

Peter's opening comments at First Light Learning Journey, January 4, 2018

Why are we here together? Everyone is here by their own choice. I'm here because of an opportunity, an aspiration, a dream if you will.

I can imagine a time in the future when many privately and publicly conserved lands in Maine carry their original Wabanaki place names and those names are readily known and spoken in our schools and coffee shops. Native people have guaranteed special access to many of those places to collect brown ash, sweetgrass, other things, and to hold private ceremony. The resulting art and language and cultural practices enrich all Mainers. Those historic Native communities are vibrant and resilient because of economic opportunity, but also because of special protected relationship and guaranteed access to the physical places that inform and shape their healthy culture. As result, our public schools in Maine are richer with diversity and have opportunities for all kids to learn a Native language.

I have a dream that, one day, conservation summits in Maine have become gatherings of Native and non-Native people who pour over maps and talk strategy together about what it will take to protect biological and cultural diversity together.

As result of understanding the connection between health of nature and health of people, the number of folks who care about conservation is 10 times bigger than it was back in 2017. Lots of people understand how their wellbeing is connected to the forests' wellbeing, and that's what makes Maine different from the rest of the country. People want to live here because life truly is better here. Business are small, but numerous and strong.

Native relationship to water, in this future, is protected jointly by non- Native and Native conservationists because we understand how they are a water nation.

In this dream, MOFGA means more than organic farming it also means Native and organic practices.

In this dream, Maine is a diverse, culturally rich place deeply connected to its nature.

The practical tools to do much of this – cultural easements, cultural respect agreements, strong conservation organizations, strong tribal governments with natural resource and cultural preservation officers - are already in place. What's needed is many more points of contact, understanding and relationship.

Speaking personally – and no one here needs to agree with me- an expanded collaboration between non-Native and Native conservationists is an ecological opportunity, meaning we can protect nature better together, and it is also a social justice

opportunity. Meaning our ability to connect meaningfully around these land issues can lead to a more equitable distribution of the wealth, resources and privileges of living here.

Why single out access for one people when most conservation easements already grant public access? Why should conservation groups make a special effort for one group in Maine?

Because of social justice. Maine does have a tradition of public access but that's not always or necessarily for Native people. "Traditional" uses are for hunting but not necessarily collecting brown ash or sweetgrass, just for example. Because Tribes and Native communities hold a unique position among conservation partners because all land conservation takes place on their ancestral tribal lands.

As important: Tribes and Land Trusts share a narrative; land and nature are both central to our beliefs and work, thus we have a special responsibility to each other.

We as a conservation movement can't be at our very best without collaborating with Wabanaki people: we have a moral obligation to do so and they hold knowledge that is essential to conservation.

I want to explore one word and idea with you to make this point. The word is sustenance. I hope our definition of conservation can expand to include sustenance.

What sustains us? I bet we have very different thoughts in this room about the meaning of this word to each of us. For some here, what sustains them might be recreation in the mountains and a deep understanding of ecology. For others, what sustains them is food on plates and food for ceremony.

Respect sustains.

Knowledge sustains.

Relationship to place sustains.

What connects conservation and the five Maine tribes is sustenance. I could see how it might also divide us, but I want to work toward a future where it connects us.

This is the first of many focused dialogues. Today is a Penobscot perspective, and the next dialogue will offer a Passamaquoddy perspective. We also know that not everyone who needs to be in the room is yet in the room. With your help, we'll expand it.

Why are we specifically asking the panelists to dig into history? From my perspective, we are not focusing on history because any one person in this room is responsible for the past, but because we are all responsible for not repeating it in the future. Also, one

person's history is another person's present-day life. And so, if we are to build understanding and relationships, we must begin with history.

I expect our work together to proceed at the speed of trust, which is to say slowly with some advances and some missteps that takes us backwards. But to persist.

The point of a learning journey over time is to sustain the conversation and to look again at the situation, which is what respect means.

Through these conversations together we're seeking a change in relationships, some broader definitions of what conservation means, and to tie our struggles and our opportunities closer together.

To Darren, Maria and Maulian, thank you for joining us. We bring a sensibility of inquiry, opportunity and respect and we will now listen with open hearts.