

Conservation Education News



Photo Above: 8th Graders at SeDoMoCha Middle School participating in a soil science program. Photo Right: SeDoMoCha 6th graders "planting" their undies for the Soil Your Undies experiment.

SOIL EXLORATION WITH PCSWCD & USDA NRCS SOIL SCIENCE

PCSWCD Education Coordinator Kacey Weber loves teaming up with officemates from the USDA NRCS Soil Science division! This year, we have offered some pretty stellar soil programming to local students. Soil scientist

EDUCATION NEWSLETTER Spring 2024

WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE:

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- Maine's "Big Night"
- My Experience Attending the Maine TREE Teacher Tour
- Onion Foundation Supports PCSWCD Youth Programming
- Expanding Trout in the Classroom
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Alaina Kresovic and Kacey worked with SeDoMoCha 8th graders on a lesson exploring soil forming factors and soil characteristics. We had the 8th grade explore 4 different locations around the SeDoMoCha campus and view and chart the soil profile from each of those areas. The 8th graders designed soil profile cards, complete with information on soil horizon colors and textures. The cards were then shared with SeDoMoCha 6th graders when they worked with Kacey to learn about soil health. 6th graders got to participate in a favorite soil health lesson - "Soil Your Undies!" This challenge had the students' "plant" a pair of 100% cotton underwear in each of the locations the 8th graders studied. Students then made hypotheses about what they thought might happen after the undies had been underground most of the school year. Kacey will be working with the 6th graders later this Spring to dig up the undies and see what happened! What do you think they will find?



WHAT IS A "BIG NIGHT?"

A "big night" is a remarkable and critical event in the life cycle of amphibians. It refers to the evening when certain amphibian species, driven by environmental cues like temperature and rainfall, embark on a mass migration from their winter habitats to breeding grounds. This spectacle often involves large numbers of amphibians, making it a captivating and significant occurrence in nature.

While the term "big night" implies only one night when this event may occur, it frequently occurs multiple times per year. In Maine, big nights tend to occur in early to mid-April for most of the state. In 2023, the true Big Night occurred on April 17th. The triggers are mostly thawed ground, nighttime temperatures above forty degrees (the warmer, the better!), and enough precipitation to make the ground wet.

Maine Big Night (MBN) is a nonprofit community science project established to confront the issue of amphibians becoming roadkill. Amphibians, already facing stronger threats than many other groups of wildlife, can see localized declines due to roadkill, and are especially vulnerable during their punctual annual migrations. MBN organizes volunteers to assist these animals across the road while collecting valuable data to protect them for decades to come. In 2023, 20,000 amphibians such as American bullfrogs, toads, a variety of salamanders, frogs, eastern newts and more were recorded by 385 Maine volunteers. While most previous big nights have had about 1 amphibian show up every 2-3 minutes, last year MBN reported seeing about EIGHT amphibians every MINUTE! The problem oftentimes is that amphibians have to cross roads in order to reach their breeding habitat. Being so small and traveling at night in low visibility, amphibians are extraordinarily hard to see, leading to mortality rates on roads approaching 100% in areas with high traffic. Because of this, amphibians may be decreasing significantly in Amphibians are one of the most endangered groups of animals on the planet, with some common species even becoming rarer.

This project seeks to evaluate the impact roads are having on populations while providing recommendations to transportation and wildlife officials about more wildlife-friendly road design.



Want to get involved?

- Sign up as a MBN Scientist and become a certified volunteer here!
- Adopt a site! Piscataquis County has 5 Maine Big Night Sites available for adoption!
 - Gales Rd in Abbot and Burough Rd in Dover- Foxcroft are up for adoption.
 To adopt a site register <u>here!</u> If you have other Piscataquis County site suggestions, reach out to the Maine Big Night contact <u>page</u>.
- Get the gear! PCSWCD is excited to share that we are now a Maine Big Night Kit Host Site for MBN! PCSWCD has 3 full kits for rent and extra vests and data sheets available. To reserve a kit or for more information about kits email info@piscataquisswcd.org or call (207) 564-2321 ext. 3
 - Want to get your own supplies? Here is the Maine Big Night Materials Checklist!
- Adult vests, Child vests, Headlamps, Clipboards, ID cards, Datasheets

