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9/19/21

Conservation groups move to protect historic Bowdoinham property

The Maine Coast Heritage Trust will soon pass over the property to Kennebec Estuary Land Trust to carry out conservation activities.



By [Payal Gangishetti](#) Times Record

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The view of Center Point from Brick Island. *Courtesy of Kennebec Estuary Land Trust*

Several conservation groups have joined forces to protect 131 acres of forestland and wetlands on Centers Point in Bowdoinham, near the Bowdoinham Wildlife Management Area.

The property is visible from most parts of Merrymeeting Bay and has a rich history.

Centers Point was the site of the first European settlers in Bowdoinham who, from the point they called Somersett, watched many vessels engaged in an early commercial sturgeon fishery. Not only is the point a significant historical archaeology location, but is home to prehistoric sites as well.

In 2000, Friends of Merrymeeting Bay started working on the property's conservation easement with then-owner Bob Patenaude Sr.

"His children back then didn't want that to happen, but in 2006 Patenaude came back to us and said he wanted to go ahead and protect the property anyway but before we had a chance to do anything, he died," said Ed Friedman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. "Patenaude's children later inherited the property."

In 2019, the property went on the market, and Friends of Merrymeeting Bay began efforts to acquire and protect the area.

"We had the property appraised in the fall of 2019 and ultimately, the owners agreed to sell it to our primary project partner Maine Coast Heritage Trust at the appraised fair market value," said Friedmann.

Friedmann said the organization's goal from the beginning was to restore the property to its natural state.

Betsy Ham, director of Land Protection at Maine Coast Heritage Trust, said the property will be passed on to Kennebec Estuary Land Trust and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

"We were holding it to make sure that we could take it off the market quickly. We had really good luck with raising money for this property, so that was wonderful, said Ham. "The Kennebec Estuary Land Trust is going to own it long term, and they're the ones that will be moving forward, plan for its future and be sensitive to its local neighborhood."

While the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust will conserve 30 acres of the property, the rest will pass from Maine Coast Heritage Trust to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Kennebec Estuary Land Trust will also be conserving the eight acres of Brick Island off the coast.

"We manage to find the balance between protecting important habitat for wildlife and providing access for the public with all our properties, which is important to help connect people to the natural splendor of the area," said Becky Kolak, acting executive director of Kennebec Estuary Land Trust.

Kennebec Estuary Land Trust is working in partnership with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the the town to build a parking area this fall for 10 cars and improve the trailhead and signage.

"It is important to us to provide access that is safe and sustainable to visitors and be respectful of our preserve neighbors," said Kolak. "We have a Stewardship Committee that discusses the type of recreation that could be done on property, like walking and Nordic skiing."

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