



Fostering the Spirit of Wildness and Conserving the Alpine Areas of Northeastern North America

Dear Friends of the Waterman Fund,

Allow me to take a moment to introduce myself: as of 2025, I have begun to serve the Fund as board president. I am truly humbled by this opportunity, and would probably admit to being a bit more nervous at the important work ahead, though our organization has a tight group of wonderful individuals who care deeply about our mission. I turn to them for support as we continue to foster the spirit of wildness in the high mountains and beyond.

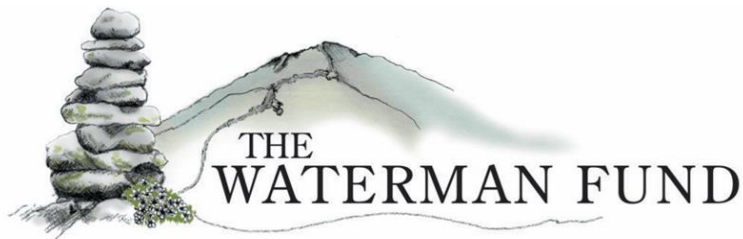
It was in 2019 when I first met Laura Waterman. That fall I had written a piece for Northeast Wilderness Trust about a very old forest up in Maine they helped preserve back in 2007, the Howland Research Forest, where for over twenty years ecologists from the U.S. Forest Service and from University of Maine-Orono were studying the ways in which the forest sequestered carbon, or as some of researchers put it: *forest breathing*. I was invited to share this work at the Alpine Stewardship Gathering held in Lake Placid that year. The event proved to be an incredible insight for me into conservation here in the Northeast.

In the years previous I had written a couple of books about hiking in the Adirondacks, though did not perhaps fully understand the weight of human presence in these alpine ecosystems. As many of you know, alpine areas contain some of the most fragile and endangered plants hikers might ever come across in their lifetime. Many of these species exist even without our being aware of their little worlds and, due to such a short growing season, remain susceptible to easy trampling by both boot and dog paw. For over twenty years the Waterman Fund, through grants and outreach, has helped to strengthen the stewardship and understanding of these endangered alpine areas here in the Northeast. It is our mission to help conserve their ecological, cultural, and recreational value.

Your continued support of the Waterman Fund has allowed us to in turn give to organizations who are directly responsible for research, education, and stewardship of high alpine ecosystems. For 2025, we have awarded \$48,556 in grant monies. These funds will help support stewardship programs in the Green Mountains, on the Franconia Ridge in the Whites, and in the high peaks of Maine. They will also support GLORIA research in the Chic-Chocs Mountains of the Gaspé Peninsula (Québec), as well as some very important trail rehabilitation in the alpine area to Mount Adams on the Presidential Range of the White Mountains.

We will share more information soon on those projects and organizations. In addition, we are still taking submissions for our annual Emerging Writers Essay Contest (they are due March 10) with prize money of \$3000 for the first-place selection, \$1000 for a runner-up. These awards are substantial as far as writing contests go, and there are no submission fees to enter. To learn more about our prompt for 2025, as well as how to submit, please visit our website.

This next year also marks the period when we plan to update our five-year Strategic plan. For some time now here at the Fund, we have been discussing what it might mean to help foster the spirit of



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wild spaces beyond simply alpine areas. Though defining what wildness can be, in all its possibility, feels ever-expanding. One way perhaps to investigate the many facets of this idea could come as we play with the language around it. We have often discussed what it means to defend wildness. I wonder how our work at hand changes if we thought of it as preservation of wildness. Or, as stated in our mission: to foster the spirit of wildness. A return to wildness. Explorations into wildness, wild(er)ness. What would it mean to allow ourselves to be bewildered by wildness. At the Fund, we continue to try and open our hearts and our minds to the pure potentiality of this work we do.

To that end, allow me to close by first welcoming our newest board member, Lorne Currier, who has come to us by way of Maine, Keene State College, Wyoming Conservation Corps, and the Appalachian Mountain Club. He currently works with the Green Mountain Club, where he is the Volunteer and Education Coordinator, responsible for supporting the Club's 1,000+ volunteers and delivering education programs to the hiking public.

And finally, a dear thanks to Lars Botzjorns, who has served as board president for the last four years. Many of you who know Lars, know how generous in spirit he is. You know him for his deep commitment to preserving the ineffable value of wild spaces, protecting fragile alpine environments. I now know him as a colleague, and a good friend. Lucky for me, he will be on the board for one more year to help with this new transition. And after that, we already sort of told him we might not ever let him leave (we'll see!)

Thank you for taking the time and care to read, more to come.

David Crews
Shaftsbury, VT
2025