MY EXPERIENCE ATTENDING THE MAINE TREE TEACHERS' TOUR

By PCSWCD Education Coordinator, Kacey Weber

I have worked for PCSWCD for 10 years, making me no stranger to the forest industry and forest ecology. When the opportunity to attend the 2023 Maine TREE Teachers' Tour was offered, I jumped on it, excited, but also feeling that perhaps most of the information gleaned from the experience would be a refresher to me. I saw attending as an opportunity to network, find out what teachers were needing for resources in their classrooms, and as a break from the computer for a week.

I signed up for the Downeast Maine Teachers' Tour, which was held July 25th-28th, 2023. My husband, a local high school teacher, and I attended together. We made our way to Leen's Lodge in Grand Lake Stream, Maine, noting along the way the differences and similarities between Piscataquis and Washington county communities. Leen's Lodge was our hosting site for the week and it was simply beautiful. Around every corner of the main lodge were photos and newspaper articles noting the lodge's place in Maine's outdoor heritage history. The lodge offered fantastic views and beaches along the shores of West Grand Lake - not a bad place to spend the week!

PCSWCD friends and partners at Maine TREE organize and deliver the Maine TREE Teachers' Tour and shortly after our arrival, we were greeted by their staff and the week's schedule was laid out to us. The reason the program is called the Maine TREE Teachers Tour is because, well, we tour! Maine TREE designed a jam-packed schedule of stops in the region, which included East Grand School, Devils Head Conservation Area, Woodland Pulp LLC, Baskahegan Company land, Downeast Lakes Land Trust, Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, a local tree farmer and so much more. We enjoyed presentations about land and forest management, conservation efforts, the forest

products industry, job paths for students, forest ecology, regional challenges and everything in between. We watched active harvests, enjoyed an ash pounding demonstration from a representative of the Passamaquoddy tribe, toured inside Woodland Pulp, walked the beach at Devils Head, learned about individual conservation efforts from local landowners. toured East Grand School seeing first-hand their impressive outdoor education programs and much more. While we toured, we started getting a sense of how impressive and cohesive the land conservation efforts were in the Downeast Lakes Region and how these efforts collectively were protecting Maine's rich outdoor heritage. Additionally, I learned new ways to approach conservation through management of the forest and through education efforts. It was hugely beneficial to me to be touring a part of Maine that wasn't Piscataquis County and picking up information that can help Piscataguis County residents better manage their land.



The educational tour component of this program was exceptional. I was wrong, I learned SO MUCH and I met wonderful people doing incredible work in conservation. Additionally, the accommodations at Leen's Lodge were exceptional. Our meals were fabulous, our beds were comfortable and the Article Continued on Page 4...

Teachers Tour Article Continued...

views could not be beat. We even had some time to enjoy a relaxing and refreshing dip in the lake with some fellow educators.

If you are an educator - traditional or not - I highly recommend the Maine TREE Teachers Tour to you all. Attending the tour offers you 30 contact hours and you will leave with ideas on how to incorporate outdoor learning into your curriculums. The tour is affordable, the lodgings are always impressive and the company is top notch! You still have time to register if you have not done so already. The link to register is here: Forests of Maine Teachers' Tours - Maine TREE Foundation

If you are still on the fence on whether or not you should participate, please reach out to me and I would be happy to share more of my experience with you!



CONSERVATION EDUCATION EXPANDED WITH HELP FROM THE ONION FOUNDATION

Grants allow small organizations like the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District to do big things. It's no small feat that we have experienced exponential growth when it comes to connecting area youth to meaningful, practical conservation education programming.

This growth comes from an increase in demand from schools and through financial support the District has received. Our time and expertise are valuable and with support, we were ready to meet the need! In 2023, PCSWCD received a grant from the Onion Foundation to support growth of our youth educational programming. This work includes our in-school programs and our Teen program, Expedition. The in-school programming we provide includes hands-on lessons in tree ID, Maine wildlife, soil health, Maine agriculture, watersheds, stream habitat, invasive species and educational field trips to PCSWCD public lands. We can customize programs to complement curriculums and educators with other education resources in the area. Our Teen Wilderness Expedition is in its 10th year and this year, the funds received from the Onion Foundation will support this valuable educational program allowing it to be free to all participants.

