

# The Alpine Steward

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

FOSTERING THE SPIRIT OF WILDNESS AND CONSERVING THE ALPINE AREAS OF NORTHEASTERN NORTH AMERICA





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### COVER PHOTOGRAPHS

Clockwise from top:

*Waterman Fund and MATC members hike in the alpine zone on Saddleback Mountain, Maine. Photo by Jason Mazurowski, 2024.*

*Mardi Fuller, keynote address NEASG '24. Photo by David Crews, 2024.*

*Waterman Fund board members at NEASG 2024 [left to right]: David Crews, Alicia DiCocco, Kevin Berend, Laura Waterman, Lars Botzjorns, Kayla White, Jason Mazurowski, Steve Crowe.*

*Mount Lincoln from Lafayette. Photo by Hailey Lynch, 2024.*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# Wildness for Everyone?

By Lars Botzjorns

The Waterman Fund's work on the ground supports stewardship of the alpine zone. Our work on the psychology of outdoorspeople concerns the concept of wildness. At this year's Northeastern Alpine Stewardship Gathering, just concluded in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, a major theme was the discussion of where we can find wildness and to whom is it available. This was highlighted by the keynote address given by Mardi Fuller, an accomplished Black outdoorswoman and advocate for evolving our perception of wild places from one of domination to one of respectful immersion.

Rather than subsuming or glossing over the cultural differences of folks who visit wild places, we should celebrate people for who they are and their unique perspective they bring to the outdoors. All humans need a connection to Nature and how that occurs is not, and should not be, uniform. The nexus of immersion and stewardship becomes challenging when one is sharing a mountain environment with hundreds of other people. It is good that more people are seeking experiences in the outdoors, but can we readily find wildness, solitude, and a break from the pressures of society? If we need to go so far as to restrict access to certain places to alleviate environmental impact, how do we determine who gets access? Those with economic means would have a natural advantage. It would be worthwhile to consider giving emphasis to populations who have traditionally had less access in the past.

Land managers already let hikers know of alternative destinations to spread out use, and there are so many lovely (and wild) places that are not alpine summits. Yet many of us are drawn to the highest and most dramatic places. The limits on visitation imposed by a social carrying capacity, such as how many people we are willing to see on a mountain top, versus the biological carrying capacity, as evidenced by the ability of alpine ecosystems to absorb human impact, seldom match. Usually the latter is more restrictive, and should take priority. Anyone, no matter their background, can experience wonder and awe at the hardiness of alpine flora. We can also be impressed upon to understand its fragility and learn to 'do the rock walk.' There are times and places, however, when overcrowding overwhelms the ability of stewardship (summit stewards, signs, trail delineation, etc.) to protect the alpine zone. There is a community of educators, researchers, trail builders, and land managers who are working to meet these challenges across our region. We'll see how we're doing when we meet again two years from now at the next Gathering.



Crawford Notch, White Mountains. Photo by Kevin Berend, 2024.

## GRANTS AWARDED in 2024



# The Waterman Fund Grants Report

By Kayla White

The Waterman Fund grants program has awarded one grant and two sponsorships totaling \$33,200 for 2024. This funding has supported trail work, stewardship, education, and research across the alpine areas of Northeastern North America. The program has awarded a total of \$438,310 in grant monies since its inception over twenty years ago.

One grant and two sponsorships went to supporting and sustaining alpine stewardship programs this year. **Katie Rhodes** from Antioch University received \$3,200 for research on snowbank communities in the Adirondacks. Katie will determine community composition change over a sixteen-year timeframe from 2008 to 2024, study community composition, soil characteristics, phenology and snowmelt timing and compare these characteristics to nearby non-snowbank communities, and examine the relationship between phenology and abiotic factors within snowbank communities.

Providing multi-year sponsorships is a newer avenue of funding that the Waterman Fund found was needed. Guidelines for sponsorships are that organizations can apply for up to three years and they need to provide yearly

reporting. The qualifications for types of work that would be funded are for education would be paying for a staff position, trail work would be a multi-year trail project, and research would include long-term monitoring. Furthermore, the Waterman Fund would provide starting money to new stewardship programs who are trying to become established.

This has been the case for funding the Franconia Ridge Summit Stewardship Program through the **World Trails Network Americas**. The Waterman Fund has continued to provide \$10,000 for staffing Franconia Ridge with summit stewards. Furthermore, the Waterman Fund has provided the **Maine Appalachian Trail Club** a three-year sponsorship of \$10,000 a year annually to help cover expenses associated with the staffing and operation of two Appalachian Trail Ridgerunners in Maine's alpine regions. Since there was a greater need than funding available, the board decided to provide \$20,000 this year.

