



Boothbay Region Land Trust

VISITOR FROM AFAR INSPIRES WHILE FINDING RESPITE ON BRLT PRESERVES

by Christine Selman, *Communications & Outreach Manager*

By now, just about anyone who spends any part of their year in the Boothbay region is aware of

the arrival of an unexpected visitor last winter—a rare and celebrated Steller’s Sea Eagle. The bird, native to Eastern Russia and Japan, had been discovered in Alaska in August of 2020 and, over the better part of a year, it had been tracked at various points making its way across North America. While vagrants, or birds that venture outside their typical range, are not unusual, the distinctiveness of the Steller’s Sea Eagle made it noteworthy. Even in its native range, the bird is a rare sight with only about 4,000 of the species remaining in the wild. Yet its massive size—it can weigh up to fifteen pounds with a wingspan as wide as eight feet—make it impossible to ignore. This species is the heaviest eagle in the world, outweighing the bald eagle by up to five pounds. With a distinctive large, bright-yellow beak, spotting and appreciating the uniqueness of the bird requires no specialized knowledge or training. Anyone lucky enough to be in its presence knows that they are seeing something special.

This was how Boothbay Harbor nature photographer, John Putrino, felt on a snowy winter day in January. Putrino had received a tip on Facebook the previous day (a local had spotted the Steller’s while laying tile), so he headed out into the storm with his camera in hand in the hopes of confirming the sighting with a picture of his own. That day he livestreamed himself driving around the Boothbay region looking for the Steller’s. “Boothbay Region Land Trust preserves were the route I followed,” he explained. Birders and locals began tuning into the livestream and offering feedback. “I had a lot of guidance,” Putrino notes. “People saying, ‘Go there, try there.’ It was a group effort and unique to have social media play this role. We all know about the negatives of social media, but this offered a really amazing way to bring everyone together.”

This group effort eventually led Putrino to the Thorpe Trail. “I had this moment where I noticed a bald eagle,
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COVER: Steller's Sea Eagle

by John Putrino

RIGHT: Oak Point Farm

by Jim Newton

BRLT PRIORITIZES SUSTAINABILITY FOR WORKFORCE

by Nicholas J. Ullo, *Executive Director*

As a nonprofit, land conservation organization, Boothbay Region Land Trust is focused on sustainability. When considering the acquisition of new properties, we always contemplate the long-term carrying costs associated with stewardship. We are committed to providing public access and environmental education to people of all ages, including our youth, to ensure that the next generation has a connection to the natural environment. We operate the land trust from an historic farmhouse at Oak Point Farm, which we renovated to be energy efficient. And, we have recently taken steps to safeguard the retention of one of our most valuable resources...our staff.



The important mission work of the land trust cannot happen without people. We are extremely lucky at BRLT to have the benefit of many dedicated and hard-working volunteers. Our committee members, water samplers, stewardship, education and office helpers all donate countless hours to support the organization. BRLT's Board of Directors is also comprised of all volunteers. This group of insightful leaders also clearly recognize the value of a good staff.

As an organization like BRLT grows, increasing its properties and also its commitments, it becomes increasingly challenging to manage these responsibilities. In order to sustain an office and nature center which is open to the public, environmental education programs for school groups and people of all ages, free access to an extensive trail system, and a robust volunteer program, it is vital that BRLT keeps an experienced and dedicated staff.

With the recent dramatic increases to cost-of-living, the Board decided last year that it was time to complete a detailed review of employee salaries and benefits. Working with an independent consultant, the Land Trust Board approved changes to employee compensation and benefits which bring BRLT in-line with other organizations of similar size across New England. The organization now offers employees a group health insurance plan while also contributing to a retirement plan. The employee handbook has been updated and a salary range structure has been developed which will keep staff compensation on-track moving forward.

These changes go a long way to ensuring that BRLT can attract and retain the best staff possible. This commitment to employees represents an investment in the people of BRLT that in turn, ensures strong returns in the future.



JOIN US FOR CELEBRATE! SIGNS OF CONSERVATION FUNDRAISER

by V. Skye Wood, Development Director

We're back! After a two-year hiatus from major events, Boothbay Region Land Trust will be hosting

the *Celebrate! Signs of Conservation* fundraiser at Oak Point Farm. Join us on Thursday, August 4 from 5:30-9pm for a small auction, delicious dinner, cocktails, live music and dancing!

