



FSM staff, FSM board member Bonnie Newsom, and Penobscot Nation Department of Natural Resources staff enjoy a field trip to Penobscot trust land Mattamiscontis. Fall 2023.



Forest View

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FSM's Wabanaki Engagement Initiative

The Forest Society of Maine (FSM) has had, as part of its core mission since its inception, the conservation of the ecological, economic, recreational, and **cultural** values of Maine's forests. As directed by its strategic plan, FSM has been actively strengthening its commitment to the rich culture and history of the Wabanaki Tribes. Over the past five years, FSM has been part of and has integrated into its work the First Light Learning Journey¹, a powerful collaborative to recenter Wabanaki voices and relearn history in an effort to restore Wabanaki presence on the land in what is now Maine. This effort has grown significantly over time and according to the Dawnland Return² website, "Collaboration within the non-native community and building relationships over time across the Wabanaki communities allows us to move forward together with trust and the momentum to build systemic change." As stewards of approximately 1,000,000 acres of easement lands in northern Maine, FSM realizes that establishing and maintaining Wabanaki relationships and access to ancestral homelands strengthens overall forestland stewardship.

FSM is striving to enrich its awareness through hosting a variety of Wabanaki speakers at board meetings and field trip opportunities and has participated in a Wabanaki Reach³ training directed toward conservation groups. The organization has worked to improve procedures to ensure consultation with Tribes takes place early in a project to receive feedback and direction. Through its work on the Delegation and in service to the Wabanaki Commission⁴ on Land and Stewardship FSM has also been able to respond

to requests for assistance connecting Tribes with landowners who are selling property or own property in culturally important areas. Other ways FSM is being responsive to Wabanaki requests is through research, data collection, and map-making when feasible.

FSM board member and Penobscot Nation Tribal citizen, Bonnie Newsom, shares, "The FSM board and staff actively seek to better understand Wabanaki desires for land access, acknowledgement of Indigenous rights, and return of culturally significant areas. Conservation easement language and project procedures are being updated to include protective measures for Wabanaki cultural sites and to create pathways for Wabanaki access for ceremonial use and the gathering of culturally important materials. When the Wabanaki Nations have an opportunity to acquire land, FSM can assist transactions, including with negotiations and complex mapping. History shows that Wabanaki stewardship of forests leads to less deforestation and greater biodiversity than in many other forests."

FSM continues its work of relearning, recentering Wabanaki voices, and restoring Wabanaki presence on the land. Check the FSM website soon for a more thorough description of FSM's ongoing Wabanaki Engagement work!

¹ First Light Learning Journey website: www.dawnlandreturn.org/first-light

² Dawnland Return website: www.dawnlandreturn.org

³ Wabanaki Reach website: www.wabanakireach.org

⁴ Wabanaki Commission website: www.dawnlandreturn.org/wabanaki-commission

A statewide land trust working with landowners to conserve and maintain the many values of forestlands in Maine

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