



## Coastal Mountains Land Trust: Ducktrap River Coalition

**Project Summary:** The nine-mile Ducktrap River in Maine flows from a small watershed that has suffered many of the same impacts as larger rivers, including dams, invasions of exotic species and environmentally degrading land use practices. To protect and restore the watershed, Coastal Mountains Land Trust initiated and coordinated the Ducktrap Coalition, a comprehensive river conservation program with 26 member organizations.

**Regional Setting:** Coastal Mountains Land Trust serves the watersheds of the upper western Penobscot Bay, which drain 175,000 acres in southern Maine. The region features rolling, mostly forested terrain with small mountains. Lakes, rivers, brooks and wetlands are important features of these watersheds.

**Land Trust Mission:** The mission of Coastal Mountains Land Trust is to establish a system of conservation lands with easements and preserves that permanently protect biological diversity, scenic landscapes and agricultural, forest and water resources, to promote awareness of the value of land conservation and to provide opportunities for the public to enjoy and experience natural lands.

**Service Area:** Watersheds of upper western Penobscot Bay, Maine.



*Photo top: A view from Ragged Mountain. Photo by Tim Dugan.*

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### Conservation Strategy

The 22,000-acre Ducktrap River watershed is located midway between the rapidly developing Camden and Belfast areas. With high-quality habitat for salmon spawning and rearing, the Ducktrap River is one of only eight rivers in the United States that continues to support wild Atlantic salmon.

Coastal Mountains Land Trust built a coalition of 26 diverse organizations, including municipal, state and federal agencies, as well as conservation, environmental education and citizens groups. The coalition's mission is the voluntary protection of the Ducktrap River, including natural features and critical watershed functions. The coalition works to:

- Preserve Atlantic salmon and their habitat;
- Protect natural communities and rare species;
- Steward natural and scenic features;
- Create and maintain a river corridor trail;
- Restore ecological functions of lands along the river; and
- Offer diverse environmental education opportunities.

## Biodiversity Values

The watersheds of the upper western Penobscot Bay include portions of the Central Interior and Penobscot Bay biophysical regions of Maine. The Central Interior is characterized by gently rolling terrain, a relatively moderate climate for Maine, glacial and marine soils and forests in transition from northern Appalachian oak-pine-mixed hardwoods to spruce-fir-northern hardwoods. The Penobscot Bay region averages elevations of 200 feet, but is punctuated by a range of small mountains featuring balds of glaciated bedrock, a climate moderated by the Gulf of Maine and more diverse soils and natural communities. The area supports numerous rare and at-risk species, including Atlantic salmon (federally listed as endangered), Atlantic white cedar, New England bluet damselfly and various plants.

## Partnerships and Projects

In 1995, with the support of the MBNA and Baker foundations, the fledgling Ducktrap Coalition began developing a conservation assessment and strategy for the Ducktrap River watershed that identified natural resources, conservation priorities and threats, as well as a strategic framework for conservation.

Working from the watershed plan, committees focusing on natural resources and restoration, education and land protection develop proposals for conservation actions and bring them to the full coalition at quarterly meetings. Decisions are made by consensus. Coastal Mountains Land Trust coordinates the program and provides administrative and fiscal agent functions.

The Ducktrap Coalition has made significant progress in conserving the Ducktrap watershed. More than 83% of the Ducktrap River corridor has been conserved, including 5,500 acres of the watershed and almost eight miles of riparian corridor, with funding assistance from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and other foundations. An ecological inventory of the watershed is complete and management plans for conserved lands are in place. Members of the coalition and volunteers have built 12 miles of trails along the riparian corridor including a recent 32-foot bridge spanning the Ducktrap River.

The Ducktrap Coalition has used several funding sources in addition to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Habitat restoration funding from the federal Clean Water Act (Section 319 grants) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program has helped turned gravel pits into vernal pools. Funding has also been used to apply new technologies to prevent erosion along the tributaries of the Ducktrap River, including encapsulated soil channel sides, pools and steps to reduce steep channel grades and periodic grade controls for channel stability.

## Looking Ahead

In addition to its habitat protection and restoration work, the Ducktrap Coalition is now focusing more attention on stewardship of the growing base of conserved land and on education for private landowners about land stewardship.

## Principles for Conservation Planning

Conservation planning for ecological resources has been a strength of Coastal Mountains Land Trust throughout its service area. The Ducktrap Coalition offers a new model for successful conservation planning based on the following principles:

1. **Collaborate early.** Early land trust meetings revealed that there were many entities interested in conserving the Ducktrap River watershed. The coalition grew to broaden participation and expand ideas and resources.
2. **Scale is important.** The coalition developed a watershed wide conservation program, because conserving the river in isolation from its watersheds would not produce a complete or lasting solution.
3. **Set ambitious goals.** Conservation goals include protection of 100% of the undeveloped lands along the river and rehabilitation of every source of erosion.
4. **Respect landowners.** The coalition works with landowners on a voluntary basis. Mutual respect and inclusiveness in a shared conservation effort are essential for success.
5. **Plan for the long term.** Diverse education programs and a solid stewardship program are designed to build a stewardship ethic that will last for generations.

## For More Information:

- **Clean Water Act Section 319 Grants (Environmental Protection Agency):**

[www.epa.gov/owow/nps/319hfunds.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/319hfunds.html)

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (Natural Resources Conservation Service):**

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip)

- **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation:**  
[www.nfwf.org](http://www.nfwf.org)



*Photo: Snapping turtle. Photo by Ian Stewart and Hugh Chatfield.*