The evening will begin under the tent with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and spectacular water views. Once everyone is settled in, catching up with old friends and making some new, we'll kick-off a live auction of retired BRLT preserve signs. Have you always dreamed of displaying your favorite preserve sign in your cottage (Porter Preserve anyone)? Now is your chance! These beautifully rustic wooden signs will be the topic of conversation and envy at every dinner party!

Portland band Champagne Casanova will officially get the party started with tunes that you know and love. These seasoned musicians can play anything from



*Above: Retired preserve signs will be auctioned
Below: Portland band Champagne Casanova will heat up the dance floor with a great variety of your favorite tunes!*

Fleetwood Mac and Tom Petty, to The Bleachers and Olivia Rodrigo. We guarantee you'll hear a favorite tune, and if you don't, request one!

Hors d'oeuvres, food stations, and an open bar will be provided all evening by Seacoast Catering & Lobster Bakes. Whether you are vegan, gluten free, vegetarian, or desire a heartier protein, there will be something delicious for every diet and preference.

This is a summer event you won't want to miss! Tickets are \$150/person or for \$1,500 you can enjoy a VIP reserved table for eight. Invite your friends and family for an unforgettable evening of fun! Tickets are available now at bbrlt.org, in the office, or by mailed check. Please contact Skye at vwood@bbrlt.org with any questions or assistance with ticket purchases. We look forward to seeing you there!



DAMARISCOVE ISLAND TRIP GIVES BRHS STUDENTS HANDS-ON HISTORY LESSON

by Christine Selman, *Communications & Outreach Manager*



At 8am on a cool and foggy May morning, a small but dedicated group of Boothbay Region High

School (BRHS) students along with their teachers met up with Boothbay Region Land Trust (BRLT) staff at Pier 8 to board the Miss Boothbay. The class was bound for Damariscove Island, one of BRLT's most iconic island preserves and a notable historic landmark to boot. The group was visiting the island as part of their "Historical Inquiry & Field Research" class, co-taught by Nick Scott and Chip Schwehm. Scott describes the course as an experiential learning class with a focus on local history. Students regularly get out of the classroom to explore local landmarks and learn through hands-on visits and independent projects focused on the region's past. The trip to Damariscove Island was the culmination of the student field visits and was a full day trip highlighting early colonial history on the island through the present day.

The visit was several years in the making. Prior to the COVID pandemic, BRLT and the teachers were in conversation about coordinating a trip to the island, however, plans had to be postponed for a few years due to the pandemic. In the meantime, BRLT was able to engage Maine Island Trails Association (MITA) in the

planned trip. MITA has been a longtime partner with BRLT, helping to support trail maintenance on the land trust's island preserves. They had approached BRLT to discuss ways to increase public visitation on Maine islands and were immediately interested in partnering to get the student group out to Damariscove Island. MITA provided financial support to secure the Miss Boothbay for the journey.

On the island, BRLT Environmental Educator Tracey Hall led the group on a tour starting at the historic stone pier and meandering along the trail and through history. She was accompanied by Executive Director, Nick Ullo. For seven years the two spent summers on Damariscove Island as caretakers. They shared the island's connection with colonial settlement, dating back to the early 1600s as one of the first permanent European settlements in Maine. They followed the history from that moment to the present-day utilizing evidence still visible on the island to bring the history to life. Hall and Ullo interspersed their presentation with the occasional legend and ghost story (what Maine island doesn't have at least



one?). Students learned about how colonial fishermen on Damariscove Island provided food for Plymouth colony during the spring of 1622 when the colony was facing starvation, and also how Damariscove settlers denied Plymouth assistance two years later when the colony again sought food (as a student noted, they've got to learn to fish!). Students enjoyed exploring the old foundations left behind from past endeavors that included everything from ice harvesting, to farming, tourism, fishing, and quarrying. They heard stories of the hardships of life on the island, like when a farmer's prize bull was struck by lightning or how dairy farmers on the island rowed milk out to the residents of Squirrel Island every morning.

