

Chebeague-Cumberland Land Trust acquires 77 wooded acres in Cumberland

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A cascade waterfall at Watson Woods, Chebeague and Cumberland Land Trust's newest parcel.
(Courtesy of Stacey Cramp)

The Chebeague and Cumberland Land Trust has acquired 77 acres of forest in Cumberland known as Watson Woods through a land purchase.

The parcel — a mile from downtown Cumberland — had long been eyed by the trust.

“CCLT and the town have waited decades for the opportunity to conserve this stunning parcel,” said CCLT Executive Director Penny Asherman in a news release.

The parcel features a cascade waterfall and abundant wildlife. Adjacent to the trust's Rines Forest and Read Family Farm and Woods, the combined parcels will create a conserved block of more than 450 acres. The trust will construct trails and a small parking area on the Watson Woods property over the next year.



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“It really is like one of the nicest properties in Cumberland, as far as scenic value and recreational value,” said Asherman.

“People are going to love it, and not very many people have seen it because it has been ‘no trespassing’ for many decades. So we’re really excited to show it to everyone,” she said.

The trust purchased the property from Erla Watson Davis, 82, who wanted to preserve the property from development. Now living at the entrance of the property, she grew up spending time in the Watson Woods when it belonged to her aunt and uncle, Ruth and Medley Watson.

“We’d come over here and get a Christmas tree and chokecherries to make wine, and go fishing down back,” said Davis in a news release.

“I’m so excited about this, especially when you look at how it is going to expand a permanently protected block of land for wildlife and recreation,” she said.

Over the past year and a half, the trust raised over \$900,000 for the purchase and maintenance of Watson Woods. It secured funding from the town of Cumberland, the Land for Maine’s Future Program, the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership Habitat Protection Fund and the John Sage Foundation. A local donation campaign amounted to nearly \$200,000. After delays under the Trump administration, the final funding commitment of \$300,000 came through this month from the U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program, clearing the way for the final purchase of the property last week.

Watson Woods is part of a multi-town conservation and recreation corridor stretching over 2,000 acres from Windham through Falmouth, Cumberland and beyond. The addition of more conserved property will both expand the habitat for wildlife and increase opportunities for outdoor recreation on the trail system across the properties.

Since 1987, the trust has conserved more than 1,100 acres in Chebeague Island and Cumberland across 35 locations. As development in Cumberland is fast growing and the price tags on properties are rising, Asherman said, the land trust increasingly works with landowners looking to sell their parcels who are motivated by wildlife protection and outdoor access rather than making a large profit.

“The way we’re able to work is because landowners have a true love for their land. They see the changes happening in Cumberland, and they want to work with us to protect it,” she said.

“They’re coming to us because they want to do something positive for the community and for future generations,” she said.

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