





**Stories and Lessons from First  
Light**

**RCP Gathering**

**November 14, 2024**

**Brett Ciccotelli  
Core Staff Team  
First Light**

**Darren J. Ranco, PhD (Penobscot)  
Executive Director  
Three Sisters Support Staff  
Wabanaki Commission on Land and  
Stewardship**

**Bryan Wentzell  
Maine Mountain Collaborative**

**Shelby Semmes  
Trust for Public Land**

# Goals



**FIRST  
LIGHT**

- Introduce First Light and the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship.
- Understand, through story and lesson, the work required to engage Indigenous led conservation and land return.

# Shifting Land Trust Understanding of Indigenous Peoples and Conservation

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**FIRST  
LIGHT**



FIRST LIGHT LEARNING JOURNEY—  
BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR  
LAND RETURN/REMATRIATION

# First Light Learning Journey and Background

- **First Light is a collaboration (started in 2017-2018) between conservation organizations and the Wabanaki Confederacy of Tribes in what is now Maine to rebuild Wabanaki stewardship and presence across the landscape.**
- The **goal is restoring Wabanaki true prosperity** through an intentional, sustained effort to **expand Wabanaki stewardship** of land. We are doing this through direct **collaborations** with Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet and Mi'kmaq Nations to assist them in **acquiring lands** and by sharing, co-managing and repatriating land that is currently owned by conservation organizations.



# First Light Delegation Leadership



FOREST  
SOCIETY  
of MAINE

Land in Common  
community land trust

BUILDING A COLLECTIVE LAND BASE  
FOR JUST AND RESILIENT FUTURES IN MAINE

southern maine  
CONSERVATION  
COLLABORATIVE





## Relearn

Start with our courses and resources, then send members to our events.

**Begin Your Journey**

## Recenter

Commit to Wabanaki-led and community-tested changes.

**Continue Your Practice**

## Return

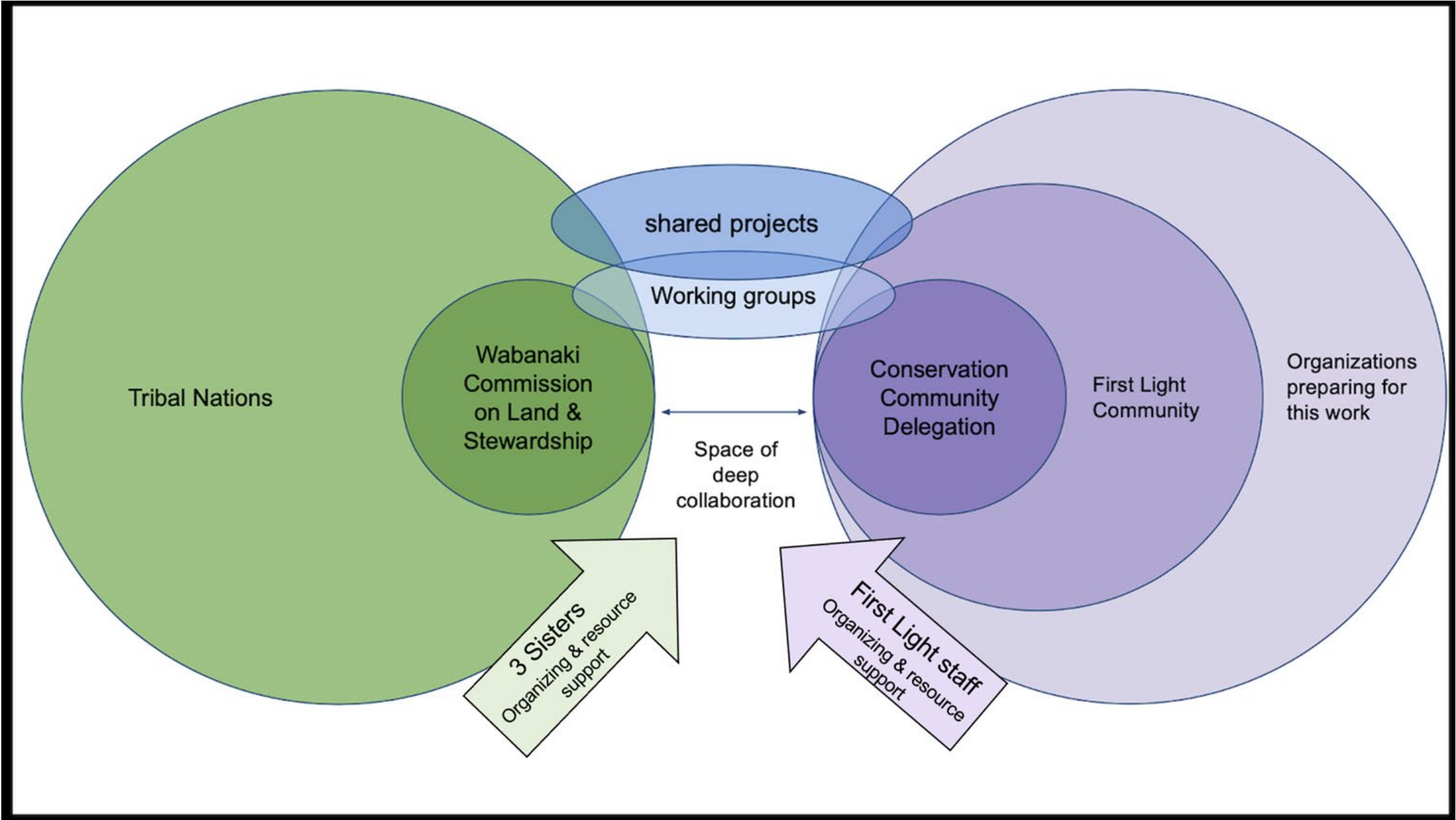
Learn about community-based processes to return land and money.