"Damariscove is a perfect place for students to learn about many of the major threads of history in our region and also in our state. Because the island retains so many remnants of this history, from old foundations to the stone pier that is still used today by lobstermen

to store traps, the students have a real opportunity to visualize and imagine what life might have been like in early colonial history, as well as to think about how much has changed even over the past hundred years," explains Hall. "Many students who grow up on the Boothbay peninsula have never been out to Damariscove Island before. BRLT hopes that we can build on this collaboration to get more local students to the island in future years."

Damariscove Island is open to the general public and accessible by boat only. During the months of June through August, caretakers are on the island to provide general information for the public. BRLT is also offering a trip to the island aboard The Novelty in September. Tickets are currently available on our website. Locate the event on our events calendar page to purchase, or call us or stop into the office to buy tickets in person. Space is limited, so don't delay!



NEW LEASHING POLICY FOR DOGS AT SELECT BRLT PRESERVES

by Christine Selman, *Communications & Outreach Manager*

Boothbay Region Land Trust is rolling out a new dog leashing policy this summer at a select group

of its public preserves. The policy will impact dog owners at the following locations: Porter Preserve, Ovens Mouth Preserve (East and West), Lobster Cove Meadow, Appalachian Preserve, Zak Preserve, and Singing Meadows Preserve. At these locations, dogs will be required to remain on leash at all times during your visit.

This new Board-approved leashing policy was crafted with careful consideration and after an extensive review of on-going concerns. The land trust strives to provide access to nature, habitat for wildlife, and educational programs for the community and visitors to the Boothbay peninsula. With this comes the responsibility to ensure visitors and their pets have a safe and comfortable experience whether they are hiking the trails, viewing wildlife, fishing and hunting, or simply seeking peace and solitude. The land trust also has a responsibility to provide a safe haven for the flora and fauna it aims to protect as a land conservation organization. By adding these additional leash requirements, BRLT can better fulfill its responsibilities while keep the trails inclusive for all.

The popularity of BRLT preserves has been on the rise for several years now (echoing nationwide trends in public land use), and BRLT is seeing a corresponding increase in dog walkers at the preserves. This has, in turn, led to increased reports of negative human-dog interactions on the trails, as well as on going issues with dog impacts near sensitive habitats. Though BRLT's policy has long required dog owners to keep their dogs in sight and under voice control, and to ensure dogs are by their side and leashed when encountering other visitors, the land trust frequently receives calls from concerned, angry, and upset individuals relaying encounters with dogs that are neither by the owner's side, nor controlled. Staff have encountered similar problems, including being approached by aggressive dogs on the trails, jumped on by dogs, and on one occasion bitten by an uncontrolled dog. Furthermore, there has been an increase in dog waste left on trails, as well as dogs entering sensitive bird nesting areas unleashed. This can have major impacts on field nesting birds in meadow habitats in particular. Given

these compounding issues, BRLT felt that it was necessary to take steps to mitigate the impacts.

At Oak Point Farm, dogs have always been required to be leashed at all times. When the land trust established a dog leash requirement at Oak Point Farm, it foresaw the heavy visitation the preserve would receive as BRLT's headquarters and the center of its educational programming. It made sense to require dogs to be leashed to ensure the safety of visitors including children and visitors with mobility concerns. The success of the leashing policy at Oak Point Farm has helped guide BRLT's new policy on some of its other high use and sensitive preserves.

In developing the policy, BRLT worked to balance a variety of needs including the need for members and visitors with dogs to enjoy BRLT Preserves; the need for members and visitors who, for a variety of reasons, do not feel safe or comfortable in the presence of unrestrained dogs, to enjoy BRLT Preserves; the need to increase safety and mitigate unsafe or negative human-dog encounters on high-use trails; and the need to address specific harm that sensitive habitats face given the increasing number of dogs off-leash.

The land trust recognizes that there are many dog owners who appreciate the fresh air and exercise their dogs get on land trust trails. All BRLT trails will continue to remain open to visitors with dogs. For those visitors who would like to let their pet run and explore off-leash, under voice control and within their sight, BRLT continues to provide this opportunity at a number of less busy preserves with smaller parking lots. These combined factors will naturally limit negative encounters. As a reminder, when visiting these locations, dogs should be called over and leashed when passing other visitors on the trail.

