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ONION FOUNDATION AWARDS \$680,000 TO SOUTHERN MAINE CONSERVATION COLLABORATIVE TO SUPPORT LAND TRUSTS



AUBURN, ME: The Onion Foundation, a charitable foundation that promotes music and the arts and encourages conservation and stewardship of the natural environment in Maine, has awarded a \$680,000 grant over two years to the Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative (SMCC). These funds will support SMCC as the organization offers technical and financial assistance to land trusts throughout the state.

Through this award, the Onion Foundation aims to encourage land trusts to develop equitable organizational structures, inclusive programs and easy access to the outdoors. The foundation's dedicated Environment Program works to empower all Maine residents, especially those living in rural areas, to enjoy the state's natural resources and inspire greater connection to nature. Supporting land trusts is a top Onion Foundation priority, as these trusts protect land and water throughout the state and play an important role in achieving equitable access to the outdoors.

“Spending time outdoors in nature is so important to our health and well-being,” said Susan Onion, co-founder of the Onion Foundation. “And, as more Maine residents have comfortable and meaningful experiences outdoors, dedicated and enthusiastic stewards of the environment are likely to emerge throughout the state.”

SMCC, which recently expanded its geographic focus to the entire state, will use the grant award to expand the capacity-building assistance it provides to land trusts and to offer professional support services, collaborative learning and networking opportunities. Specifically, the grant will support SMCC’s work to:

- Strengthen land trust community governance, leadership, strategic planning, financial stability, programming, marketing and organizational development
- Help land trusts integrate equity and inclusion into their organizational policies, practices and programming and root conservation in community
- Position land trusts to broaden their membership, including by welcoming communities historically underserved by land trusts — people of color, individuals living with disabilities, low-income people, young people, and LGBTQIA+ individuals
- Keep land trusts apprised of trends in land and water conservation and convene land trusts to discuss current and future threats and identify solutions and effective practices

“We are thrilled to have this opportunity to increase the support we provide to organizations conserving land and water in Maine,” said Jess Burton, executive director of SMCC. “As always, we’ll work closely with land trusts to ensure our expanded programs respond to their needs and include opportunities for peer-to-peer exchanges.”

The Onion Foundation has awarded a portion of the grant funds to enable SMCC to assume most of the grantmaking the foundation has provided to individual land trusts in the past. By entrusting decision making to a well-respected organization like SMCC, the foundation is bringing grantmaking closer to the land trust field and democratizing the process. Grantmaking this year will be similar to the Onion Foundation’s past grantmaking, and SMCC will devise a more participatory process for 2024.

“Our hope is that other funders, in Maine and beyond, will also find using SMCC as an intermediary to be an efficient way to support land trusts throughout the state,” said Diana Morris, executive director of the foundation.

By invitation, the Onion Foundation will continue to provide some support to individual land trusts that serve as important models or bring new ideas and approaches to the field.



Visit www.onionfoundation.org/environment for more information about the foundation's Environment Program.

The **Onion Foundation** is a private charitable foundation established in 2014. It was created with the mission of encouraging conservation and stewardship of the natural environment and promoting music and the arts in the state of Maine. Since its creation, the foundation has made over 1,400 grants to more than 460 nonprofit organizations, totaling more than \$15 million.

The **Southern Maine Conservation Collaborative** is a nonprofit organization with a mission to work collectively in Maine to create mutually beneficial relationships with the earth, communities, and people through the conservation movement. SMCC's vision is that conserved, restored and stewarded lands provide climate resiliency, community health, justice and equity for generations. SMCC provides technical assistance, networking opportunities, and collaborative leadership to the conservation community in Maine. More information about SMCC can be found at <https://southernmaineconservation.org>.