

Sebago Clean Waters

Scope: Regional/Watershed

Location: Portland, Maine

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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SCOPE:

- **Geographic focus:** The 234,000-acre forested Sebago Lake watershed that protects Sebago Lake, the drinking water supply for over 200,000 people living in Greater Portland.
- **Coalition Membership:** Sebago Clean Waters (SCW) is a ten-member partnership of conservation organizations and the Portland Water District. In addition to the water utility, members include three local land trusts, four regional conservation organizations, one EPA National Estuary Partnership, and one regional lake association.
- **SCW Mission:** The coalition works to protect water quality, community well-being, a vibrant economy, and fish and wildlife habitat in the Sebago Lake region through voluntary forestland protection and other watershed protection measures.

COLLABORATIVE FORMATION:

- Portland Water District (PWD) and Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) began providing grants to two of the local land trusts for watershed forest conservation to help protect water quality and other co-benefits in the early 2000s.
- A formal PWD program to partially fund voluntary forest conservation by conservation organizations in the watershed was adopted in 2013.
- In 2015, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) led a collaborative effort to develop a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the Crooked River, the largest tributary to Sebago Lake, recognizing the importance of its watershed for habitat, water quality and climate resilience. The Open Space Institute, CBEP, PWD and local land trust partners were all involved in this collaborative effort.
- Recognizing the convergence of interests in forestland conservation in the Sebago Lake watershed for water quality and other co-benefits and an opportunity to establish a Water Fund to engage downstream water users, Sebago Clean Waters was established in 2017 with seven partner organizations including the six mentioned previously and the Highstead Foundation.
- A successful 2018 U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities Healthy Watershed Consortium grant provided the initial capacity-building funding to hire contract staff and build communications, fundraising and conservation capacity.

STRUCTURE/FUNDING

- SCW was launched as a member-driven effort initially and, beginning in 2018, has secured public and private grants and business contributions to support its core operations and conservation work.
- Land conservation is financed with contributions from Portland Water District, private foundation grants, other SCW partner contributions, federal and state funds and the Sebago Clean Waters Fund established with business and individual contributions.

MEMBERS:

- [Portland Water District](#)
- [Lakes Environmental Association](#)
- [Loon Echo Land Trust](#)
- [Mahoosuc Land Trust](#)
- [Western Foothills Land Trust](#)
- [Highstead Foundation](#)
- [Open Space Institute](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy](#)
- [Casco Bay Estuary Partnership](#)
- [Trust for Public Land](#)

[See the full list of members and business partners here](#)

WATER CONCERNS:

- Maintain the purity of the Sebago Lake drinking water source and Portland Water District's waiver to filtration. The 234,000-acre watershed is 84% forested but only 11% of the land is currently conserved. The U.S. Forest Service identified the watershed as one of the drinking water watersheds most at risk of development in the Northeast. SCW aims to conserve 35,000 additional acres to bring the conserved acreage to 25% of the watershed by 2032.
- Additional SCW watershed protection efforts include reconnecting fragmented streams, managing forests, implementing erosion control measures, developing innovative conservation finance mechanisms and removing invasive aquatic plants.

STRATEGIES:

- Catalyze voluntary watershed forestland conservation through fee acquisition or easement.
- Implement other watershed protection measures including stream connectivity and aquatic organism passage; forest management; invasive aquatic plant removal; landowner outreach and education and other measures.
- Engage downstream businesses, municipalities and citizens in supporting protection of their water supply watershed through financial and other means of support.
- Establish and capitalize the Sebago Clean Waters Fund to provide a long-term funding source for watershed protection.

RESULTS:

- Awarded \$8M NRCS [Regional Conservation Partnership Program Alternative Funding Arrangement](#) (RCPP AFA) grant that will leverage private and public funds for a total of \$18.5M in conservation and watershed protection.
- Established the Sebago Clean Waters Fund with business support to fund watershed land conservation.
- Conserved over 6,000 acres high priority forestland.
- Developed communications collateral (logo/brand, website, videos, brochures, photo library, etc.) and gained visibility through press coverage, social media and digital ads.
- Increased coalition and land trust partner capacity.
- Developed a GIS-based mapping tool for land prioritization/evaluation.
- Engaged eight business partners in supporting the coalition through funding and in-kind measures.

Information current as of April 2021. Please check with the Collaborative contacts or www.sebagocleanwaters.org for the most up to date information. To find other source water collaboratives across the U.S. or to add yours to the list, visit the Source Water Collaborative's [How To Collaborate Toolkit](#)