

September 20, 2024



To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Maine Audubon, and particularly its board of directors and staff, we wish to express our commitment to organizational improvement and change alongside the dozens of other organizations in the First Light Community.

For longer than most other First Light cohort enrollees, and for much of its 150-plus-year history, Maine Audubon has been white led and has had direct connections to colonization and other oppression across much of its education, conservation, policy, and land ownership/stewardship work. We continue to wrestle deeply with the implications and responsibilities of our namesake, John James Audubon, an unrepentant slave owner whose name and artwork was used by activists after his death to specify and elevate bird conservation. As a statewide entity which is completely independent of the national organization, Maine Audubon is focused on learning about and implementing the actions we must take to decolonize and address injustice here in communities and lands in what is now called Maine.

Maine Audubon has proudly participated in First Light since Cohort One and contributed to the Solidarity Fund, and we have appreciated the aligning opportunities to host online First Light programs for our staff and board and to send staff to Knoll Farm. That work has been part of our broader work to be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive across all of our programs and practices. Maine Audubon has been guided and aided by new partnerships in some of the most diverse communities in the state; programs focused on engaging marginalized youth; and EDI committees of our staff and board. We partner with Wabanaki leaders and advisors to incorporate indigenous knowledge into our education programs, team with tribal natural resources departments on habitat conservation efforts, and advocate vocally for tribal sovereignty and other policy that benefits Wabanaki communities. We have also just launched a project to develop a Wabanaki interpretive plan for Maine Audubon, a pathway which will be informed by advisors from Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Abenaki nations.

First Light helps Maine Audubon and its peer organizations engage more deeply and broadly with legacies which have no doubt strengthened our organization and many Maine communities, but have been harmful to Wabanaki people, communities, foodways, access to cultural resources, and in myriad other ways. Our participation in and commitment to First Light serves to involve more of us in the unlearning and reflection we need, but as part of a safe, supportive, and, most importantly, *actionable* community of practice. We also continue to look to the First Light Community and our learning amongst it for other ways we may be called on to more directly support Wabanaki people, communities, and nations. Many of the ongoing partnerships and efforts we now count as progress spawned from connections and discussions during the First Light Learning Journeys.

Thank you for all that First Light is doing and has become for organizations like Maine Audubon and the individuals like us who comprise them. We remain committed to the values, ideals, and progress First Light seeks to advance.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Bealm, Executive Director".