



Letter of Commitment to the First Light Coalition

The mission of the Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust (MATLT) is to preserve and protect land surrounding the Appalachian Trail in Maine for public benefit. The land that we now call Maine is Wabanaki land and known to the Indigenous people of the area as Wabanakik. Today, these communities have generously and slowly opened up communication and collaboration with “western” individuals and organizations via First Light. This letter serves as a statement of commitment to honor, respect, revere, and trust this opportunity to build a relationship with Indigenous people and to be authentic in our actions as a power-holding organization.

We respect and honor the origins and dignity of the Indigenous people of Wabanaki lands, and we recognize and denounce the genocide, displacement, theft and dehumanization that has left deep scars in their communities. To honor our commitment, we must not take the opportunity to build trust for granted, for trust has been slashed countless times by colonial powers.

As an organization committed at our core to preserving and protecting land for public benefit, the values of ecological stewardship and land access are tenets of our daily work. Before many of our ancestors were born or stepped foot on these lands, they were actively stewarded by the Wabanaki people for 10,000+ years. Humbly, we acknowledge that western ecological practices have not always been the most sustainable. It is time for us to honor the life-giving interconnectedness of Indigenous peoples and their land and the benefit that it has on all of us. Our commitment to this work represents a maturity in understanding of our mission given the paradigm in which it sits.

When an opportunity to join the First Light coalition presented itself via a learning journey a number of years ago, MATLT’s Executive Director and a board member joined the cohort and began our organization’s relationship with the First Light. Since then, we have been committed to engaging with the Wabanaki community through the work led by First Light and other partner organizations; to building relationships with the intent of including Wabanaki voices and perspectives into our organization; and to continue to explore ways to benefit and collaborate with the Wabanaki community.

Through First Light, the Wabanaki Delegation has expressed interest in intentional land access and land return projects, and some have already taken place across Wabanakik. MATLT commits to working collectively with others under the auspices of First Light, including by engaging in conversations that allow us to learn about opportunities to share resources and power with Wabanaki communities and to expand Wabanaki people’s access to land and cultural resources.

This is a journey of learning and relearning that will take not years, not decades, but generations. We will continue to educate ourselves about Wabanaki history, culture, needs, and priorities. To live up to our mission of preserving and protecting the lands along the Appalachian Trail in Maine, we will relearn history and recenter Indigenous voices.

As a member of the First Light coalition of conservation organizations, we are proud to be a supporter of the *Wolankeyutomone kisi apaciyewik*, "*Let us take good care of what is returned*" *Fund* (formerly known as the "self-determination fund.") We will openly share this message with our constituents, including our donors, program partners, and followers on digital media: MATLT is committed to expanding Wabanaki people's access and relationship to land for their prosperity and cultural integrity. We will expand our support beyond words alone through authentic action by embracing initiatives, addressing public policies, and bolstering other organizations that have an explicit commitment to addressing the injustice experienced by Wabanaki people.

Finally, we reemphasize our deep gratitude for this opportunity to build relationships and trust between our organization and First Light.

Approved by a vote of the Board of Directors, November 4, 2024