**Grant and Sponsorship applications are due each year by December 31. For more information please visit [watermanfund.org](http://watermanfund.org) or direct any inquiries to [grants@watermanfund.org](mailto:grants@watermanfund.org). Also, see back cover for details.**

## FROM THE TREASURER

# Fiscal Report for 2023- 2024

The Waterman Fund received annual contributions for the 2024 fiscal year beyond our annual goal thanks to a large donation from friends of the Fund.

We approved \$76,694 in grants for the 2023 field season and paid out \$41,800 during the fiscal year to organizations that completed work and submitted final reports, including three grants from the previous year. As of March 31, 2024, there were \$66,694 in outstanding grants, including \$53,581 in grants approved for the 2024 field season, which is reflected in our net assets. Administrative expenses also came in under budget, as well as program expenses (which include our annual stewardship awards, essay contest awards, and the 2023 annual dinner).

INCOME	
Annual Contributions	\$34,006
EXPENSES	
Administrative	\$6,904
Programs	\$4,437
Grants Disbursed	\$41,831
TOTAL NET ASSETS	
April 1, 2023	\$394,523
March 31, 2024	\$457,643



# And the Winners Are ...

By Laura Waterman

The Waterman Fund is proud to announce the winners of our fifteenth essay contest. We welcomed 43 essays of which ten made the final round. The committee is composed of current and former board members, outside readers, and the editor of *Appalachia Journal*. Our First Place Winner for our 2024 Essay Contest is **Catherine Wessel** for her piece, “Old Friends in the Alpine.” Our Runner-Up is

**Samantha Sapp** for “Splinter Hill.”

The prompt for 2024 was as follows: *Wilderness has the capacity to create memories, some of which are so powerful they affect the entire course of a life. Describe a single moment you have experienced in the wilderness that profoundly changed you. How did that moment reverberate through your life? What changes to your world exist because of that single moment in time?*

## SAMANTHA SAPP, “Splinter Hill”

*Sometimes the soul of our land is underfoot and we don't know it.*

*It was late summer in a remote pocket of southeast Alabama, not far from the border of my home state Florida. Down here, summers are brutal—even the trees sag and sweat in the heat. Still, my fiancée and I had trekked deep; into the woods to find the bog at Splinter Hill.*

*Bogs are hardly exotic. When tourists flock to the beach with the rhythms of spring and summer break, they bypass the bogs entirely, unable to see past the swarms of flies and fetid stench of death. But on the Gulf Coast, bogs are havens for the only genus of pitcher plants in North America. “Sarracenia.” Of its eleven species, ten can be found in Alabama and Florida. Only one can be found outside the South.*

**Samantha Sapp** is an MFA student at Miami University and former middle school English teacher. Though she is originally from the Florida Panhandle, she has spent the last few years in the Midwest coping poorly with winter. Her work

has appeared or is forthcoming in several literary journals, including *Sinister Wisdom*, *Mount Hope Magazine*, and *Screen Door Review*.

## CATHERINE WESSEL, “Old Friends in the Alpine”

*From the Chin of Mount Mansfield the highest point in the state of Vermont, I watch a stream of hikers cresting the Lower Lip, their t-shirts making dots of bright color across the long face of the ridgeline. It is an unusually spectacular day, all blue sky and sunshine. The air is warm and still and the mountain has already transformed from a few weeks previous—growing things have sprung into action with incredible speed and vigor as soon as the snow disappeared. The serene weather feels like a good omen for the field season.*

*When I see an older couple in khakis pausing with hiking poles in hand, I know it is whom I am waiting for: Bill and Betsy Howland. They have generously offered to meet me here, on the summit of a mountain that I am preparing to study just as Bill did for several summers beginning in 1991.*

**Catherine Wessel** is a field ecologist and recent graduate of the Field Naturalist Masters Program at University of Vermont. Her selected essay was inspired by a transformative experience with a previous researcher who visited her on Mount Mansfield. She witnessed his return to this beloved

place after being away for nearly thirty years, which offered access to thinking on greater time scales, as well as what the human expression of wholeheartedness and delight in the work could look like, as one grapples with how climate change has and has been impacting alpine areas of the Northeast.