Support from the Onion Foundation will continue until 2025. Our District is actively working to seek additional funding support for this work. Additionally, we are exploring funding opportunities for local school districts that can help streamline their science curriculum and incorporate outdoor conservation education into their lessons.

This school year, we are offering programming in 9 Piscataquis County schools! It's important that all kids get a chance to learn outdoors and about their natural environments. Additionally, it builds student's connections with their local communities when they are given the chance to explore and learn about challenges our local communities face and how they can be involved in local conservation efforts. Thank you to the Onion Foundation for supporting our education work in Piscataquis County!



It's Not Too Late to Order Trees, Plants... & Trout!

PISCATAQUIS COUNTY SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S

ONLINE ORDERING OPEN MARCH 11TH
MAY 3RD ORDER DEADLINE



PCSWCD'S
TREE & PLANT
SALE IS YOUR
ONE-STOP
SHOP FOR
LOCAL
VEGETABLE
SEEDLINGS,
PERENNIAL
PLANTS, HARDY
FRUIT TREES
AND SHRUBS!

FOLKS
WITH
PRIVATE
PONDS DON'T
FORGET TO
ORDER
YOUR
TROUT!



EXPANDING THE TROUT IN THE CLASSROOM PROGRAM

PCSWCD launched the national program "Trout in the Classroom" with SeDoMoCha 4th grade starting in September of the 22/23 school year. We coordinated the program with SeDoMoCha Clark, Carolyn with PCSWCD librarian Coordinator. Kacev Education Weber. presenting during the 4th grade library classes. Kacey provided lessons that introduced students to brook trout biology, habitat and conservation. In February 2023, PCSWCD delivered 300 brook trout eggs to the school, which went into a temperature-controlled tank set up in the library. The students watched their trout hatch and grow as they learned about their importance and what we can do to protect native populations in Maine. The program concluded with a release event that featured learning stations, further exploration and a great day alongside the beautiful Piscataquis river.



The Trout in the Classroom program gained a lot of support from parents, teachers, students and administration at SeDoMoCha. After a successful year, SeDoMoCha committed to purchasing their own tank and cooling equipment, keeping the program running for 4th graders for years to come! This freed up PCSWCD's tank equipment to travel to another school, expanding the program in Piscataquis County. Piscataquis Community Elementary School (PCES) joined the fun starting the 23/24 school year and committed to offering the

Trout in the Classroom program to their 5th and 6th grade students. Kacey has spent this vear traveling to PCES school SeDoMoCha, delivering lessons to the students and getting them excited about the release event in May! The students have learned about the trout life cycle, habitat characteristics and species conservation. New this year, Kacey had each school construct a river habitat mural, which provided them a chance to learn about the native species that live in a river habitat AND celebrate being involved in the Trout in the Classroom program! Their trout are all hatched at this point of the year and the students are all looking forward to May and their release day.

Both schools will combine for the release event and all students will have the chance to release the trout they have raised, stock adult trout with the Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, and enjoy fun learning stations throughout the day. PCSWCD will be working with folks from Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Appalachian Mountain Club and local Maine guides to introduce students to games, river macroinvertebrates, how to fly cast and tie flies, different types of fishing gear and much more!

PCSWCD hopes to keep expanding our Trout in the Classroom program each year - where will we be next year?







Above Left Photo: PCES 5th and 6th grader's river habitat mural. Photo below: SeDoMoCha 4th grade's river mural. Nice work all!

NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS:

All About the HEAL Program

PCSWCD has had the pleasure of participating in a few of the stellar programs Kate Fergola, Coordinator for Community Health HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living), has been coordinating. HEAL is a program offered by Maine Prevention Network in partnership with Northern Light Mayo Hospital. We wanted to give Kate an opportunity to share information about the great work she is doing - thanks for the great article, Kate!



