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Bedford Land Trust Merges with Piscataquog Land Conservancy

Local conservation group transfers its properties to regional land trust

The Bedford Land Trust (BLT), a non-profit organization founded in 1990 to conserve open space in Bedford at a time when the town was undergoing rapid development, has merged into the Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC), a regional land trust based in New Boston. The Bedford group's 704 acres of conservation property and financial assets have been transferred to PLC, under a merger agreement reviewed by Charitable Trusts Unit of the NH Attorney General's office. The merger became effective New Year's Day.

The two groups began discussing a possible merger in late 2018. The Bedford Land Trust's volunteer board looked at the demands of perpetual stewardship of the lands it had protected over almost three decades, and concluded the responsibility would be better handled by a larger land protection organization with professional staff. For its part, the Piscataquog Land Conservancy had already worked closely with the Town of Bedford in 2017 to take ownership of the 332-acre Florence M. Tarr Wildlife Sanctuary in the northwest corner of town. After agreeing on the essential terms of the merger in early 2019, the two conservation groups spent the balance of the year performing due diligence and developing the legal documents required to finalize the union.

The Bedford Land Trust's Board Co-Chair Rita Carroll says "It was a bittersweet decision, in that during our 30 years as a land trust we worked very hard to successfully conserve seven hundred acres of land in Bedford. Every property has a story behind it, and we are grateful to all who have helped us in our work. At the same time, we know this is the right thing to do, and that the PLC will be an outstanding steward of our conservation easements going forward."

PLC Board Chairman Jim Shirley says "the integration of the Bedford Land Trust with the Piscataquog Land Conservancy brings together two conservation organizations with a combined eighty years of experience protecting forest, farm, and watershed lands. The Piscataquog Land Conservancy will honor the Bedford Land Trust's history, uphold its commitment to stewardship, and continue the work of protecting high conservation value land in Bedford and throughout southern New Hampshire."

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BLT Co-Chair Jeanene Procopis adds “With all the development that has occurred in Bedford since the Bedford Land Trust was founded in 1990, we are fortunate to have had open space set aside for passive recreation and natural resource protection. We appreciate the people that made that possible - our donors, board members, and volunteers. It’s a privilege to have these natural areas available for the public to enjoy. Looking to the future, the most important thing is that the land that has been set aside for conservation will continue to be protected and monitored.”

Of the fourteen conservation properties in Bedford transferred to the Piscataquog Land Conservancy, twelve are conservation easements, which permanently protect parcels of land from development, conserving the natural resources and recreational opportunities that open space provides. The holder of the conservation easement deed is responsible for monitoring the property to ensure the landowner is meeting the terms of the easement, and legally enforcing compliance if necessary.

In the case of the former BLT easements, seven are held on conservation properties owned by the Town of Bedford. These include the town’s 330-acre Pulpit Rock conservation area, 192-acre Joppa Hill property, 68-acre Van Loan Preserve and four other smaller town-owned parcels. Two easements totaling about 19 acres are on properties owned by the Bedford School District next to the town’s middle and high schools. Three more easements are on small privately-owned properties. Two small properties, including Bedford’s historic 19th-century town pound, were owned outright by the Bedford Land Trust, and are now PLC property.

Bedford Conservation Commission Chair Beth Evarts says “the Town of Bedford recognizes the amazing conservation efforts of the Bedford Land Trust without whom we would not have the protected open space lands and recreational trails systems such as Pulpit Rock, Heritage Trail, Moore’s Crossing and many others for our community members to enjoy. We look forward to partnering with the PLC to continue the legacy of the Land Trust and the mission of the Bedford Conservation Commission to protect and conserve our natural resources here in Bedford. “

Every conservation easement and deed restriction was transferred to PLC without modification, so all restrictions, use limitations, reserved rights, etc. listed in each easement or deed remain unchanged and the land will remain protected in perpetuity. Existing restrictions on the use of BLT’s financial assets also continue under the merger agreement.

There will be a public information session about the BLT-PLC merger on Thursday, January 23rd from 6-8 PM in the McAllaster Room at the Bedford Public Library.

Founded in 1970, the Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC) is a private non-profit land conservation organization based in New Boston, NH. Its service area comprises 23 southern New Hampshire communities that encompass the watersheds of the Piscataquog, Souhegan and Nashua Rivers. PLC has to date protected 112 properties totaling more than 7,300 acres. With the inclusion of the Bedford Land Trust properties, these totals increase to 126 properties and just over 8,000 acres. To learn more, visit www.plcnh.org.

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