## • 2025 EMERGING WRITERS ESSAY CONTEST •

The Waterman Fund seeks new voices on the role and place of wilderness in today's changing world. Our prompt for the 2025 Essay Contest is as follows:

*“The clash of wilderness preservation versus use and enjoyment by thousands is inherently unresolvable. But that does not absolve any of us from striving to resolve it, from doing the best our generation can to preserve the spirit of wildness.”*

Wilderness and wildness have two distinctly different meanings. Yet we have observed they can be used almost interchangeably.

Wilderness is often spoken of as a means of protecting land through an act of legislation. In this country, the idea behind it has preserved great tracks of land for public use. It has also allowed justification for times when governments displaced and took land from indigenous peoples. And perhaps the act of codifying or naming Wilderness (with a capital “W”) only further distances humans, in an abstract sense, from the primal and profound connections to the land itself. The narrative is complex and nuanced.

Nonetheless, in this country today wilderness areas contain some of the more rare, wild and undefined places available to citizens. The Waterman Fund invites submissions that explore how moving

through mountains and rivers and wild lands brings out the uncultivated spirit, the unscathed, non-commercial, honest primal human in all of us. What is the wild in wild(er)ness?

**The deadline for submissions is March 1, 2025.**

Submissions should be between 2000 – 3000 words. Please include contact information and a few lines about why the writer feels their essay is appropriate for the contest. Online submissions should be double-spaced, manuscripts in 12-point font. Word doc compatible files are preferred. If submitting by mail please include an email address. We select a first and second place winner with awards of \$3000 and \$1000, respectively. Winning essays are published in *Appalachia Journal* as well as on the Waterman Fund website.

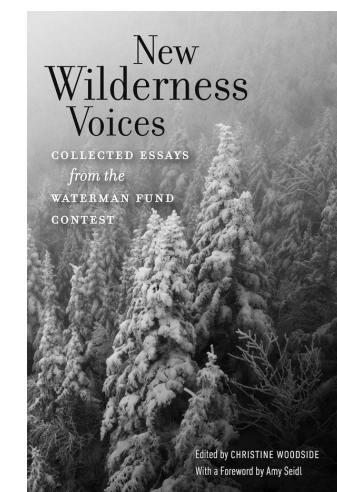
For purposes of this contest, we consider an Emerging Writer a person of any age who has not previously been published in a national magazine or written a book-length work of fiction or narrative nonfiction on topics of wilderness, wildness, or the ethics and ecology of environmental issues. We welcome personal, scientific, adventure, or memoir essays. Fiction, poetry or songs are not eligible for this contest. More information is available at [watermanfund.org](http://watermanfund.org). Please send inquiries to [essays@watermanfund.org](mailto:essays@watermanfund.org).

A LITERARY CELEBRATION OF  
THE NORTHEAST'S WILD PLACES

*New Wilderness Voices:  
Collected Essays  
from the Waterman Fund Contest*

Edited by Christine Woodside  
with a foreword by Amy Seidl

Available at [watermanfund.org](http://watermanfund.org)







Board members Kayla White and David Crews talk with stewards and members from MATC on the summit of Saddleback Mountain, Maine. Photos by Jason Mazurowski, 2024



MATC Ridgerunners Koty Lewis and Chloe Kenyon on the summit.



Waterman Fund board members join Maine Appalachian Trail Conservancy on hike to Saddleback Mountain, Maine.

# SUMMITTING SADDLEBACK MOUNTAIN, MAINE

By Jason Mazurowski

On August 17th, members of the Waterman Fund Board joined representatives from the Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) on a field trip to the summit of Saddleback Mountain. Our arrival in Rangeley coincided with a late-summer cold front, pushing out the lingering Canadian wildfire smoke and replacing it with a low blanket of clouds obscuring the high peaks.

The cool, overcast weather was a welcome relief for MATC Ridgerunners Koty Lewis and Chloe Kenyon, who had just spent several hot and humid weeks engaging with summer crowds on the summits of Bigelow and Saddleback. As we gathered at the Fly Rod Trailhead, they explained that we were approaching ‘the bubble’—the time of year when the summit sees its heaviest traffic from Appalachian Trail thru-hikers nearing the final stretch of their journey to Katahdin.

Soon, we were joined by MATC President Tom Gorrill and ATC’s Maine Regional Manager Leah Beck, and we began our ascent into the alpine zone. As we climbed into

the clouds, Tom and Leah shared some of the challenges and successes they’ve faced since Saddleback Ski Resort was purchased by a Boston-based investment firm. In 2021, the resort began operating lifts during the summer, providing easy access to the ridge and significantly increasing visitation to the summit. Saddleback Mountain features the third-largest alpine zone in Maine and is second only to Mount Katahdin in popularity. Today, 80 percent of visitors reach the summit via a short trail from the ski lift.

