



# First Light Community Call to Action!

## *Support the Creation of the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund*

The Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship is currently working to create a structure for the long-term administration of a fund to support Wabanaki flourishing and sovereignty on and with ancestral lands.

A small working group of non-native First Light community members is supporting this process and organizing our community in preparation for the launch of what we are provisionally calling the **Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund**. This will be a fund *run* entirely by and for Wabanaki people. It will be *funded* by annual payments from non-Wabanaki organizations who live, work, and recreate on the Wabanaki land that is now called Maine.

The work required of our Wabanaki colleagues to create this fund is substantial, and it will take time, care, and trust. To stand beside them as they do this work, and to show our collective good faith and commitment to the success of this fund, **we the non-native organizations in First Light are gathering an initial “solidarity deposit” of one million dollars over the next year.**

This solidarity deposit will be collected and held by First Light (via its fiscal sponsor, New Learning Journey) until the Wabanaki-led structure has been established, at which time 100% of the solidarity deposit will be transferred to this entity.

**We are calling on all First Light organizations to:**

- **Make a substantial contribution to the collective “solidarity deposit” by the Fall 2023.**

There's a place in this effort for every size of contribution and for every organization. You have a year to decide how your organization would like to participate in this solidarity deposit. Early commitments are welcomed and encouraged!

- **Consider including ongoing fund payments in your organization’s budget.** Over the next year, we will be working with the First Light community to set the goals for the larger, long-term fund and for how our organizations might think about ongoing payments.

**Our \$1 million solidarity deposit is only the first step toward a much larger fund.** In this first step, we’re taking a collaborative and multi-scale approach:

- \$250,000 (minimum) from non-native First Light organizations
- \$250,000 matching funds from Maine-based foundations and philanthropists
- \$500,000 matching funds from national foundations

The \$1 million solidarity deposit, generated from such wide communities of support, will serve as a launching point for further national and international-scale fundraising.

***We're already halfway there!*** Even before launching this call, we have secured pledges of \$175,000 from First Light organizations; \$125,000 from Maine foundations; and \$200,000 from national foundations.

**With your organization's participation, we will be able to present a \$1 million+ solidarity deposit to the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship by October 2023.**

### **Some Background about the Fund**

First Light organizers heard from Wabanaki communities during listening sessions in early 2022 that there is a clear need for significant funding to support, among other priorities, the work of rebuilding and deepening connection with tribal lands and sustaining care for these lands over the long-term. We also heard strong enthusiasm from many organizations in the conservation and philanthropy communities toward deepening their work on decolonization and growing their support for Wabanaki sovereignty. Projects across the continent such as the Shuumi Land Tax, Real Rent Duwamish, Wiyot Honor Tax, and Mana-hatta Fund have shown us that organizing this energy into focused commitment can generate significant resources to support Indigenous flourishing.

The vision that has now emerged, in conversation with the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship, is for **a long-term fund held by and distributed by and for Wabanaki communities, with funding coming primarily from ongoing annual contributions made by non-native First Light organizations and foundations.**

Our process moves forward in three phases:

- 1. Solidarity deposit from non-Wabanaki First Light organizations.**
- 2. Wabanaki-led development of the Fund structure.** The fund will be held and distributed in a way that is determined by Wabanaki communities via an intertribal organizing process that will be implemented by the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship. Committed non-Wabanaki people and organizations will work with Wabanaki leadership to develop parallel structures for ongoing support of the Fund.
- 3. Public launch of the Fund.** This will happen in a manner and on a timeline established by the Wabanaki Fund organizing process.

## Why Participate?

Why should non-native conservation organizations and others make a commitment of their financial resources to supporting Wabanaki health and wellbeing on the land? We believe there are strong moral and strategic reasons why you should allocate your organization's hard-earned financial resources to the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund.

### Moral Reasons:

- All of the land that has flowed into public and private conservation stewardship in the last 100+ years was directly cared for and belonged to Wabanaki people prior to colonization.
- 400 years of colonization reduced Wabanaki land holding to less than 1% of ancestral lands. Non-native conservation has come to control, own and manage 23% of the state of Maine.
- Because of the history of colonization and racism in Maine, the financial wealth and land resources that have flowed into environmentalism and conservation came directly and indirectly at the expense of Wabanaki communities.
- The Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act has failed to uphold basic human rights including hunting, water and self-determination. This aura of injustice permeates the land and all human relationships in Maine.
- As non-native people seeking a deeper connection to the landscape of Maine that we call home, our own relationship to place is greatly diminished and stunted by this history of colonization. *No one can move forward without making amends on this history.*

### Strategic Reasons:

- Do non-native scientists, conservationists, environmentalists believe they have all the answers to saving the planet? Is our western approach to protecting nature proving to be correct? Is the planet actually doing better as result of the last 100 years of western conservation? If your answer is no, then working closely with Wabanaki communities in Maine is the most direct way to bring into land management a perspective and knowledge that is more time-tested (thousands of years old) and more durable than non-native's western science.
- All of Maine will have access to knowledge that will help us to better address fire management, climate adaptability, and biodiversity conservation. Our conservation movement will grow stronger and wiser if it can embrace and center Indigenous traditional knowledge.
- Non-native organizations and communities will be able to better understand the cultural and natural history of the land we call home.

This contribution of your organization's resources to the Wabanaki Self-Determination Fund should not be driven by charity, but by a **longing for solidarity**. All people, Native and non-native, will deepen their relationships to this place now called Maine as Wabanaki communities flourish and as their connections with land and waters are restored. The land will grow healthier, and all people in Maine will benefit.

**For more information or support in advocating for this work within your organization, please contact members of the Working Group:**

Gabriela Alcalde, Elmina B. Sewall Foundation: [galcalde@sewallfoundation.org](mailto:galcalde@sewallfoundation.org), (502) 387-9492  
Jess Burton, S. ME Conservation Collaborative: [conservationcollaborative@gmail.com](mailto:conservationcollaborative@gmail.com), (207) 272-9693  
Kate Dempsey, TNC Maine, [kdempsey@tnc.org](mailto:kdempsey@tnc.org)  
Peter Forbes, First Light Learning Journey: [peter@peterforbes.org](mailto:peter@peterforbes.org), (802) 595-0711  
Ethan Miller, Land in Common: [ethan@landincommon.org](mailto:ethan@landincommon.org), (207) 754-7575  
Ellie Oldach, First Light Learning Journey: [ellie@firstlightmaine.org](mailto:ellie@firstlightmaine.org), (443) 928-9461

**To make a contribution to the First Light Solidarity Deposit please send a check with “solidarity deposit” in the memo line to:**

New Learning Journey, Inc  
700 Bragg Hill Road  
Waitsfield, VT 05673

*For more information about how to make a contribution to the fund other than via check, please contact Lauren Brady at [Lauren@firstlightmaine.org](mailto:Lauren@firstlightmaine.org).*