**Enact Change**

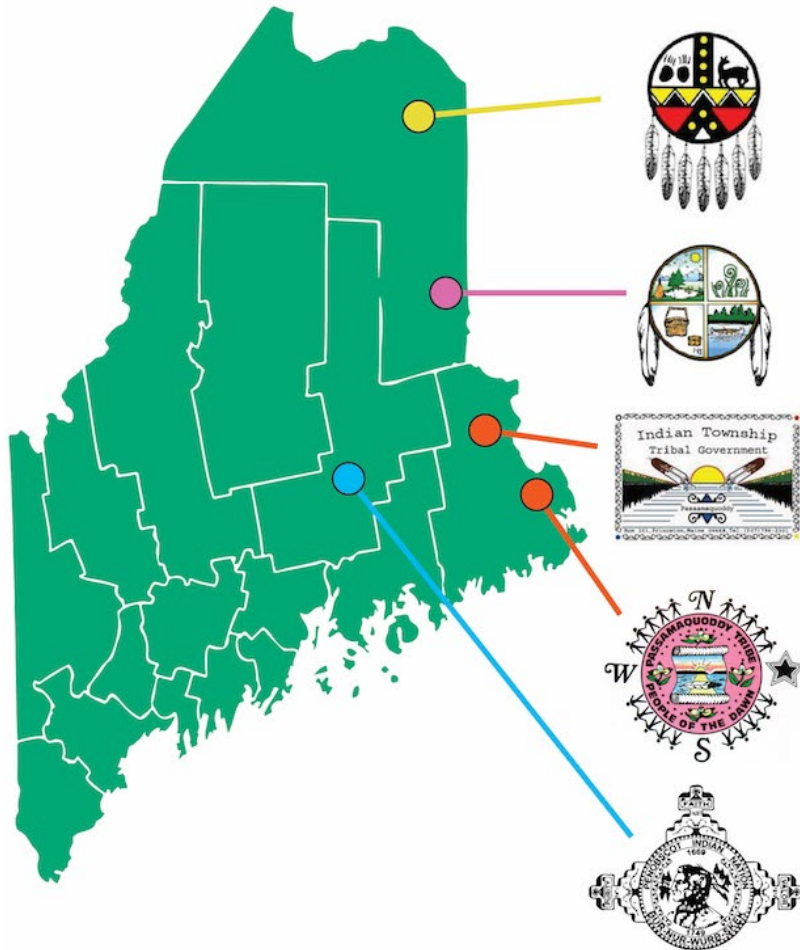
### FIRST LIGHT VISION

“WE COMMIT TO RETURNING LAND WITHOUT COST AND WITHOUT RESTRICTION AND WITH A FUND TO HELP CARE FOR IT.”