Northern Light Mayo Hospital Healthy Eating Active Living By Kate Fergola

Free Produce Pop-Up Markets

Northern Light Mayo Hospital in collaboration with the Piscataquis Regional Food Center held two free produce pop-up markets last fall and they were such a success that we plan to have markets May-October in the communities of Dover, Milo, and Greenville. Our first market of the season will be at Mayo Hospital on May 30th. We hold these markets because we believe everyone should have access to fresh produce. These markets play an important role in addressing food insecurity. While individuals experiencing food insecurity are encouraged to attend, these markets are open to anyone who would like fresh fruits and vegetables.

These markets also provide some great opportunities for education materials on healthy eating and food preservation.



Highland Area Gleaners

Highland Area Gleaners is a gleaning program that was established in April of 2023 in collaboration with Northern Light Mayo Hospital and the UMaine Cooperative Extension. Gleaning has been around for thousands of years. It is the recovery of quality produce from farms, gardens, and markets then redirecting it back to the local community. This process helps to support food sustainability and accessibility while reducing excess food waste. We strive to create a positive experience for farmers, volunteers, and recipients. Last fall we had two successful gleaning events in which we gleaned over 460 pounds of produce to be distributed back to our community. We are always looking for volunteers to join our program. If you are interested in meeting new people from your community, spending time outdoors, and getting quality food to neighbors contact นร highlandareagleaners@gmail.com.

Farm to ECE

Northern Light Mayo Hospital's Healthy Eating Active Living Team has been working to establish gardens at a variety of early childhood centers in Piscataguis County. Children in their early childhood years are rapidly developing. In particular, they are developing their taste preferences which is why childcare settings play a huge role in forming healthy habits that carry on through adulthood. Substantial evidence has shown that children who participate in garden activities are more likely to try new fruits and vegetables therefore exposing them to healthier habits earlier in life. Last year two gardens were implemented in the Dover-Foxcroft region. Healthy Eating, Active Living Coordinator Kate Fergola enjoyed watching the kids learn and explore all summer long.

"My favorite part of this project was seeing the children grow each week alongside the garden," she says. "Each week the children Article Continued on Page 8...

Spotlight on our Partners article continued...

became more eager to try new fruits and vegetables and learn new skills about the process of growing their own food. My hope from this program is that the kids will take their newfound knowledge and experience back home to their families and communities. These are lessons that will last a lifetime."

The children learned how seeds and plants grow, prepared garden beds, planted seeds and seedlings, watered and weeded the plants, observed plant growth, and harvested the produce to create healthy snacks at their site and also to take home to share with their families. Thank you to our local partners who supported this project including Tractor Supply, The University of Maine Co-op, The Piscataquis Soil and Water District Conservation, Coast of Maine, and Bob's Farm Home & Garden.



Photo Page 7: Kate Fergola pictured with Little Linus preschoolers.
These kids participated in the Farm to ECE Program. Photo above:
Kate participating at a gleaning event. For more information about these programs, please reach out to Kate Fergola,

kefergola@northernlight.org.

PCSWCD Featured Events & Programs



SUNDAY AUGUST 11TH
RAIN DATE AUGUST 20TH
LAW FARM NATURE TRAILS

10-12PM OR 1-3PM
WITH SARAH ROBINSON FROM
PCSWCD
& DUSTIN SMALL FROM BB3R

\$20/PERSON

PCSWCD IS LOOKING FOR A JUNIOR REPRESENTATIVE

PCSWCD has a great resume-building opportunity for high school and/or college students - our Junior Representative position! This position serves on our Land Management Committee, which is a subcommittee of our Board of Supervisors. This provides the Junior Representative an opportunity to be a part of community decisions that impact the overall health of our environment and the protection and conservation of our natural resources.

Volunteering as PCSWCD's Junior Representative would be an excellent way for students interested in natural resource careers to gain hands-on insight and knowledge about forestry and land non-profit management, structures, grant administration. community projects and educational outreach. This opportunity would also provide our Junior Representative with a unique way to log community service hours and build their resumes, all while learning about how public lands are managed.