This situation highlights the ongoing dilemma of balancing recreation with preservation, access with protection—a challenge that all land stewards must confront. On the one hand, more people can now experience the beauty and wildness of Maine’s high peaks, potentially inspiring a deeper appreciation and desire to protect these landscapes. On the other hand, increased foot traffic threatens the fragile alpine ecosystems and diminishes the sense of wildness that draws visitors in the first place.

Despite these concerns, Tom and Leah remain optimistic. With financial support from the Waterman Fund, L.L. Bean, and others, MATC is uniquely positioned to take

proactive measures to preserve these delicate ecosystems. Protecting these wild places before harm occurs is easier and more cost-effective than restoring them. Ridgerunners like Koty and Chloe are on the frontlines of this effort, educating hikers about responsible travel above treeline and safeguarding the delicate alpine ecosystem.

Crouched among the krummholz, Koty chatted with a group of northbound thru-hikers just a couple weeks from Katahdin, preparing them for the camping challenges they would face during the busiest season. It’s here that I’m struck by how stewardship efforts create ‘downstream’ effects. Many thru-hikers arriving on Saddleback will have already encountered alpine conservation resources in the White Mountains and come equipped with the ethics of ‘rock-hopping.’ These principles are reinforced here and again on Bigelow, so that by the time hikers reach the wild slopes of Katahdin, they are well-prepared to tread lightly through the alpine zone.

We continued along the foggy, wind-swept ridge, speculating about the common names of Red crowberry versus Purple crowberry, and swapping horror stories

of off-leash dogs and defiant day hikers. Eventually the conversation turned toward the inevitability of big corporations like Vail eyeing these wild, northern summits as the snowpack continues to diminish throughout southern New England. How will we adapt to even more pressure for development, and even more summer traffic?

Tom and Leah respond by whipping out their phones to show off photos of the summit during last spring’s total solar eclipse. A line of hundreds of hikers—all in single file—snakes up toward the summit. It’s a scene reminiscent of those photos of an overcrowded Everest, but what’s notable is that not a single hiker can be seen off-trail, not a single piece of trash or off-leash dog. MATC was prepared with ample signage, and staff strategically positioned at key spots, and the result was overwhelmingly positive. While this was a once-in-a-lifetime event, bringing the most foot-traffic the summit may ever see, the message still resonates: for the most part, no one intentionally wants to cause harm. People want to do the right thing; they just need to be pointed in the right direction. Stewardship works.



# Cultivating Environmental Stewards and Improved Mental Health

By Corey Denenberg Dehner

Throughout my life, nature has always served as a balm for my mind and soul. The first time I saw the Rockies over thirty years ago, I felt at home. There is something about those extraordinary, grounding mountains that made me feel breathtakingly insignificant, part of something larger. This realization helped relieve the pressure I always put on myself. Mountains continue to bring quietude and purpose to my busy mind. I teach in the Global School at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Massachusetts. As a professor, working with 20- and 21-year-olds, I lament the lack of connection many students have with nature. Not infrequently, our conscientious students



Figure 1 - Students and other volunteers moving rocks on the Old Bridle Path, Franconia, NH. September 2023.

become overwhelmed, anxious and stressed. Their lives are extraordinarily busy. One of the things I strive to impress upon them, in addition to the value of hard work, is the importance of work/life balance, and that “busy” shouldn’t be a badge of honor. On the heels of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, increasing isolation and rates of depression made me want to do something more to support the whole student. However, connection to nature is decreasing not increasing.

In the fall of 2021, I reached out to Nat Scrimshaw, Chair, World Trails Network-Hub for the Americas, and a Lorax of sorts, to discuss developing an immersive project experience in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. My

goal was to create a program that helps students consider the environmental impact and indigenous perspective in whatever career they pursue and develop a deep connection to nature to facilitate improved mental health.

Specifically, I wanted to develop an *Environmental Certificate* program that students could participate in, while simultaneously completing their required junior



Figure 2 - Students at Fireside Chat, Thornton, NH. September 2023.

year social science research project. Nat enthusiastically supported the idea. Shortly thereafter, I connected with the humblest of White Mountain environmentalists and board member of the Waterman Fund, Laura Waterman. Laura was also enthusiastic about the idea and offered to consult the Waterman Fund Board of Directors about supporting the *Environmental Certificate*. The following summer I interviewed Waterman Fund board members, Appalachian Mountain Club staff, and conducted research on how to facilitate a strong human-nature connection. With advice from Nat and Laura, among others, I developed the *Environmental Ethics Certificate* program.

