKES PRESERVE IN GORHAM

The Land Trust is excited to announce a collaboration with the United Way of Greater Portland and Brick and Beam, a local non-profit, on a Story Walk along the towpath and river at our Hawkes Preserve. What could be better than reading a story outside while enjoying fresh air and the beautiful scenery of the Presumpscot River? The first Story will be posted on our website later this spring, and it will be the subject of our June outreach event.



Mill Brook Preserve Fairy and Gnome Home



# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

## CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Our service to the community as a local nonprofit is based on active and engaged volunteers. We want to say a big thank you to the over 100 volunteers who helped our Land Trust this past year, including water quality monitors, fish counters, preserve stewards, trail builders, event leaders, committee members, advisory council members, and board members. We have more volunteer opportunities this spring:

### FISH COUNT VOLUNTEERS

We now coordinate the Fish Count volunteer program, collecting data used by University of Southern Maine and the Maine Department of Marine Resources as part of their ongoing research on the alewife run through our Mill Brook Preserve. It is important for these efforts to have accurate data on the number of alewives successfully completing their migration, and you can help by becoming a Fish Count volunteer. No prior skills are needed and we will provide training. Volunteers count fish for 30 minutes at a time throughout the weeks of the run from mid-May to mid-June. Volunteer shifts are short and hours are flexible.

### FISH MIGRATION AMBASSADORS

There are now thousands of visitors who come to see the fish migration at our Mill Brook Preserve. As a result, we are starting a new fish migration ambassador program. Ambassadors will engage with visitors at the two fish viewing pools, welcoming visitors, answering questions and supporting a successful fish migration. No prior skills are needed and we will provide training. Volunteer shifts will be mid-May to mid-June and hours are flexible.

### TRAIL VOLUNTEERS

Each field season brings trail maintenance projects at each of our 16 public access preserves. If you want to spend more time outside while doing challenging and meaningful work for the community, this is for you. No prior skills are needed, and we will provide all necessary tools and equipment. Hours are flexible.



Mill Brook Alewife Migration



Mill Brook Alewives Schooling



Frazier Preserve Trailwork Volunteers

LEARN MORE AND SIGN UP FOR ANY OF THESE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT

**[WWW.PRLT.ORG/GET-INVOLVED](http://WWW.PRLT.ORG/GET-INVOLVED)**

OR CONTACT TOBY JACOBS AT [TOBY@PRLT.ORG](mailto:TOBY@PRLT.ORG) WITH QUESTIONS.



# New Conservation Land with Trails Nearly a Reality in **Steep Falls**

One of our highest priorities as a Land Trust is to provide access to forever-conserved lands close to home for everyone in our five-town region. Mark Anderson recently offered the gift of 25 acres of land, covered in meadows and forests, for conservation and public access in Steep Falls Village, our leadership voted to accept the gift, provided that the necessary funds are raised to cover the transaction, stewardship, and trail-building costs.

Mark Anderson, who grew up in Steep Falls and now wants to give back, explains: "This land has served the community well. It contributed to the early economic development of the Steep Falls area by housing lumber mills for over a century. The land has now been restored, and it is ready for a new role as a gateway for the public to experience these exceptional natural lands."

This new project is a priority because there are no walking trails within six miles of Steep Falls. Standish has 10,000 residents, yet only two trail systems: Randall Orchards Trails and Sebago Lake Land Reserve. So most Standish residents do not have access to walking trails close to home.

This land has important conservation value because most of it is covered in meadows, which we will maintain to provide habitat for rapidly declining ground nesting birds and pollinator species, such as moths and butterflies. Also, this land is adjacent to the 4,000-acre Steep Falls Wildlife Management Area, which has the highest density of wetlands in the region providing incredible wildlife habitat and wildlife viewing. The state of Maine

conserves the land for wildlife habitat and hunting (however, they do not provide walking trails).

We regularly receive feedback from Standish residents that they want more walking trails. Specifically, we have already received strong initial support for this project from Steep Falls Village residents, who are excited to not only have walking trails on this new preserve but also to have connecting trails to the state wildlife management area, as well as to the nearby Mountain Division rail corridor.

Our plan for the future Steep Falls Village Preserve is to provide a trailhead parking area, keep the land as meadows and forests, and provide two miles of walking and birding trails on and adjacent to this conserved land, in collaboration with the state of Maine.

The Steep Falls Village Preserve budget is \$120,000. The great news is that the Land Trust has 73% of the funding and has only \$33,000 left to raise. As soon as we raise all funds, from individuals and grants, we will move forward with this project. Steep Falls Village Preserve and trails could open to the public as soon as this fall.

We are looking to individuals to help raise the remaining funds this spring. If you want to see more land forever-conserved in our region, with increased access to walking trails now and for generations to come, please consider making a gift to this effort using the form below or online at [www.prlt.org/steepfalls-donation](http://www.prlt.org/steepfalls-donation).



