

The Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative

A Progress Report to Friends and Supporters

May 2005



Photo by Patty O'Connor

Just two and a half years ago, representatives from 10 conservation organizations came together under the title of The Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative (MtA2C) to achieve a common conservation goal: natural resource protection within a 48,000-acre area, spanning Maine's six southernmost towns of Ogunquit, Wells, York, South Berwick, Eliot, and Kittery.

Driven by a science-based conservation plan developed by more than 80 organizations and stakeholders, the partners agreed that time was of the essence, and that cooperation was essential to protecting the region's drinking water supplies, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and ecological features that made Maine's southernmost communities both unique and desirable.

Further, the partners recognized the need to protect the places that allowed for traditional livelihoods such as farming, fishing and timber harvesting, and to make certain that residents would continue to enjoy access to the open space and natural areas as they had for centuries. This update describes progress made since ten partners officially launched the Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative in October 2002.

A Two-Pronged Approach to Conservation

Recognizing that conservation cannot be achieved by land protection alone, the MtA2C Conservation Initiative approaches conservation in two ways:

- Traditionally, via the acquisition of natural areas by outright purchase or the donation of development rights (commonly called conservation easements).

The partners of the Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative are working together to achieve a common conservation goal: natural resource protection within a 48,000-acre area, spanning Maine's six southernmost towns of Ogunquit, Wells, York, South Berwick, Eliot, and Kittery.

- Creatively, by leveraging our dollars and work with MtA2C's six municipalities. In helping implement the conservation goals of each town's Comprehensive Plan, MtA2C can realize more land conservation via improved zoning ordinances and smart growth planning.

Land Protection

The partners of MtA2C have collectively protected an additional 1,000 acres of land since October 2002. Some projects have represented large land areas, such as the 296-acre McIntire Highland Preserve in York, while others are small in acreage but key to completing links between already protected lands. Here are some examples of MtA2C's successful land conservation projects:

The ATP lands of South Berwick – Situated in the center of a 4,000-acre forested block, the ATP lands were slated and approved for a 50-unit subdivision that would have dramatically increased traffic flow through prime habitat for the state-endangered blundings turtle and state-threatened spotted turtle. In protecting ATP's 225 acres, the MtA2C partners kept one of southern Maine's largest forested blocks intact, protected a key wildlife habitat, and helped to defray additional community service costs for South Berwick residents.

McIntire Highlands Preserve of York – Home to what are believed to be the oldest trees in York County, the McIntire Highlands Preserve is a 296-acre tract that abuts more than 4,000 acres of open space owned by the Kittery and York Water



Landowners are critical to MtA2C's work. Here, Mary Kimball and Ward Feurt, manager of the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, celebrate Mary's donation of 15 acres to the Reserve.

Districts. Protecting the parcel also served to bring the MtA2C partners one step closer to connecting the protected lands of Mt. Agamenticus with lands protected along the upper reaches of the York River – a key goal of the MtA2C Conservation Initiative. Vernal pools and four rare plant species are found on the property.

The Sewall's Bridge Dock Project of York – Protecting a commercial fishing dock is not normally the role of terrestrial-driven land trusts, but MtA2C's partners felt that protecting traditional livelihoods was critical to York's culture and community fabric. In 2003, the York Land Trust, a MtA2C partner, teamed with local fishermen Jeff Donnell and Mark Sewall to purchase and place a conservation easement on this piece of working waterfront. With a new twist on an old tool, the easement requires that the dock must be used for commercial fishing in perpetuity – forever.

The Kimball parcel of Kittery – Ten years ago, Mary Kimball's father, William F. Raynes, conveyed 126-acres of his Cutts Island land to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge. Following a family tradition, Mary Kimball donated nearly all of the family's remaining acreage to the Refuge in March 2005. Kimball's land will be forever protected and actively managed for the more than 100 waterbird species that use the Refuge each year.

MtA2C partners have protected an additional 485-acres via 12 other projects. Collectively, the region has more than 6,500 acres of permanently protected

MtA2C's partners are pursuing conservation on two levels:

- Land and conservation easement acquisition, and
- Partnerships with municipalities to realize each town's conservation goals.

lands. These lands, combined with the York and Kittery Water Districts' 4,500 acres, make up the 11,000 acres of open space in the MtA2C project area.