In the fall of 2023, through the new WPI White Mountains Project Center (WMPC), my colleague, Professor Seth Tuler, and I brought sixteen junior year students to Grafton County, New Hampshire to work on four projects with government and not for profit sponsors. A unique

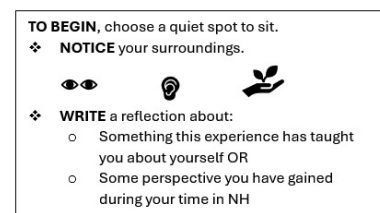


Figure 3 - Solo hike instructions. October 2023.

component of the WMPC is that, in addition to completing the junior year project, students participate in the newly developed *Environmental Ethics Certificate* program. To earn the Certificate, students must: i) complete Leave No Trace Training, ii) consult with Tribal Leaders of the Cowasuck Band of the Abenaki-Pennacook People to gain an indigenous perspective on their project, iii) volunteer in some capacity to protect the White Mountain National Forest (e.g., through trail repair) (see figure 1), iv) complete weekly readings & respond to prompts in an online discussion board, v) attend and participate in regular potluck fireside chats (see figure 2), and vi) complete a solo hike and reflection.

The pilot year was a success as illustrated by discussion responses and solo hike reflections. For example, after reading chapters from the Watermans’ book, *Wilderness Ethics*, students seemed to understand some of the nuance in human-nature connection. In response to one discussion board prompt—*What are the threats to wildness and wilderness? What can we do about it?*—students shared, “The threats are human values. Setting up forests for our own amusement.” And another responded, “By putting labor into a trail you can preserve the wilderness, but eliminate some of the wildness. Wilderness is just nature. The sense of wildness is its appeal.”

The most persuasive data came from the students’ solo hike reflections. Students could choose from one of three solo-ish hiking opportunities, each of varying length and level of difficulty. Prior to their departure, we handed them granola bars, a map, and a piece of paper with instructions (figure 3). In the solo hike reflections students reported



Figure 4 - First Cohort of Environmental Ethics Certificate recipients. October 2023.

enhanced connection to nature and as a result, improved mental health and well-being. Below are excerpts of students’ reflections. The students knew that there were no right answers, we were merely asking them to be present and to reflect on their time.

**Student 1:** My thoughts can get overwhelming. There is something mind blowing about how underwhelming those same thoughts can be after a physically rigorous hike & a gorgeous view.

**Student 2:** I have also found solace in the outdoors. By being outdoors I am forced to reflect on myself... understand my own character and place in the world. The stillness of nature supplies a reminder that the world remains independent from my own subjective view. This provides me peace that I have nothing to prove to the world. All that is truly important to me, is my initiative to do good and be good.

**Student 3:** My time in the White Mountains is more like a creek, I am here for such a short time. Yet it has changed me more than years at home. I have found a semblance of peace here. A moment of quiet, I would not say it is happiness that I have found. But I am content to sit here for a few moments longer and appreciate the time that I have.

These reflection excerpts offer insight into part of the impact I had hoped this program would have on students. In the words of Mother Teresa, “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”





The White Mountains from Franconia Ridge. Photo by Hailey Lynch, 2024.

# A SEASON ON FRANCONIA RIDGE

By Hailey Lynch, Chief Steward of Franconia Ridge

Compared to other alpine areas in the Northeast, Franconia Ridge is a unique and difficult place to steward. Situated along the Franconia Notch Parkway, trailhead parking lots fill quickly on fair weather days with locals and out-of-state hikers alike. I am the only paid staff person on Franconia Ridge, and my job is to ask people to stay on trail and avoid trampling the fragile alpine vegetation.

My time on the ridge begins Friday afternoons and ends Monday afternoons. While having coverage every day on the ridge would be ideal, my schedule prioritizes my work above treeline for the weekends, when many more hikers find themselves on the ridge. On Saturdays and Sundays, there is a shuttle that brings hikers from Cannon Mountain Ski Area to the Old Bridle Path Trailhead. This shuttle service can increase the number of hikers to the ridge by several hundred more per day.

I start these weekends with an early, peaceful hike to the summit of Lafayette from Greenleaf Hut. The Greenleaf Trail from the hut to Lafayette is steep, 1.1 miles with 1,100

ft of elevation gain. I always indulge in some hut coffee before braving this climb. At this time of day, around 7:30 am, there's no one, aside from the occasional sunrise photographer that did the first five miles completely in the dark. This time of day is my favorite. The air is cool, dull pinks from the last traces of sunrise linger, and the ridgeline is quiet. Once at Lafayette, I usually have a quick snack and head south, following the white blazes of the Franconia Ridge Trail to Little Haystack.