# Federal & State Recognized Tribes of Maine



- Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians
- Mi'kmaq Nation
- Passamaquoddy Tribe
- Penobscot Nation

## Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship



**WABANAKI  
COMMISSION**  
ON LAND AND STEWARDSHIP

# Wabanaki Territory



## Wabanaki Territory-Reality

29 Mi'kmaq, 1 Passamaquoddy, 6 Maliseet and 2 Abenaki Bands in Canada



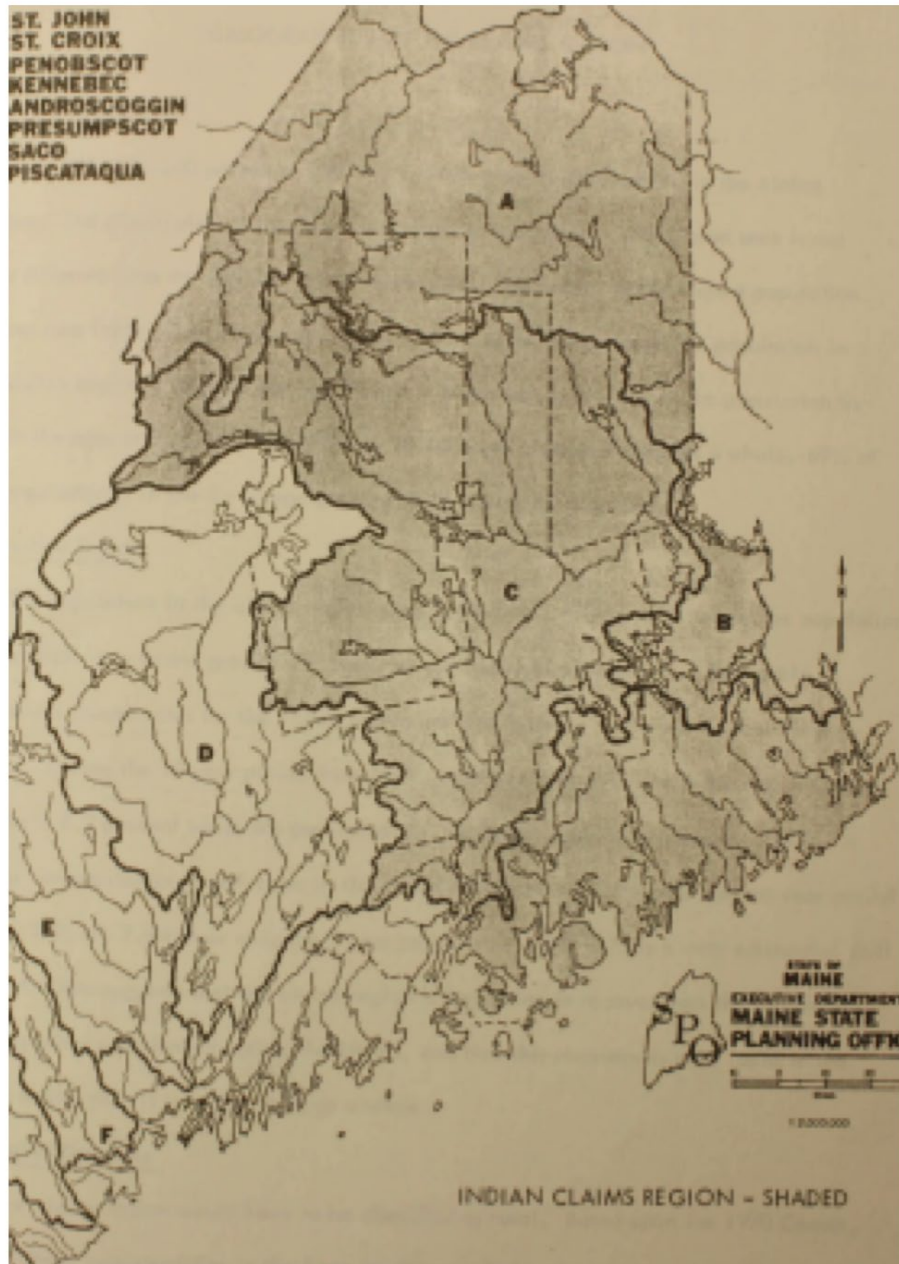




# COLONIAL LEGACIES/ OPPORTUNITIES?

## Map of Conserved and Park Lands in Maine



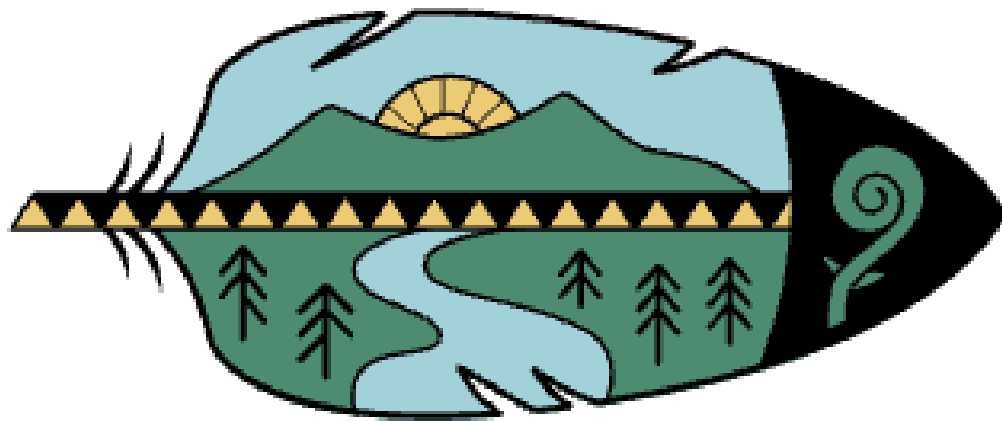


## COLONIAL LEGACIES/ OPPORTUNITIES?

**Map of Lands Taken by Illegal Treaties  
after 1790—  
A legacy of 12 million acres taken.**

# Wabanaki Possibilities

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**WABANAKI  
COMMISSION**  
ON LAND AND STEWARDSHIP



Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship  
*Psiw ut skitkamiq kignumin*  
(The whole earth is our home)

**The mission of the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship is to improve the health and well-being of Wabanaki people through a sustained effort to expand our access, management, and ownership of lands to practice our land-based cultures across Wabanaki homeland in what is now the State of Maine.**

