

Acadia Senior College Schoodic to Schoodic course – Addendum

by Ben Emory

bemory770@gmail.com

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I promised to circulate any commentary or questions I received after the course if I thought other participants might want to see them. This addendum is prompted by comments sent yesterday by retired Acadia National Park Superintendent Sheridan Steele. I will give you his comments below after a few words about Flanders Bay, the northeast corner of Frenchman Bay. I will conclude with mention of a new project on the Canadian side of the St. Croix River Watershed, an example of how habitat preservation and connectivity indeed continue on to the northeast of S2S as discussed in PDF #4.



In PDF #1 (page 6) I mentioned Wendell Hadlock’s archaeological investigations of shell mounds, also known as middens, along Flanders Bay shorelines. The bibliography accompanying that PDF lists two of his reports published by the Abbe Museum in 1939 and 1941. Above is a photo I took yesterday of the site on Jones Cove (field in background) that is the subject of the 1939 report. Said Hadlock, “It was known by the inhabitants of West Gouldsboro that the Indians had, at some time in the past, occupied this small point of land and dug vast quantities of clams, leaving their shells in one place.”

I also mentioned in PDF #1 that Jones Pond offered a protected canoe and portage route that avoided the exposed and often rough water off Schoodic Point. Jones Cove leads to the outlet of Jones Pond and is the beginning of this route across the Schoodic Peninsula. Below is the entrance to Jones Cove off the Taft Point Preserve of Frenchman Bay Conservancy. The island with prominent trees just across the narrow entrance to the cove is Maine Coast Heritage Trust's Hog Island, and beyond is shoreline on the north side of Jones Cove



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Now, this came yesterday from retired Acadia National Park Superintendent Sheridan Steele, whom many of you active with Acadia Senior College know:

“I have been occupied with finishing the work on my book and just recently returned to your excellent papers on S2S. Conserving land has been my #1 priority for decades. In my view, land is the very essence of any park – state or

federal because it is the land that contains the natural and cultural features and values that we want to preserve for all time. Conservation easements are an important tool to protect those values but fee ownership in my mind is the most important outcome for several reasons. I believe that public use and enjoyment of preserved lands is essential for long term support for land conservation efforts. We want the public to enjoy these lands, to appreciate their value and significance, and to therefore support conservation of other land. This is not to say that every conserved piece of land must be open to public use. Of course there needs to be a balance between appropriate use and preservation. Acadia managers and other park managers spend a tremendous amount of time discussing what use is appropriate, how much is appropriate, and how to find the right balance related to use versus preservation. I think MCHT does an excellent job of preserving land and allowing for public use. Regarding economic benefits, I have always felt that being able to articulate those benefits increases the public support for land conservation. National parks do a pretty good job of analyzing these benefits, and those arguments help obtain local and federal official support necessary for Congressional appropriations for both land acquisition as well as operating budgets. The one major downside is overuse and resulting damage to protected resources. While I want people to enjoy THEIR national parks, one of my goals has always been to maintain a high quality visitor experience. To me that means resources that are well managed and protected for future generations while allowing for appropriate use to the extent compatible with that long term preservation. In the NPS, the key word in our legislated mission is “unimpaired”. We are to preserve significant resources, make them available for public use and enjoyment but leave them unimpaired for future generations. Managers spend a lot of time discussing what is impaired. Trampling some vegetation along a trail is probably not (unless it is a rare plant or an endangered species) while flooding the main canyon would be. But the trick is all of the levels in between and how use or management actions might lead to impairment. Thanks for your documenting the S2S subject and encouraging discussion. S2S is an extraordinary concept and collaborative project that will benefit generations of Americans.”

I want to pick up briefly on Sheridan’s comment that conservation easements are an important tool but that in his mind fee [outright] ownership is the “most important outcome”. Outright ownership by a conservation agency or organization is not always possible and in some cases not necessarily desirable.

Sometimes a landowner is willing to preserve his or her land's natural qualities but wants to retain ownership, perhaps for limited residential or recreational use, perhaps as working forest or farmland. Sometimes a conservation easement is a less expensive way to preserve a parcel, both in terms of acquiring and on-going management. Sometimes from a property tax standpoint it is more acceptable to a community to leave a tract of land in private ownership subject to a conservation easement and on the tax rolls (albeit perhaps at a lower assessed value), especially if ownership by a conservation agency would mean no payment in lieu of taxes. Acadia National Park has showcased for the nation the effective use of conservation easements to preserve scenic and ecological qualities of land. PDF #2 (page 7) mentions Spruce Point, the small peninsula just northeast of Schoodic Point, as a stellar example of how Acadia has benefited from accepting conservation easements. But, as Sheridan says, especially when public use is desired such as in a National Park, outright ownership is usually best, although many conservation easements do allow for public use subject to conditions set forth in the easement document. Preserving land requires multiple tools, and as stated in PDF #2 (page 14) outright ownership (fee simple) and conservation easements are the two primary land conservation techniques used in S2S.

Sheridan mentions his forthcoming book. Entitled *From Bear Dens to the Oval Office – True Stories From My 38 Years Managing National Parks*, this will be a must read for anyone interested in the National Park Service!



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On to Canada?

In PDF #4 I mentioned how S2S provides a framework for considering a wider geography and a broad range of issues. Since the conclusion of our course I have been contacted about a major effort to protect the Canadian side of the St. Croix River Watershed, the St. Croix separating eastern Maine from New

Brunswick. This is a very large area of largely intact forest with a system of interconnected lakes and wetlands supporting a rich diversity of species. Years ago when I first heard of the concept of a corridor connecting the Gulf of Maine to the North Woods, we looked at a map showing the then conserved land from Hancock County eastward through Washington County and on to crown lands in New Brunswick. A grand vision was to adequately preserve this vast area of coastline, forests, lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands and the communities, cultures, and ways of life dependent on these natural resources. S2S is now part of this vision, but as I have pointed out, major effort goes into projects to the north and northeast.

In 1993, the St. Croix International Waterway Commission called for increased conservation to protect the ecological qualities of the watershed. Half of the watershed is now protected, but 80% of the protected land is in Maine. The Province of New Brunswick, the Peskotomuhkati First Nation, the Nature Trust of New Brunswick, and American Friends of Canadian Conservation are collaborating to protect over 50,000 acres on the New Brunswick side of the river. The project is viewed not only as a way to secure the ecosystems of a fragile region but also as a model for healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples – this latter goal perhaps especially timely for us all to consider right now.

This Canadian project is not S2S, but in a sense they connect and are both part of the bigger picture of land conservation in the northern forests of the United States and Canada.