Most folks who are hiking the 9-mile Franconia Ridge loop first break out above treeline on the Falling Waters Trail where it intersects the Franconia Ridge Trail at Little Haystack. I get here early to talk to as many of these hikers as possible, not knowing if they know to mind the plants. I greet every hiker who reaches the ridge. I ask them how they are and end each interaction by saying:

*Before you head out across the ridge, I'd like to let you know that this place is home to very rare and fragile alpine vegetation. These plants can be killed by our footsteps, so follow the trail as best you can, and walk on rocks if you need to go off trail.*

The spiel is short and sweet. You can't talk to hikers

for too long or they'll get bored and wander away. Being a summit steward is kind of like working in customer service. You say the same thing over and over and answer the same questions over and over. Rarely do hikers ask more about what plants they ought to care about, but when they do, it presents a great opportunity. In the summit area of Little Haystack, there are a lot of species to show people including, Diapensia, Bog bilberry, Mountain cranberry, and Deer's hair sedge. This area also has some successful revegetation, as evidenced by little tufts of Mountain sandwort scattered beyond the string fencing. I show this to people as well, noting the mountain sandwort is the first plant to come back after disturbance, just like the early-successional poplars that sprout up after a fire at lower elevations.

After spending the morning and early afternoon on Little Haystack, and with feeling satisfied that I chatted with most of the hikers of the day, I meander back to Lafayette. In between my present self and future destination is Mount Lincoln, the steepest climb of the day and one of New Hampshire's 48 4000-foot peaks. Actually, standing at 5,089 ft tall, Lincoln is my least favorite climb on the ridge. First off, it tires me out. Secondly, the rocky, exposed bedrock of the trail unnerves hikers into stepping outside the scree walls onto easier terrain. I typically spend an hour or so here a day, tidying up the scree walls and asking people to stay on trail. As I do this, more hikers continue to flow in from the south and the northern ends of the ridge, creating a traffic nightmare. As hikers battle with each other for right of way, they step off trail contributing to more trail erosion and de-vegetation.

Between Lincoln and Lafayette, I mostly work on fixing

the scree walls that delineate the trail. First built in the 1970s to discourage off-trail travel, the scree walls were effective in keeping hikers on trail, for the most part. In more recent years as the number of hikers on the ridge has increased, people step over the scree walls to get by other hikers. I repair the scree wall where it has fallen and brush-in social paths with dead krummholz—Balsam fir ravaged by harsh wind and ice that leave the trees contorted and stunted.

My patience on these busy days can be stretched thin. More and more frequently, Franconia Ridge welcomes over 1000 hikers in a single day. The number of access points further complicates the situation. Most hikers choose the classic Falling Waters—Old Bridle Path loop, but others hike directly up Greenleaf Trail to the summit of Lafayette. Still others are in the middle of a Pemi Loop or a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail. While it can feel overwhelming at times, I am rewarded by having a job that not many other people get to experience. Over the course of the field season, I watch spring flow into summer and then into autumn. Ericaceous heaths bore vibrant pink flowers in June, yielded cranberries, bilberries, and blueberries in August, and now don red leaves that match the maples down in Franconia Notch. The Bicknell's thrushes that once serenaded me in the evenings with their mating songs now watch their fledglings practice flying between the crooked firs. The first frosts typically arrive by late September, signaling to the birds that the Mountain ash berries are finally ready to eat.

The allure of these mountains is what brings me back year after year. There is always something new to learn from this ancient, yet continually evolving, community of flora and fauna.

## The Waterman Fund Welcomes New Board Member

**Jason Mazurowski** is an ecologist, naturalist, and adjunct faculty member at the University of Vermont where he teaches graduate courses in the Field Naturalist MS program. After graduating with a BS in Geology from SUNY Buffalo in 2011, Jason assumed a rotating role of seasonal jobs in New Mexico, Minnesota, and Montana before finally discovering his passion for the northeastern mountains as an AMC hut crew member. In 2019, he earned an MS

from the University of Vermont's Field Naturalist program where he studied the relationship between prescribed burns and endangered shrubland bird habitat in the Ossipee Pine Barrens Preserve. Since 2020, he has worked with UVM's Gund Institute to study native bee populations in agricultural systems. Jason currently lives off-grid in Woodbury, Vermont and spends most of his spare time running or skiing above tree line with his pup Raven.





