



**PRESS RELEASE
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Agreements Reached to Conserve Branch Lake Property for Ellsworth

Deals protect important drinking water resource and land for future community forest;
\$50,000 endowment needed for care of the property and stewardship of public recreation opportunities

ELLSWORTH, MAINE, April 1, 2010: More than 1,170 acres and 3.5 miles of shoreline along the southeastern edge of Branch Lake have been permanently protected, The Trust for Public Land announced today. The agreements will protect the land in Ellsworth under two separate conservation easements, meeting important drinking water, watershed protection, timber management, and public recreation needs.

Over the last four years the Maine office of The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has worked with the Fenn family, the City of Ellsworth, the Frenchman Bay Conservancy, and the Forest Society of Maine to conserve 1,177 acres of the Fenns' land along Branch Lake. The Fenns have owned the land for more than eighty years and were eager to see the land permanently protected to support the fragile natural resources of Branch Lake, the singular source of drinking water for Ellsworth, eastern Maine's largest coastal city.

"Ellsworth has made a wise and impressive commitment to protect the largest remaining parcel of land on Branch Lake," said Wolfe Tone, TPL Maine director. "TPL applauds the city's leadership and is enormously grateful for the many partners and the Land for Maine's Future Program, who all worked tirelessly to protect this spectacular natural resource."

“For over 80 years our family has nurtured the woods and water around the Lake. We are delighted that others share the vision to sustain the purity of the water and the pristine beauty of the surrounding forest,” said Bill Fenn. “The protection of this land and of the water is a legacy of which we can all be proud. We are very grateful for the support of all those who came together in order to make it happen.”

Protection of the Fenn property has long been a priority for Ellsworth, and last summer the Ellsworth City Council voted to contribute \$1.5 million to the \$2.45 million project. The commitment reflected both an understanding that watershed protection through conservation would be less expensive than water treatment, and recognition that other public benefits would be gained, including public recreation and access to the lake, potential links to existing city-owned land to the north, and a possible new community forest.

“The City of Ellsworth is pleased to complete the Branch Lake Conservation Easement project. After countless hours of meetings and time expended we would like to thank the Land for Maine's Future Program for their tireless support and all the partners involved for bringing this to a close,” said John Phillips, Chair of Ellsworth's City Council. “Branch Lake is a wonderful resource for our city and our drinking water supply, and our collective efforts will help protect it now and into the future. This accomplishment also provides an area for low impact recreational use that will allow the public to enjoy the beauty of the lake and the surrounding forests for years to come.”

The State of Maine has contributed the balance of the \$2.4 million purchase price of the easements, with \$900,000 from the Land for Maine's Future Program.

Senator Dennis S. Damon of Hancock County said, “The Land for Maine's Future program has invested in protecting many of Maine's best landscapes. Our children and grandchildren will thank everyone who worked to protect Branch Lake. Together, we have protected a small but important piece of the social and economic well being of Ellsworth by protecting tax base, drinking water, and sport fisheries. I'm a strong supporter of conservation easements that keep forests undeveloped with guaranteed public access for hunting and fishing.”

On March 15 the Ellsworth City Council voted to accept the terms of a conservation easement on the northernmost 447 acres of the property. The Frenchman Bay Conservancy will oversee the easement and Ellsworth will develop a community forest strategy for the land. The Fenn family will retain the remaining acreage, subject to a working forest conservation easement that permanently restricts development on the land. The Forest Society of Maine will oversee the working forest conservation easement on the Fenn property. In order to help meet the ongoing recreation and public benefit goals, and the project partners are raising \$50,000 for an endowment to meet ongoing recreation and public benefit goals.

“FSM is pleased that its experience with working forest conservation easements has helped facilitate this collaborative conservation effort and is looking forward to continuing its relationship with the Fenn family and other project partners,” said Peter McKinley, Director of Forestland Conservation for the Forest Society of Maine.

Tom Sidar, Executive Director of the Frenchman Bay Conservancy said, “From the start, it was clear to the Frenchman Bay Conservancy that the City of Ellsworth cared about protecting the natural ecology of Branch Lake and the woods around the lake. It was just as important to the City and to Frenchman Bay Conservancy, that there would be appropriate access for the public to enjoy this beautiful natural resource. Right now, I’m pretty happy. I think we got the balance just right.”

Branch Lake, significant for its drinking water and recreational values, also drains into Union River and Blue Hill Bay, which together form a nationally significant estuary. The 1,177 acres of protected land connect to more than 7,000 acres of unfragmented forest.

The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. TPL has conserved nearly 3 million acres of land, and in Maine, TPL has protected more than 115,000 acres with projects ranging from city parks and pathways to coastal habitat and working farms and forests. TPL depends on the support of individuals, corporations, and foundations. Visit TPL online: tpl.org/maine.

The mission of the Forest Society of Maine (FSM) is to conserve Maine's forestlands in a manner that sustains the ecological, economic, cultural, and recreational values of the Maine woods. As Maine's land trust for the North Woods, FSM focuses its efforts to promote the conservation of functional, working forest landscapes with multiple social and ecological values. For more information, visit online: fsmaine.org.

The Frenchman Bay Conservancy builds lasting relationships and commitments that promote conservation of the distinctive landscapes and natural resources of the Frenchman Bay and Union River watershed. Visit FBC online: frenchmanbay.org.

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