BRLT will provide complimentary leashes at the kiosks for visitors where leashing is required. We thank all of our members and visitors for respecting this new guideline and helping others to do so as well. We hope that this balanced approach will enable all visitors to feel welcome on our trails.

Steller's Sea Eagle *(Continued from page 1)*

but it stirred and flew above me. I missed what would have been a great shot of him, but it made me realize I was being too loud. After that I came upon a clearing and I just knew it was a great spot. In my mind I thought if I were an eagle, this is where I'd be. So, I scanned the area, and soon noticed something hopping branch to branch. It was huge, almost like a small cub. That's when my eyes locked in and I realized that it was the Steller's Sea Eagle," Putrino recalls.

"I knew I was too close—you don't want to be close enough that the bird notices you," he explains. Putrino tried to adjust his location, but slipped and fell onto the bank. "At that point, I just pulled out my camera and got some shots. It definitely saw me and I saw it. It waited around for about five minutes and I waited silently. And then it took flight—it was one of the most amazing moments of my life" he notes. "Of all the places this Steller's Sea Eagle could have landed, it chose one, Boothbay Region Land Trust, and I somehow managed to stumble upon it like a needle in a haystack."

Yet the Steller's presence on BRLT's trail makes perfect sense. Just as Putrino knew that if he were an eagle, BRLT is where he would be, the preserves, by design, provide an ideal refuge for countless wildlife species, including this lost Steller's Sea Eagle. The thoughtful and specific conservation that Boothbay Region Land Trust has been engaged in since its founding in 1980 has been precisely dedicated to protecting large and diverse tracks of wilderness from fields and forests, to wetlands, ponds, and coastal waterways. The parcels of conserved area in the Boothbay region were no accident. Rather they were the work of countless dedicated individuals who saw the value in protecting wild spaces not only for human enjoyment, but for the benefit of wildlife. When the Steller's Sea Eagle flew across midcoast Maine, it was no mistake that the protective forests of BRLT preserves, along with the fertile fishing grounds on the shores of the Sheepscot River, were the refuge that this bird, like so many others before and since, discovered that winter day. It is also unsurprising that over the course of the following one to two months, the bird returned to the region, with sightings from Ocean Point to Indiantown Island—the Steller's knew a good thing when it found it!



Snow-dappled Steller's Sea Eagle at Thorpe Trail in Boothbay Harbor. Photo courtesy of John Putrino

And while this bird seemed content to make midcoast Maine its temporary refuge this winter, it brought many thousands of people, like John Putrino, joy and inspiration. Putrino explains, "It launched this new obsession with birding for me. To have Boothbay Region Land Trust in our backyard and to have the opportunity to see all of these rare birds—not just the Steller's, but so many amazing species, as well as other wildlife—it's just an incredible gift. And it launched a lot of passion in others to get out into nature too—seeing little kids waiting at dawn looking out for the Steller's from McKown Point and feeling such joy to see it—that is what this bird brought me and to so many." And this is what conservation of natural spaces can bring to us all.

John Putrino has graciously donated a print of the Steller's Sea Eagle taken on the Thorpe trail to Boothbay Region Land Trust. It will be on display at BRLT's nature center at Oak Point Farm. Putrino's photography is can be seen and prints may be ordered on his website, manbythesea.com, or make an appoint to visit his gallery in Boothbay Harbor.



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The Boothbay Region Land Trust seeks to conserve for the public benefit the natural habitat, scenic beauty and working land of the Boothbay region.



BOOTHBAY REGION LAND TRUST

Field & Forest

FAMILY FUN DAY

WHERE: OAK POINT FARM
WHEN: SATURDAY, JULY 16TH 10AM-2PM

A free event to celebrate the grand opening of our new natural playground!

Activities
Stone carving with Maine Stone Workers Guild, bouncy house, alpacas, scavenger hunts, lawn games and more

Live Music
Enjoy music from local artists Phil Brooks and Darlene Bailey in the morning and the F Block Combo in the afternoon

Refreshments
Provided by Boothbay Region High School Seniors, all proceeds go towards Project Graduation





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Visit bbrlt.org for more info

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