Working with Municipalities

The MtA2C project area spans the six towns of Ogunquit, Wells, South Berwick, York, Eliot, and Kittery. Each of these towns has set forth conservation goals in its Comprehensive Plan, a document that identifies the town's vision, goals, and work plan. MtA2C's Coordinator, Roger Cole, has fully assessed each town's Plan, identifying overlaps between town and MtA2C conservation goals. Roger has partnered with municipal officials to achieve the following:

- In April of 2005, the Town of Kittery formally established and launched an Open Space Committee;
- The Conservation Commission in Wells helped the town purchase several parcels of important conservation lands. Town funding, not private dollars, was used for these purchases;
- The York Planning Board now wants the York Land Trust to partner with developers who are proposing large-scale developments so that conservation planning is incorporated from the beginning;
- Municipal funding sources for conservation have been identified for each town.

Most recently, the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission received a \$15,000 challenge grant from Maine's State Planning Office to partner with MtA2C and the six towns within MtA2C's project area on conservation initiatives. To date, four towns have matched the SMRPC grant: Wells, South Berwick, York, and Kittery. Eliot and Ogunquit are pursuing matching funds as well.

Federal and State Support

With three of MtA2C's ten partners representing governmental organizations (the US Fish and Wildlife

Service, the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife) MtA2C has successfully established a public/private approach to conservation. Nonetheless, additional governmental assistance, at all levels, is essential to the Conservation Initiative's work.

In the fall of 2004, MtA2C was both delighted and grateful to receive a federal appropriation of \$1 million via the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP). Congressman Tom Allen and Senators Susan Collins and Olympia Snow were instrumental in securing the funding.

MtA2C was also fortunate to receive state funding via the Land for Maine's Future Program and municipal funding from the Town of York. The combined awards generated \$430,000 to help purchase the MacIntire Highlands Preserve.



With Congressman Allen's and Senators Collins' and Snow's help, MtA2C was honored to receive a \$1 million appropriation from NOAA's Coastal Estuarine Land Conservation Program in 2004. The program funds the protection of coastal lands, like those shown in this photo of the York River.

Photo by Christina Epperson

Work and Recognition

As MtA2C's partners have developed policies and practices for working together as a ten-member coalition, word of the MtA2C Conservation Initiative has spread throughout Maine and elsewhere. In 2004, MtA2C was pleased to be recognized by Governor Baldacci as a model for regional planning.

MtA2C receives frequent inquiries from groups throughout the country who are considering a coalition approach to conservation projects. Recently, MtA2C's coordinator presented the MtA2C Conservation Initiative to the Maine's annual "Smart Growth" conference, an event that attracted over 300 participants.

In 2005, MtA2C will work with outside analyst Martha Lyman to evaluate the effectiveness of the collaborative. In addition to providing feedback for improving the coalition's immediate work, an outside assessment of MtA2C should help to determine if a 10-partner coalition creates opportunities for conservation that would not be realized if all 10 partners were working independently. With resources stretched thin for non-profit and governmental organizations, it is important to know that the MtA2C partners are conserving more natural resources by working together.

Looking Ahead

In 2005 and 2006, MtA2C will continue to implement the Conservation Plan for the Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea's 48,000-acre project area. New lands will be protected and MtA2C will continue working with each town on shared conservation goals. Land conservation projects that should be completed include:

- A 350+ acre parcel with nearly one mile of undeveloped coastline;
- A large forested parcel that abuts existing conservation and drinking water lands;
- Land in the Tatnic region of Wells and South Berwick that will link to Mt. Agamenticus' existing conservation lands;

- A working farm in the southern region of MtA2C's project area.

In addition, MtA2C will continue its work with municipalities. By working jointly with the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission, MtA2C expects to achieve the following:

- Installing the State of Maine's "Beginning with Habitat" data onto the desktop computers of each town's planning office. The data is in a Geographic Information System (GIS) format that can be layered over existing maps to pinpoint where each town's most important natural resources are located;
- Developing impact fee and zoning language that meets legal standards and can be directly incorporated into each town's Comprehensive Plan and ordinances;
- Compiling existing build-out studies and preparing additional developable lands analyses for input into the regional open space planning process.

We hope you'll agree the MtA2C Coalition has made excellent progress. Much has been done and we are proud of our accomplishments. At the same time, so much work remains. Over 7,000 acres of land identified as critical to conserving our region's most important natural resources remain unprotected. The six towns of MtA2C's project area need to add programs and planning to address the growth that will continue to dramatically change southernmost Maine over the next 10-15 years.

With your help, the partners of MtA2C will continue addressing our region's conservation challenges. By conserving the natural areas and open spaces necessary to maintaining the high quality of life we have come to enjoy, southernmost Maine will continue to be a desirable place to live, raise our families, and appreciate the extraordinary beauty found right here, in our own backyards.