



9 June 2022

Statement of Intention for First Light Ambassadorship 2022-2023

Portland Trails would be honored to participate in the First Light Ambassadorship for the next two years. Portland Trails is a 31-year-old member-based organization that “owns” approximately 130 acres in Portland, Falmouth, and Westbrook, land Wabanaki people once lived on or visited seasonally. Additionally, we have other land agreements and commitments to care for 50 miles of public trails and natural areas across Portland, South Portland, Westbrook, and Falmouth. If or when it is of interest, Portland Trails is ready to discuss access rights to and/or the return of the lands we “own” to Wabanaki people.

At Portland Trails, we have focused on ensuring that trails and natural spaces physically connect all neighborhoods, schools, service centers, and ecosystems. This provides habitat corridors as well as creates an off-street walking and cycling transportation network for people. We believe it is important for human wellbeing that everyone has nearby nature they feel comfortable visiting if they choose.

Our Past President, Wendy Suehrstedt, and I were honored to participate and learn in the second cohort of First Light. We both had transformative experiences, and we found it challenging to convey the emotional weight of our learning to the full board and staff. This is one reason we are eager for the Portland Trails team to take part in the Ambassador experience: so the power of First Light may be spread more broadly and deeply across the staff, board, volunteers and beyond. We need our whole team aligned in this commitment.

Land has been used as a tool of dominance over, and of harm to, many people. As the “owner” and caretaker of land in Greater

Portland, we at Portland Trails have been given unearned power by an unjust system of which we are a part. With this power comes responsibility. We will use our privilege to build Wabanaki prosperity. We will work to be in right relationship with the land. We will foster healing. Portland Trails still has much to learn.

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Kara Wooldrik

A few of the key takeaways that Board and staff members told us they had from our First Light engagement so far include:

- That we knew a very limited history of Maine’s Indigenous peoples, and we still have little understanding. The more we learn, the more we realize how much more we do not know.
- That we take this learning with us in all areas of our lives, and it impacts our workplaces and the organizations with whom we volunteer.
- That we want to encourage our members to learn about Wabanaki and settler history so that they may take restorative action.
- Repairing relationships with the land and with Wabanaki people requires generational commitment that must begin with us.

We know that we will be stretched by learning and unlearning and that it will be uncomfortable. We know that we will have to face our past choices and actions that did not align with our values. We know that we will have members and stakeholders who do not understand or agree with our actions. We know that, in our relationships with Wabanaki people, we come forward as people whose professional roles are changeable pieces of our identities, whereas Wabanaki people’s identity as Wabanaki is fixed and inherent. We must bridge this gap. We know that this is relationship work and this is generational work.

We will continue asking ourselves, “Who benefits from this?” Our [Land Justice Statement](#) and our values will continue to guide us as we unlearn, learn, and relearn.

Portland Trails is open and ready any time to have conversations to explore whether there is interest by the Wabanaki Conservation Delegation in having access rights or full acquisition of lands that we currently “own.” Portland Trails is honored to commit to participation in the Ambassador program and to working toward Wabanaki sovereignty.

Sincerely,



Kara Wooldrik
Executive Director