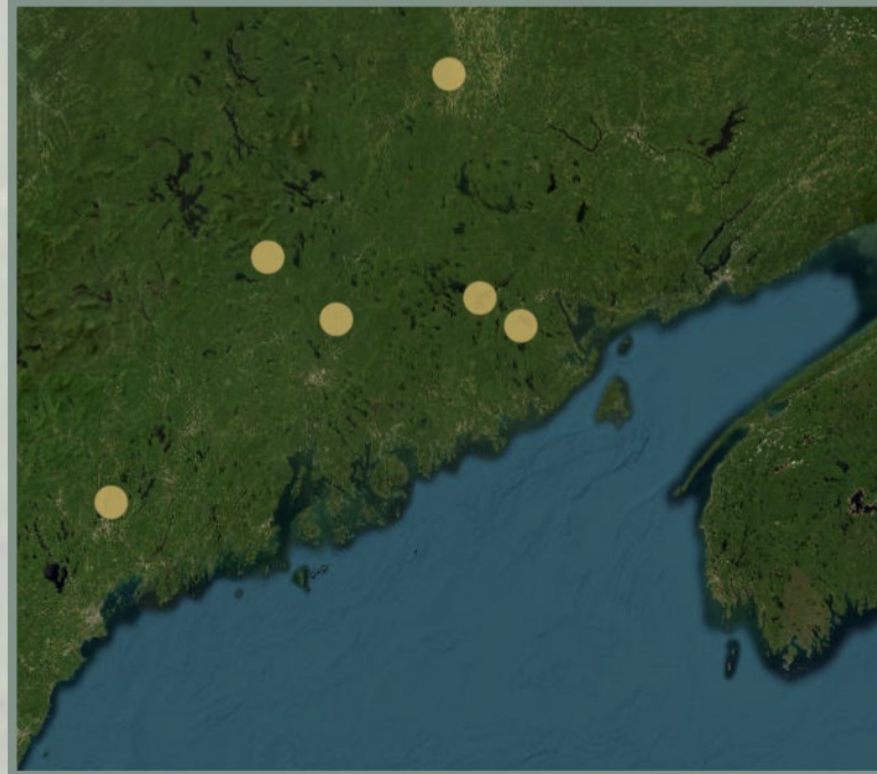


**We support this mission by acquiring lands and by sharing and co-managing, in the spirit of reciprocity, land that is currently owned by land trust and conservation organizations.**



**To support this collaborative work, we seek to create, through partnership and education, a stronger conservation movement that includes and reflects Wabanaki expertise and perspective.**

## Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship— Six Projects Completed



Yellow dots depict places where land has returned through this collaboration.

Connecting	<b>Connecting trust lands:</b> Forests in the Penobscot headwaters returned to the Penobscot Indian Nation with support from Elliotville Foundation.
Returning	<b>Returning a stolen island:</b> After being renamed & stolen 200 years ago, the Passamaquoddy Tribe recovered Kuwesuwi Monihq with support from TNC & partners.
Supporting	<b>Supporting economic growth:</b> The Mi'kmaq Nation realized an active tree farm with resources from First Light & Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT).
Returning	<b>Returning heath &amp; forest:</b> Thousands of acres of wetlands, waterways, & forest near an important village site returned to the Passamaquoddy Tribe with help from TNC and Forest Society of Maine (FSM).
Securing	<b>Securing access to cultural sites:</b> Riverbank across from Sugar Island returned to Penobscot Indian Nation, with support from MCHT and FSM.
Returning	<b>Returning “conserved” land:</b> Bomazeen Land Trust recovered homelands near the Androscoggin River through the return of half of Land in Common’s land holdings.



## Kihtahkomikumon (Our Land) - #IsLandBack in Passamaquoddy Territory

Sunlight Media Collective



# PINE ISLAND RETURN, SPRING 2021



## Native American tribe in Maine buys back island taken 160 years ago

The Passamaquoddy's purchase of Pine Island for \$355,000 is the latest in a series of successful 'land back' campaigns for indigenous people in the US



Pine Island. Photograph. Courtesy the writer

In 1794 it was officially granted to the tribe by Massachusetts for **their service during the revolutionary war**. But after 1820, when Maine became its own state, colonialists changed its title, voiding the treaty. In the 1851 census there were 20 Passamaquoddy living there, in 1861 there were none.

By 2021, they had not only lost all but 130,000 acres of their original 3m. They hadn't stepped foot on Pine Island in 160 years.

# Projects in Process:

## Tributary Cohort:

- 11 land return projects spanning over 52,000 acres of river frontage, coastal islands, wetlands, lake shores, farmlands, and forests. The Commission, Wabanaki NGOs, First Light's core team, and seven First Light organizations are managing the project details and raising the \$51 million needed to complete this cohort.
- Once completed, the Tributary Cohort will nearly double the land holdings of the two Wabanaki Nations in Aroostook County, connect large tracts of Tribal trust land for hunting and access, return stewardship to coastal islands, provide space for economic growth & development, support Wabanaki land care without restriction, and give room for communities & dreams to grow.



