

# Western Maine High Peaks Conservation Project

## FY 2012 Crocker Mountain & Orbeton Stream



**MAINE'S HIGH PEAKS:** Wedged between the densely populated southern Province of Quebec, just across the border with Canada to the north, and the population centers of southern Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, Maine's Western Mountains serve as a critical habitat corridor linking large blocks of existing conservation land in Northern New Hampshire with the vast forests of the northern Maine Woods.

### IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THE HIGH PEAKS:

- **An essential wood basket** producing forest products for mills throughout Maine. A key goal of the High Peaks Conservation Project is to keep this historical forest use in place and to continue to provide a source of raw materials that feed paper mills, saw mills, biomass energy plants, and local citizens with fuel wood.
- **A diversity of ecological communities** critical for species adaptation in the face of climate change.
- **Home to several rare, threatened and endangered plants and animals.** The High Peaks region has been recognized by the Maine State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and in the Beginning with Habitat (BwH) program as a conservation focus area and designated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as Critical Habitat for the federally listed endangered Atlantic salmon. The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture identifies sub-watersheds in the region as the highest priority for protection.
- **A Relatively intact large-scale forested landscape** that hosts a wide diversity of **motorized and none motorized recreational opportunities.**
- **A 50-mile section of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail** spans this area, and according to the National Park Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and the Maine Appalachian Trail Club represents one of the most remote, wild and scenic sections of the entire 2,175 miles Trail.
- The region includes **11 of the 14 highest mountains in Maine** and the largest chain of lakes in the state



**OPPORTUNITY:** Today there are 52,944 acres, across 9 parcels straddling Crocker Mountain, Mt. Abram, Saddleback Mountain, and others for which landowners are willing to discuss both easement and fee sales. Two tracts, in particular are most ready for acquisition – **Crocker Mountain** (11,798 acres-fee) and **Orbeton Stream** (5,808 acres-easement). These tracts and the neighboring acreage are top conservation priorities for the conservation community and federal and state agency partners because of their incredibly high habitat value, rich recreational opportunities, and opportunities to maintain large tracts of highly productive timber lands. Approximately \$7,500,000 is being requested in federal FY 12 funding for forest conservation and \$3,500,000 is being sought as match from other public and private sources.

**THREAT:** The region’s remote character, scenic vistas, developed recreational opportunities, and proximity to areas of high population density increases both the risk of fragmentation and conversion to development. The Crocker Mountain property is currently threatened with conversion to non-forest uses via second home development or alpine ski area development and susceptible to liquidation forestry. Its high elevation forests are particularly vulnerable to poor forest management. The Orbeton Stream parcel is home to dramatic views and spectacular sporting opportunities, especially native brook trout fishing. The corridor along Orbeton Stream is highly susceptible to second home development. If conservation is unsuccessful both the Crocker Mountain and Orbeton Stream properties are extremely likely to be subdivided and developed; placing the remote scenic character, public recreational opportunities, and local forest products economy at significant risk.



**PROJECT PARTNERS:**

- **The Trust for Public Land** is a national land conservation organization headquartered in San Francisco, California and with a Maine State Office in Portland. TPL uses expertise in real estate, finance, law and public policy to help communities and public agencies achieve their conservation objectives in line with its “Land for People” mission. TPL has deep experience working with the Forest Legacy Program in Maine having completed recent projects in Stowe Mountain, Grafton Notch, Katahdin Ironworks, and Sebobeis Lake.
- **The Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust** was founded with the mission of “preserving and protecting the land surrounding the Appalachian Trail in Maine for public benefit.” MATLT owns interest in lands on Mt. Abraham and on Saddleback Mountain in the High Peaks region.
- **The Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust** is one of Maine’s most successful regional land trusts having conserved over 12,500 acres including 45 miles of lake and river shoreline. They manage their lands to enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat and provide public access on a 35-mile network of multi-use trails. Their lands are actively managed and timber harvest operations provide revenue to RLHT and support local jobs. RLHT holds fee title to a 1,257 acre parcel which was the first Forest Legacy project in Maine and the first FLP project nationwide conserved using a conservation easement that is held by the Dept. of the Interior with oversight by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands.

