

Confluence January: Colonization and Land Theft in Maine

Taking the learning back home

In this session...

We heard about how land theft and land hoarding has been institutionalized by the State of Maine since it separated from Massachusetts. We know about treaties between Massachusetts/Maine and Wabanaki Tribes that have not been honored. We heard about court cases brought against Wabanaki people in order to create unrelated legal precedents of taking. We saw how the State and the Timber industry worked together to fund a young poor State by taking land from Wabanaki people. Policy and legal tools of government have been used against Indigenous Peoples repeatedly in the US Northeast and around the world. (Looking forward: In February, we will learn about how the Conservation/Farming/Fishing industries have benefited from using these same tools to “protect” and hoard land.) We heard directly from organizers at the Wabanaki Alliance about ongoing efforts to change legislation & help restore full sovereignty to Wabanaki Nations, necessary steps in addressing a legacy of taking.

Questions for you and/or your organization*:

Given the historical and contemporary policy focus of this session– plus the opening of the legislative session!-- we invite reflection on where your organization stands in policy change spaces.

- Does your org (or you) speak out publicly about...
 - Land or water conservation?
 - Climate change?
 - Farming/fishing rights?
 - Solar/wind electricity?
 - Pollution?
 - Environmental or food justice?
 - Wabanaki or other Indigenous sovereignty and rights?
- Why do you speak out on these topics?
- What is the decision-making process to determine when to speak out, who will speak out, and how public this will be?
- Is the decision open and transparent to board, staff, members?
- Can a board member, staff person, or member/constituent bring issues/legislation to the table for consideration for public organization comment?
- Do you encourage your members/constituents to speak out on legislation/policy?
- Are your practices around advocacy aligned with your mission AND values? Are there changes you'd like to make?

Resources on advocacy:

Board members often bring up concerns about putting the organization's 501c3 status in jeopardy by “lobbying” or “doing advocacy”. Sometimes this concern comes from a lack of knowledge and appropriate onboarding of new staff and board members. And sometimes, this is the result of dominant culture not wanting to “deal with it”. Either way, this issue comes up very often and can consume a lot of meeting time. If you are a staff or board member of an NGO, learn what is/isn't allowed so that this red flag can be addressed expeditiously.

The following resources have been helpful for the First Light Community. Take a look at the guide from [Bolder Advocacy](#) for non-profit lobbying in Maine. Watch this [2-minute clip](#) from First Light's Legal Training in 2023 for attorney [Rob Levin's](#) guidance on advocacy for land trusts.

*If you are a Confluence participant who works for a government agency or are participating as an individual, consider these questions personally.