**WABANAKI  
COMMISSION**  
ON LAND AND STEWARDSHIP



**FIRST  
LIGHT**

*Building a movement of*  
**Land Return**

**Sharing the work of the  
Wabanaki Commission  
and First Light**

# Solidarity Deposit from First Light Organizations

## **Solidarity Deposit Fundraising Overview**

As of January 2024

For the members of the Wabanaki Commission,

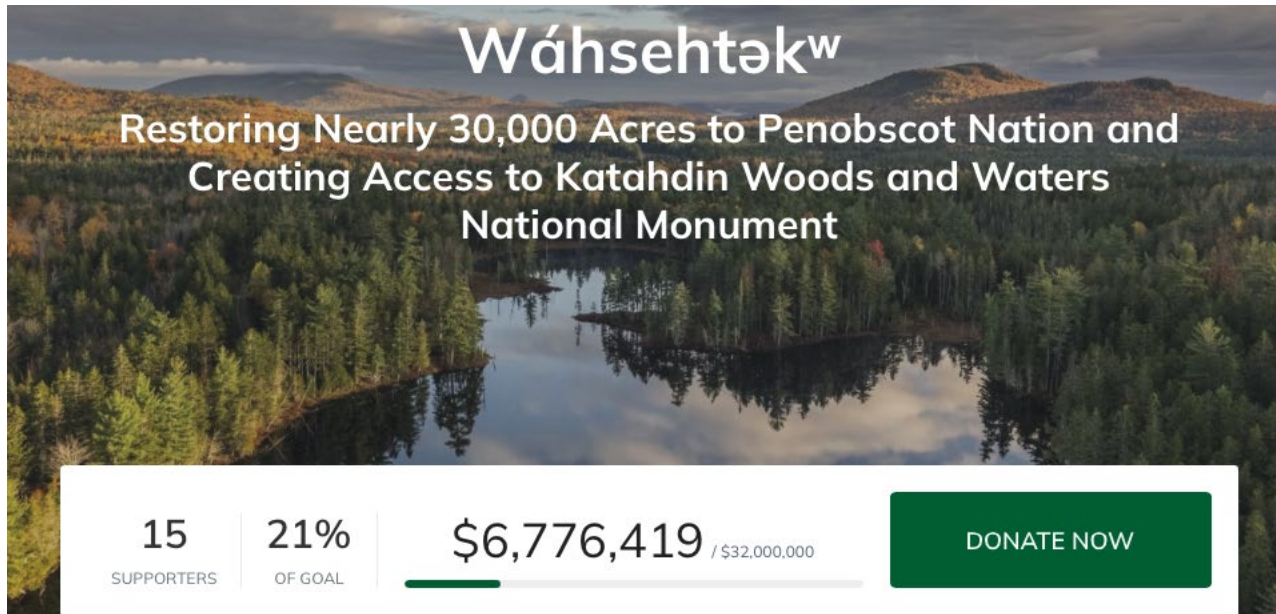
In October 2022, we announced the Solidarity Deposit for the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund and began accepting contributions from First Light organizations, local foundations, and national funds and foundations. By the end of 2023, we had raised more than \$1.5 million for the Solidarity Deposit. We're writing to share a fundraising overview to offer more insight into where this is coming from.

Overall, 30 First Light organizations, 7 foundations in Wabanaki homelands, 8 regional or national foundations, and 20 anonymous individuals contributed \$1.5 million to this fund in 2023. Note that some organizations have already made multi-year commitments to the Fund.