## I want to make a gift to help make the Steep Falls Village Preserve and Trails a reality:

\$100     \$250     \$500     \$1,000     \$5,000     Other \$

All gifts of \$500+ will be publicly acknowledged at the Preserve trailhead kiosk.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_ Town/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable and mail to: Presumpscot Regional Land Trust, P.O. Box 33, Gorham, Maine 04038. You can also donate online directly to this project at [www.prlt.org/steepfalls-donation](http://www.prlt.org/steepfalls-donation). As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, all donations to PRLT are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.





# 2020 State of Clean Water

The Presumpscot River is the backbone of the Land Trust's region and Maine's most urban river. It features over 20 water access points, swimming holes, and many great fishing spots. It also runs through or along many of the conserved lands in the region. It is the largest freshwater input into Casco Bay, and as such, hosts the largest fish migration from Casco Bay. It is essential for people and wildlife that its waters be clean. This remains the focus of our water quality program. Through the program, volunteers collect data that identifies the general health of rivers and streams in our region for both wildlife and people.

Maps reflecting 2020 data and historical data and trends can be viewed on the Water section of the Land Trust website. In 2020, bacteria levels were below state standards at the top recreational spots on the Presumpscot River, though levels were higher in some tributaries. We recently began testing another major river, the Stroudwater, and bacteria levels there are generally not meeting state standards. Dissolved oxygen levels were variable, though they generally met state standards in larger water bodies, and met the standards less frequently in smaller tributaries.

We are continuing this important work this spring, which will mark the fifth year of our water quality monitoring program. We'll be collecting data at more sites than ever as we continue to sample the 40+ historical sites in the region as well as new sites along Black Brook



**Volunteers Rosie Hartzler and Dawn Baumer Testing Water Quality on the Pleasant River**

and Pleasant River in Windham. These added sites are part of the Land Trust's participation in efforts led by the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District to investigate and improve these two impaired waterways. This is an important example of how our data has real-world applications.

Thank you to the volunteers who collect samples, and thanks to the program funders—Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, Town of Windham Watershed Program, University of Southern Maine, IDEXX Laboratories, and to our Business Partners and Individual Members—for supporting our water quality program.

## WHAT'S YOUR LEGACY ?

Consider making it the places that make our part of Maine such a wonderful place to live, work, and play. Consider including Presumpscot Regional Land Trust in your will.

Through a planned gift to our Land Trust, you can leave a legacy of forested river corridors, sweeping views of working farms, and walking trails for the next generation to enjoy.

Planned gifts come in all sizes, and each is an expression of a person's desire to make a difference and leave a lasting legacy. A bequest is the most common way to make a planned gift. You can donate a specific amount or a percentage of your assets in your will, or make a donation of land to our Land Trust.



**Pride Preserve, Westbrook**

We would be honored to discuss planned giving options with you. Please contact our Executive Director, Rachelle Curran Apse, at (207) 839-4633 or [rachelle@prlt.org](mailto:rachelle@prlt.org), and learn more at [www.prlt.org/planned-giving](http://www.prlt.org/planned-giving).



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Find out more by emailing  
info@prlt.org or go to www.prlt.org



# JOIN US

Presumpscot Regional Land Trust is a community-based nonprofit that exists due to member support from people like you. If you are already a member, thank you.

**MEMBER BENEFITS** – As a member you are part of protecting and caring for your favorite rushing brooks, local farms, and forested river corridors that are essential to our quality of life. Members also receive our newsletters, invitations to events, and our printed trail map.

**Yes, I want to support the Presumpscot Regional Land Trust today.**

\$50    \$100    \$250    \$500

Sustainer \$1000    Other \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

- My company will match my gift
- I/We prefer to stay anonymous
- The Land Trust is in our planned giving
- I wish to volunteer

**Make check payable and mail to:** Presumpscot Regional Land Trust, P.O. Box 33, Gorham, Maine 04038 or **donate at [www.prlt.org](http://www.prlt.org).**

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, all donations to PRLT are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Donations of any size makes you a member for one year. The more generous your gift, the more service our organization can provide to the community.







**Presumpscot Regional Land Trust**  
PO Box 33, Gorham, Maine 04038 | [info@prlt.org](mailto:info@prlt.org) | [www.prlt.org](http://www.prlt.org)

## Upcoming Events

### **Scavenger Hunt & Fairy/Gnome Homes**

May 8 - 16

Black Brook Preserve, Windham

### **Story Walk & Scavenger Hunt**

June 26 - July 3

Hawkes Preserve, Gorham

### **Exploring for Mushrooms**

July 24 at 1pm

Mill Brook Preserve, Westbrook

### **Learn to Paddle on the Presumpscot**

August 21 at 1pm

Shaw Park, Gorham



Sebago to the Sea Trail

**All events are free, but space is limited, and RSVP is required.  
To learn more about these events and to RSVP, go to our website  
[www.prlt.org](http://www.prlt.org) or call 839-4633.**