# NEASG Highlights Science and Arts



13<sup>th</sup> Northeastern Alpine Stewardship Gathering, 2024.

By Kevin Berend

The 13<sup>th</sup> Northeastern Alpine Stewardship Gathering was held October 25-27 at the Appalachian Mountain Club's Highland Center in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. As the sun went down over Mt. Field and Mt. Tom on Friday evening, over one hundred attendees gathered in the shadow of the Presidential Range to kick off a weekend of science and celebration.

Friday evening featured opening remarks by Waterman Fund president Lars Botzjorns, AMC Senior Scientist Georgia Murray, and Waterman Fund board member Kevin Berend, followed by a featured talk by Steve Tatko, AMC's VP of Land, Research, and Trails, who spoke about large-scale forest conservation and management as part of AMC's Maine Woods Initiative.

Saturday morning began with a keynote address by freelance writer and outdoor community leader Mardi Fuller, who spoke of the need to broaden the coalition of nature protectors by including demographics historically marginalized by the outdoor industry, particularly people of color. A panel discussion on *Reimagining Wild(er)ness*, moderated by Kevin Berend, featured Steve Tatko, Mardi Fuller, Caitlin McDonough MacKenzie, and Larry Anderson. The main portion of the day featured a total of 25 speakers across six sessions, ranging from research to restoration to arts and social science. Speakers traveled from across the

country and beyond, including New Jersey, California, and Quebec to present and discuss their work.

Saturday evening's program began with the presentation of the Emerging Alpine Steward Award to Liam Ebner, Summit Steward Coordinator for the Adirondack Mountain Club, in recognition of his accomplishments and demonstrated commitment to the program stewardship. Next, Waterman Fund board member Jason Mazurowski read the Waterman Fund Emerging Writer essay contest winner for 2024, Catherine Wessel, and her piece "Old Friends in the Alpine," about an encounter with Bill Howland, from whom she inherited a lifelong



Mardi Fuller at NEASG 2024. Photo by Alicia DiCocco.

appreciation for alpine research work on Mt. Mansfield. To close out the evening, Waterman Fund board member and poet David Crews regaled attendees with excerpts from his new work, *Mónadenok*.

A cold front moved in Saturday night, but attendees were able to get out on four field trips Sunday morning, including a hike to Mizpah Spring hut, a trip to view trailwork on Franconia Ridge, a tour of weather instrumentation led by Mt. Washington Observatory staff, and a citizen science walk at Highland Center. Those who stayed at the Highland Center were treated to a wonderful

trip through White mountain history in photos and letters with AMC's archivist, Becky Fullerton.

We'd like to thank our event sponsors for helping to make the Gathering such a success: Appalachian Mountain Club, World Trails Network, Burgeon Outdoors, The Nature Conservancy, Citrin GIS Lab—Dartmouth, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Maine Mountain Collaborative, Schoodic Institute at Acadia National Park, Mahoosuc Land Trust, and Vermont Center for Ecostudies, and Ken Kimball, former Guy Waterman Alpine Steward Award honoree.



## 2024 Award Recipient: Liam Ebner

By David Crews

The Waterman Fund is delighted to announce that the 2024 Emerging Steward Alpine Award has been given to Liam Ebner of the Adirondack Mountain Club.

Board member, Kayla White, shared these thoughts about Liam with whom she has worked closely for the last four years: "In Liam's second year as a steward, we spent time together in the field and it became apparent to me that Liam was someone to whom I could entrust the Summit Stewardship Program. He works hard, thinks critically about stewardship, and is a team player. His humor and good-natured attitude make him resilient in all weather conditions, just like the alpine plants."

In 2022, Liam made a very important plant discovery while on a field trip at the 12<sup>th</sup> Northeastern Alpine Stewardship Gathering hosted by the Green Mountain Club. Kevin Berend of the Waterman Fund board writes of the moment: "I was joined by Liam and several others on a field trip on Mt. Mansfield led by Kevin Tolan of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, who was showing off high-elevation pockets of scrubby spruce, the breeding habitat for the rare Bicknell's Thrush. During a moment of downtime, when others were talking, Liam began rock-hopping and scanning the ground near the trail, as he had become accustomed to do, when he bent down to inspect a patch of crowberry. The plant, it turns out, was the rare Purple crowberry (*Empetrum atropurpurea*), a plant thought to be extirpated



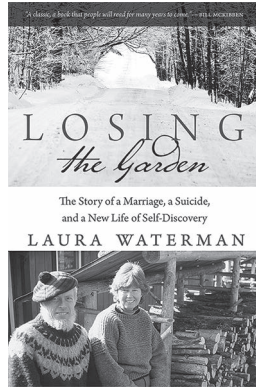
Liam Ebner receives Emerging Alpine Steward Award with Fund board members Kayla White and Laura Waterman. Photo by Kevin Berend, 2024.

in Vermont, last seen in 1908. Liam's keen eyes, trained by years of summit stewarding, noticed something that even professional botanists had missed."