***Wolankeyutomone kisi apaciyewik***

**“Let's take good care of what has returned” Fund**





**Wáhsehtək<sup>w</sup>**  
Restoring Nearly 30,000 Acres to Penobscot Nation and  
Creating Access to Katahdin Woods and Waters  
National Monument

15 SUPPORTERS | 21% OF GOAL | \$6,776,419 / \$32,000,000

**DONATE NOW**

## What can I do?

**Support return of Wahsehtekw:**

<https://support.tpl.org/wahsehtekw>

**Support Wolankeyutomone kisi apaciyewik and this work:**

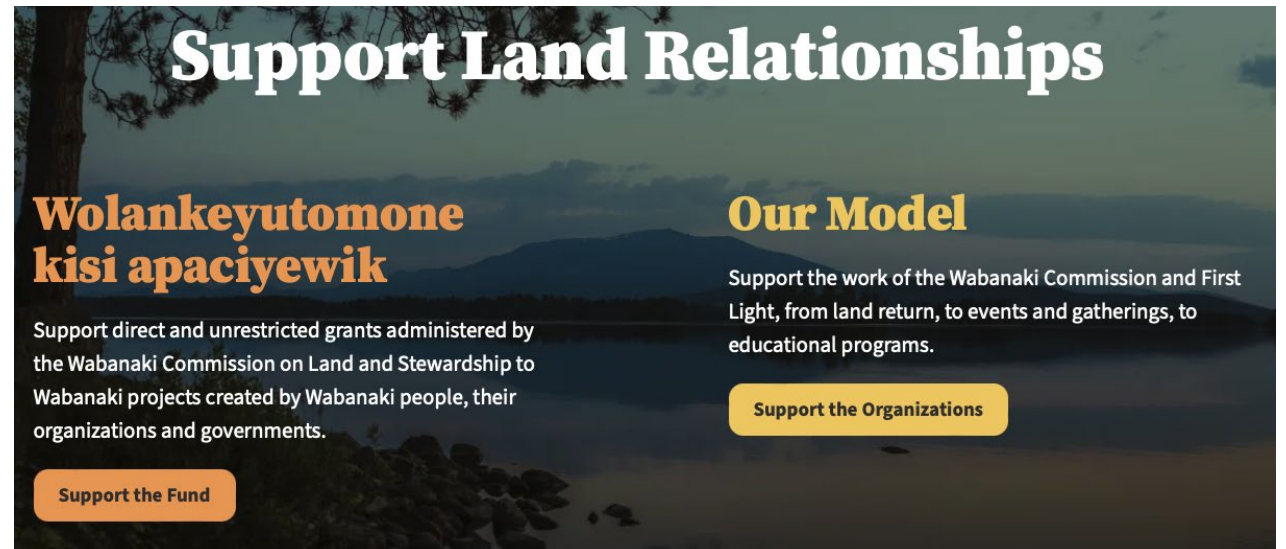
<https://dawnlandreturn.org>

## What can my organization do?

**Continue the work of relearning together:**

<https://dawnlandreturn.org/first-light/courses>

**Focus on relationships with Indigenous partners and between organizations**



## Support Land Relationships

### Wolankeyutomone kisi apaciyewik

Support direct and unrestricted grants administered by the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship to Wabanaki projects created by Wabanaki people, their organizations and governments.

**Support the Fund**

### Our Model

Support the work of the Wabanaki Commission and First Light, from land return, to events and gatherings, to educational programs.