Over the past several years, the PCSWCD has made incredible strides in developing and improving our two community forests that total over 400 acres - the Law Farm in Dover-Foxcroft and our Williamsburg Forest in Williamsburg. Through grants, various community service projects and a diverse line-up of natural resource conservation programs, we have been able to accomplish so much, including building trails on the properties, planting thousands of trees, hosting several youth and family-oriented events, trainings for professionals, and also working with members of our community to maintain each of these lands for public use. All of this groundwork is just that, the start of many future projects and programs aimed to connect community members with what can be learned and gained from these two public forests.

We encourage anyone interested to reach out with questions. This is a great way to learn about natural resource careers, meet folks in our local community doing work in this field and learn alongside resource professionals! We have a lot of fun too! Individuals interested in joining our Land Management Committee as our Junior Representative must be available to participate in occasional events at our forests and attend committee meetings, which are held occasionally throughout the year. Interested individuals should submit a letter of intent to info@piscataquisswcd.org. The letter should include your full contact information, references and also express your desires to be a part of this dynamic committee.





Above Photo: Elisa Schine (middle), PCSWCD's current Junior Representative, examines a young tree sapling at PCSWCD's Women's Forest Walk n' Talk event. Bottom photo: Emily Dickison (left) and Kylie Dow (right) at a PCSWCD Volunteer Workday event. Both Kylie and Emily were former PCSWCD Junior Representatives and have advanced to work in conservation and forestry careers.

Click here to watch an interview with past Junior Representative Emily Dickison to see how the position helped her get to where she is in her career!

MESSAGE FROM PCSWCD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Written by PCSWCD ED, Sarah Robinson "Success is best when it's shared," - Howard Schultz

Over the years, PCSWCD has cultivated a collaborative environment. We work with so many different organizations, individuals, businesses, and have built strong relationships with professionals, making them all the backbone for our organization. Maintaining these relationships is how we are able to offer interesting, high-quality educational workshops, events and resources to our community. We wanted to take a minute to recognize all of the partnerships we've made and thank the supportive network and diverse group of people that are always willing and wanting to work with us. Many of our presenters for events are volunteering their time to share their expertise, are passionate about the topic and their work, and down-right love what they do. When you get to work alongside people that share that kind of enthusiasm, it makes our work easier to bring resources to our county.

By fostering this type of atmosphere, we have been able to welcome more and more collaborations. which have resulted innovative events such as our Green Jobs Fair, which is in its second year and will become an annual event here in Dover-Foxcroft at PCSWCD's Law Farm Nature Trails. Over 25 different organizations agencies, and representatives from businesses join us to offer students the opportunity to see what kind of "green" careers are available in our region. This type of event is important to our area so children can see there are jobs locally in natural resource industries that they have access to. We're looking forward to this event, which is cohosted by Maine TREE and PEEC, and to welcome new students to the Law Farm to learn with us.

PCSWCD works alongside Rural Aspirations, Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) and Natural Resource Education Center (NREC) - the organizations that make up The Piscataquis Environmental Education Collaborative (PEEC - sounds like the 'peak' of a mountain, thanks to Steph Perkins from AMC for the catchy name). Through this partnership, in its second vear, PEEC can offer diverse educational opportunities in rural Maine. Each organization brings a different level of expertise and opportunity to Piscataquis residents and students. By banding together, we are expanding educational opportunities and student aspirations within Piscataguis county schools, strengthening every student's sense of place, community, and belonging. partnership, Through this **PCSWCD** Education Coordinator Kacey Weber is hard at work in 9 different Piscataquis County schools. Ask your child if they know "Miss Kacev!"

It doesn't stop there. When you sign up for an event or workshop, you will find other specialists professionals and organizations like Maine Audubon Society. Forest Society of Maine, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Forest Service, Maine Organic Farmers Association (MOFGA), Department of Environmental Protection, The Maine Woodland Owners. Town municipalities, District Foresters, private foresters, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Maine Lakes Society, Forest Rangers, Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) and experienced presenters in their area of topic like our foraging, cider pressing mushroom inoculation events. There are just too many partnerships to list!

PCSWCD has developed quite the name for ourselves in our local communities and beyond by maintaining relationships with so many different people. Additionally, these relationships have allowed our organization to grow. We're thankful to share this with our partners who have been the catalyst for our growth and our success, allowing us to be a reliable resource hub for the people that live here.

