

John Banks' lunchtime remarks at the Katahdin Conference, June 6th, 2019

John Banks shared three guiding words for us: Trust, faith, and hope.

Trust: The tribes have a lot of reasons not to trust non-natives. There is a long history of agreements being broken. During the 1750s, Wabanaki agreed to support the colonies in the Revolutionary war in exchange for the protection of our lands and people. This was the first promise that was broken. They built dams that starved our people. So, it is hard for tribal people to put any trust in conservation organizations. You must prove to us that you are trustworthy, and results are much better than promises. Too many non-natives have "candy store syndrome;" they just like to work with the tribes on the good stuff like drumming circles and celebrations but are absent when it comes to politics. We must move away from this type of relationship. Don't keep us in the museum—don't say Wabanaki used to do this or that. We're still here! Don't come to us after the project is planned. Work with us from the beginning. Don't talk about us without us.

Faith: I have faith in the folks who have gone down this road with us. We have a lot of allies. People are showing up, continue to do this.

Hope: This process gives me hope. We want these mutual relationships. For us it's not about power, it's about our creator-given responsibilities to this land. Wherever your area is, reach out to the tribes and ask if their land is important to the tribes and how they can be protected for them. This is the journey. This is a great first step, but the destination creates the journey and is important as well.