**Support the Organizations**



## Reflections/Conclusions

### Hope and Promise in Indigenous/Land Return

- Healing and Heart work and the future of our planet

### Ongoing legacies and colonial structures

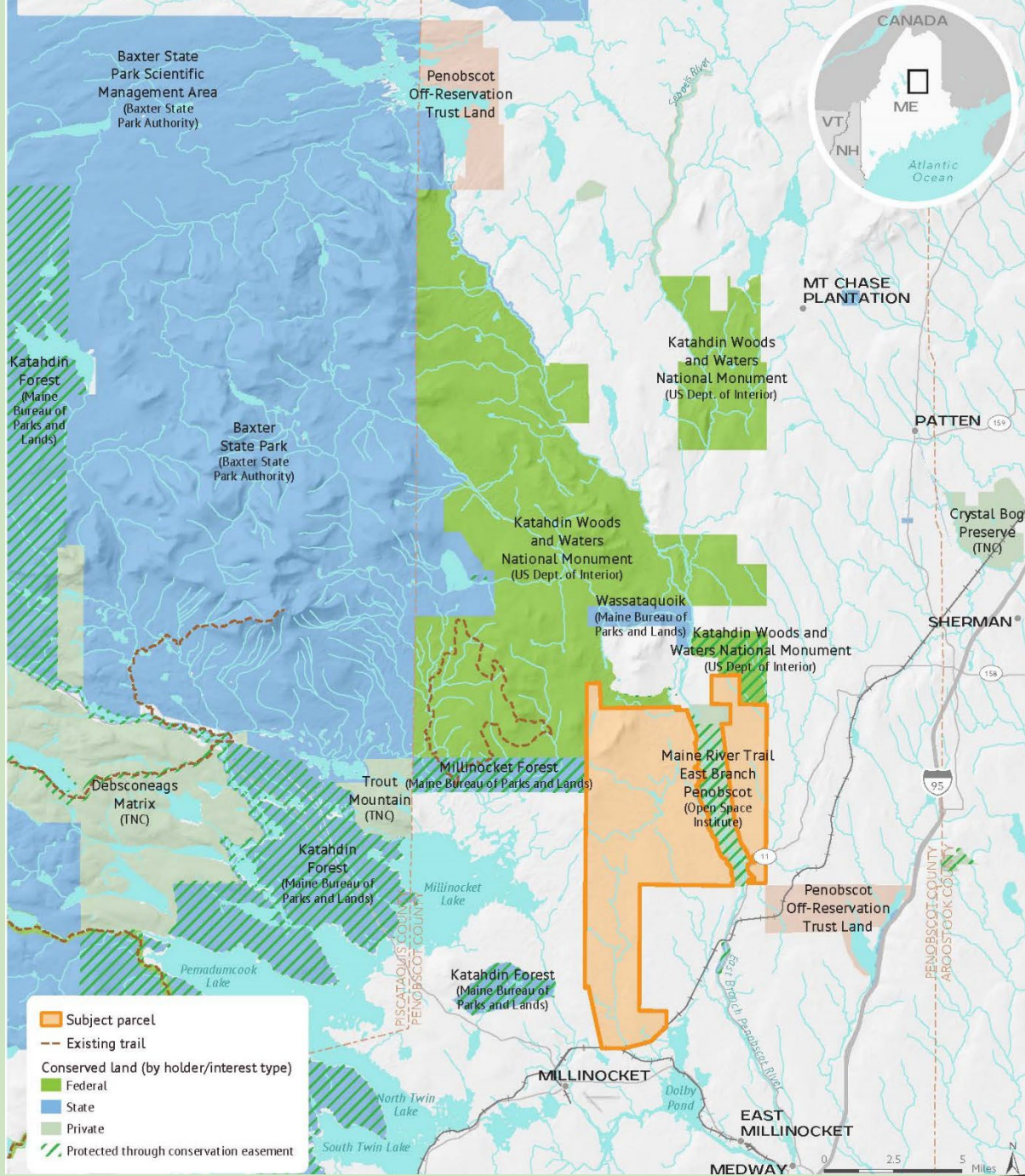
- Private Property relations, Conservation easements, and other structures stand in the way of Indigenous Caretaking roles and responsibilities.

### Landback and repatriation are interconnected and need each other

- The reason for landback is repatriation and Indigenous Caretaking











*“The Penobscot River is the heart of the cultural identity of Penobscot Nation. We have been the caretakers of this great watershed since time immemorial and we consider that responsibility to be a very serious priority of our tribe.”*

- Penobscot Nation Chief Francis, 2015  
Letter of Support for Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument



# Commitment of TPL leadership

All Tribal communities need access to their ancestral homelands. ***These lands are the foundation on which every community's culture, language, and way of life is based.***



*“We believe that every Tribe should have a homeland where they can thrive and where everyone in the Tribe can receive the benefits of access to nature, the outdoors, and their culture. As TPL looks toward the future, we are renewing our commitment to partnering with tribal and Indigenous nations to protect and restore even more of their sacred lands and, with that good work, help write a new, more hopeful chapter in the long history of Native peoples.”*



# Penobscot Nation Stewardship

