

Maine Island Trail Association (MITA)
Statement to the First Light Community, 2025

Context: Maine's coastal islands

What is now the coast of Maine has supported a system of Wabanaki water transit routes through time immemorial. Before European colonization, these routes were essential to Wabanaki life. They allowed for the transportation of people, goods, and trade items through salt- and fresh-water channels among Native villages and vital coastal and island resources.

In current times, the coast of Maine supports the [Maine Island Trail](#): a recreation-oriented water trail connecting some 220 uninhabited islands and coastal sites from Kittery to Eastport. The Trail is managed by the Maine Island Trail Association (MITA), although MITA does not own any of the islands/land. Instead, the organization has gradually developed relationships with over 100 private and public property owners to permit public access to islands based on the owners' guidelines. MITA also provides volunteer-based island stewardship activities. In this way, MITA has fostered mutual trust between island owners and visitors across 37 years, creating the Maine Island Trail. That said, MITA understands and seeks to celebrate that *the original Maine Island Trail was Wabanaki*.

MITA brings to First Light

- A mission and membership structure that explicitly welcomes island access
- Longstanding relationships with approximately 100 land/island owners, ranging from public agencies to land trusts to private families
- Potential to support (island) land return process and long-term management
- Detailed information concerning visitation guidelines from each individual island owner
- Publications where this information is made available to people accessing the islands
- Practical knowledge of the islands themselves from years of stewardship work and monitoring
- A fleet of 10 open work boats for island stewardship and access along the coast
- Opportunities for island stewardship activities (beach cleanups, light construction, tree work, etc.)

MITA pledges continued participation in First Light

Two members of the MITA staff participated in the Second Cohort of the Learning Journey and wish to continue representing MITA as program 'alum' during the Third Cohort/Confluence and beyond:

- Downeast Stewardship Manager, Christina Hassett, who hopes to continue indefinitely (christina@mita.org)
- Former Executive Director, Doug Welch, hopes to continue in a six-month transitional capacity ending in April 2025. (dougwelch207@gmail.com)

MITA's new Executive Director is excited to get engaged as well:

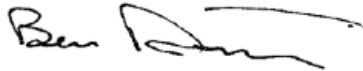
- Executive Director, Ben Dougherty, (Ben@MITA.org)

MITA pledges continued membership in the Island Access Working Group

In 2022 MITA worked with First Light staff to establish the Island Access Working Group.¹ The group seeks to address two conditions identified by Wabanaki Tribal representatives in 2022: (1) The coastal islands are particularly sacred to Wabanaki tribes given the clear evidence of eons of occupation (shell middens, petroglyphs, etc.) (2) The islands are particularly exclusionary to the Wabanaki today as a result of their being the first places to be colonized some 400 years ago and given the exclusive nature of the coast under present-day ownership laws and dynamics. The purpose of the Island Access Working Group is therefore to increase access to the coastal islands by Wabanaki People.

Christina Hassett plans to remain an active member of the Working Group. Doug Welch is committed to represent MITA on an interim basis in the coordination of the Working Group and its monthly meetings. This will continue beyond Doug's tenure as a full time employee at MITA in November 2024 for as long as MITA and First Light seek to continue this arrangement. Ben Dougherty will join the working group in 2025.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Dougherty", written over a horizontal line.

Ben Dougherty, Executive Director
February 2025

¹ As of this writing the group includes First Light, MCHT, MITA, National Park Service, ME Bureau of Parks and Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Chewonki, Maine IF&W, Frenchmans Bay Conservancy, the National Audubon Society and the Wabanaki Commission via their staff designee.