On his role as Summit Steward Coordinator with the Adirondack Mountain Club, where he has served for the last two years, Liam writes, "Spending seasons as a summit steward has provided me with a unique opportunity, the chance to help develop the next alpine stewards in the Adirondacks. Seeing people who were just like me, brand new to the alpine, learn to love this special place was an absolutely rewarding experience."

The Waterman Fund would like to thank Liam Ebner for his continued commitment to stewardship and education in the high peaks of Adirondack State Park.





## Losing the Garden By Laura Waterman

"Laura Waterman has written a universal story about marriage, depression, tenderness, silence. You don't need to care a fig for mountains or New England woods to be utterly caught up in this quiet, stunning saga." ~ Bill McKibben

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## Thank You's from Page Hollow ... *Laura Waterman and Sean Robinson*

Our Eastern Alpine Managers and Stewards Gathering was hosted by the Appalachian Mountain Club at their Highland Center in Crawford Notch. A hearty thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this Gathering happen!

The Essay Contest was quietly and efficiently steered again by **Annie Bellerose**, with able assistance from our volunteer readers. **Meika Hashimoto, Rebecca Oreskes, Emily Mitchell, Val Stori, Alice**

**Tufel**, and **Christine Woodside**, in her dual role of valued reader and publisher of *Appalachia Journal*.

Always a sincere thank you to **Brian Post** who handles website hosting and keeps our content updated.

A strong shout-out to **Anne McKinsey** of AMCK Web and Print Design who seems somehow to outdo herself with her work on the *Alpine Steward*. This is our twelfth year of working with Anne.

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Please make your check payable to *The Waterman Fund* and mail to: P.O. Box 1064, East Corinth, VT 05040

If your donation is for \$200 or more, we are pleased to offer you a signed copy of *Forest and Crag*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Check box if you would like us to mail you a book.

*The Waterman Fund is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are fully tax deductible.*

## ALPINE STEWARD AWARD: *Nominate someone for 2025!*

To nominate someone for the **Guy Waterman Alpine Steward Award** and/or the **Emerging Steward Award**, please send nomination letters by **August 1, 2025** to The Waterman Fund (forms are available on our website), citing specific examples of the nominee's stewardship of the Northeast's wilderness, along with other relevant personal or professional experience. If you have nominated someone in the past, the nomination remains in our files and is reviewed annually. Please visit [watermanfund.org](http://watermanfund.org) for more details. *Anyone can be nominated!*

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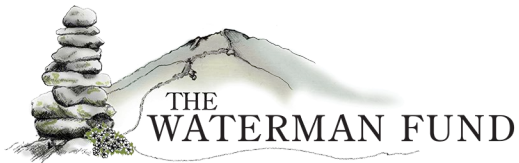
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This year's list may be missing in honor and in memory attributions. Please let us know of the omissions and we will publish this on our website.





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

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## •• FUNDING OPPORTUNITY FOR TRAIL PROJECTS CONTINUES ••

In previous years the Waterman Fund has discussed providing larger grant awards towards trail projects to better serve the mission of the Fund. The Fund has cumulatively awarded over \$355,340 towards trail projects since 2002. These individual grants have been generally between \$2,000-\$3,000. As a result, the Fund has not been able to invest a significant amount of funding towards trail projects.

Due to the impact of the pandemic, in recent dialogue with land managers, trail maintainers, and researchers, there appears to be a need to invest into the greater alpine trail infrastructure. This improved trail infrastructure will help protect the fragile alpine ecosystem that surrounds these trails.

In the 2024-2025 grant cycle, the Waterman Fund is offering up to \$15,000 towards alpine / sub-alpine trail reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. This grant will be in addition to our annual grants awarded and will follow the same guidelines and parameters.

We encourage nonprofit trail maintenance organizations to apply to the Waterman Fund if there is a trail project that the Fund can contribute to. The Fund is excited to offer this expanded opportunity to help strengthen trail stewardship in the alpine areas of Northeastern North America. **Please submit a grant application by December 31, 2024.**