With a heartfelt thanks, Sarah Robinson

PROTECT THE LAKE WITH LAKESMART!



LOW-COST, EASY SOLUTIONS!

PCSWCD Serves as a Resource Hub for Maine Lake's program LakeSmart!

PISCATAQUIS COUNTY CONTACT:



<u>Kacey Weber</u>
<u>katherine.weber@piscataquisswcd.org</u>
207-564-2321 ext. 3

2024 PCSWCD Events



2024 Events & Workshops Calendar

April

Eclipse Viewing Party at Law Farm, April 8th 2-4pm - SOLD OUT
Drinking Water & PFAS, April 11th 1:30pm, Thompson Free Library
Mushroom Inoculation Course, April 27th 12-2 & 3-5pm BB3R - SOLD OUT
Stream Smart Workshop, April 23rd, 8:30-12:30PM, Greenville
May

Women Foresters and Climate Impact webinar with Maine TREE May 8th & Field Tour to Williamsburg Forest May 10th
Bird Walk at Law Farm Nature Trails, May 4th 8am
PCSWCD Annual Tree & Plant Sale Pick Up! May 16th at Law Farm, 4-6pm
Trout Sale Pick Up, May 6th USDA Service Center DF 12PM

Chainsaw Saftey 1 Course with Maine Woodland Owners Association,

June 28th 8:30am- 3pm Williamsburg Forest

July

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Teen Wilderness Expedition July 16th-18th August

Foraging at Law Farm, August 11th 10-12pm or 1-3pm September

Grading Roads Workshop with SFI, Williamsburg Forest, TBD
Cider Pressing with East Sangerville Grange, September 14th, Law Farm
Chainsaw Safety Level 3, Williamsburg Forest September 28th
October

Pond Construction with Somerset SWCD, October 6th, RD October 20th PCSWCD Film at Center Theater, October 20th 2:30pm

December

Holiday Mini Photo Shoot with Eric Ogden, Law Farm Nature Trails TBD



Educational Services



- Field Trips to our Law Farm and Williamsburg Forest Public Lands
- Hands-on Educational Programs
 Tailored to the Needs of Your
 School or Group
- Natural Resource Conservation
 Presentations to Any Group
- Merit Badge Opportunities for Scout Groups
- Bridging Connections to Local Resources and Help Addressing Natural Resource Concerns
- Year-Round Educational Programs and Events Geared Towards Multiple Audiences
- Envirothon Team Support
- Volunteering Opportunities Ways to Earn Community Service Hours!

See Reverse Side for Program Options & Topics!



FMI: Reach out to our Educational Coordinator katherine.weber@piscataquisswcd.org 207-564-2321 ext. 3

Youth Programming Options:

Forestry/Forest Ecology:

- Tree ID walk (all seasons)
- Invasive Forest Pests Activities (Build-a-Bug, Tree Tagging)

Pollinators:

- Pollinator Habitat (planting activities, native plants, bug hunts)
- Build Your Own Bee Waterers/Bee Hotels

Agriculture:

- Farm tours
- Maine Ag in the Classroom



Water:

- Watersheds & You (Exploration of watershed model, understanding watersheds)
- Water Quality Exploration Aquatic Insect ID

Soil:

- · "Soil is Life!" Understanding the Benefits of Soils
- Soil painting
- Soil Pit Exploration (two pits at the Law Farm)
- Meet a Soil Scientist!

Wildlife:

- Winter Animal Track ID
- Nature Explorers Hikes
- Trout in the Classroom









Don't see what you are looking for?
Reach out and we will build something unique for your group!



The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District (PCSWCD) staff and board of supervisors determine which programs, events and workshops we offer and we want to hear from you...the public! Our mission is to build resilient, sustainable farms and forests through education, technical services, demonstration and stewardship.

What conservation educational opportunities do you wish for?
What have you wanted to learn more about?
What can we offer our community to meet these goals and
serve our mission better?

Your suggestions matter and we want our county to be strong in protecting its soil, forests, farms, water and air. Please respond by sending an email to info@piscataquisswcd.org or call (207) 564-2321 ext.3. We look forward to bringing a wonderful and educational lineup of events to the public this year!