



## Wabanaki Island Access Reconciliation

Pilot Project 2023

“What has been forgotten and what can be remembered?” Ann Pollard Ranco

Maine’s thousands of islands are all Wabanaki places of identity, sustenance and lineage. The islands fed Wabanaki babies and hold the bones of Wabanaki ancestors. And the islands were often the earliest places of colonization, forced removal and erasure of Wabanaki story. Colonization on islands was an erasure of presence, but never of belonging. The First Light community has learned from Kuwesuwi Monihq that the return of land is experienced by Wabanaki as the return of a stolen child.

First Light comprehends the betrayal and indignity of Wabanaki people not having safe, practical, culturally appropriate access to these places and we seek to make amends. The role of nonnatives may be to secure access, ensure safety from parking to boats, feed and care for collaborators, ensure they have privacy and to the ability to reconnect on their own terms. First Light is just beginning to fully understand the sensitivity of directly providing access to places that have been at the heart of erasure. We approach this with both deep humility and commitment.

First Light is proposing, and funding, a pilot project in Downeast where nonnative collaborators will create a physical “place of reconciliation” on the mainland for Wabanaki people to safely gather in families. At this gathering place, nonnative collaborators will have food and camping space ready, as well as any supplies that are needed for a comfortable stay. Wabanaki community members who wish will be transported by boats to visit the most important Islands to them under their terms. This project is designed to be replicated in every region of coastal Maine over the coming years.

This work will raise important questions: How do all of our (Wabanaki and nonnative) relationships to these islands need to shift? What Wabanaki protocols must nonnative people respect on islands? Can we make stronger, more honest requests of each other after this experience together? How might we guide each other to a better future around Island access?

### **The 2023 Pilot Project: Little Kennebec Bay, Machiasport, Passamaquoddy Territory**

First Light seeks the collaboration of the Wabanaki Commission, the Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Office, the Sipayik Environmental Department, the Motahkomikuk Environmental Department, the full involvement of the seven-member Island Access Working Group, and the engagement of all interested First Light members to collaborate together to achieve this pilot. Together, we can do it.

First Light commits to model a process where Passamaquoddy needs and sensitivities come first. We seek Commission and Passamaquoddy Tribal staff guidance on the best way to share roles and responsibilities around this project so that Wabanaki needs and wishes are central. In addition, we propose hiring a Wabanaki community organizer in Sipayik and Motahkomikuk who can work with

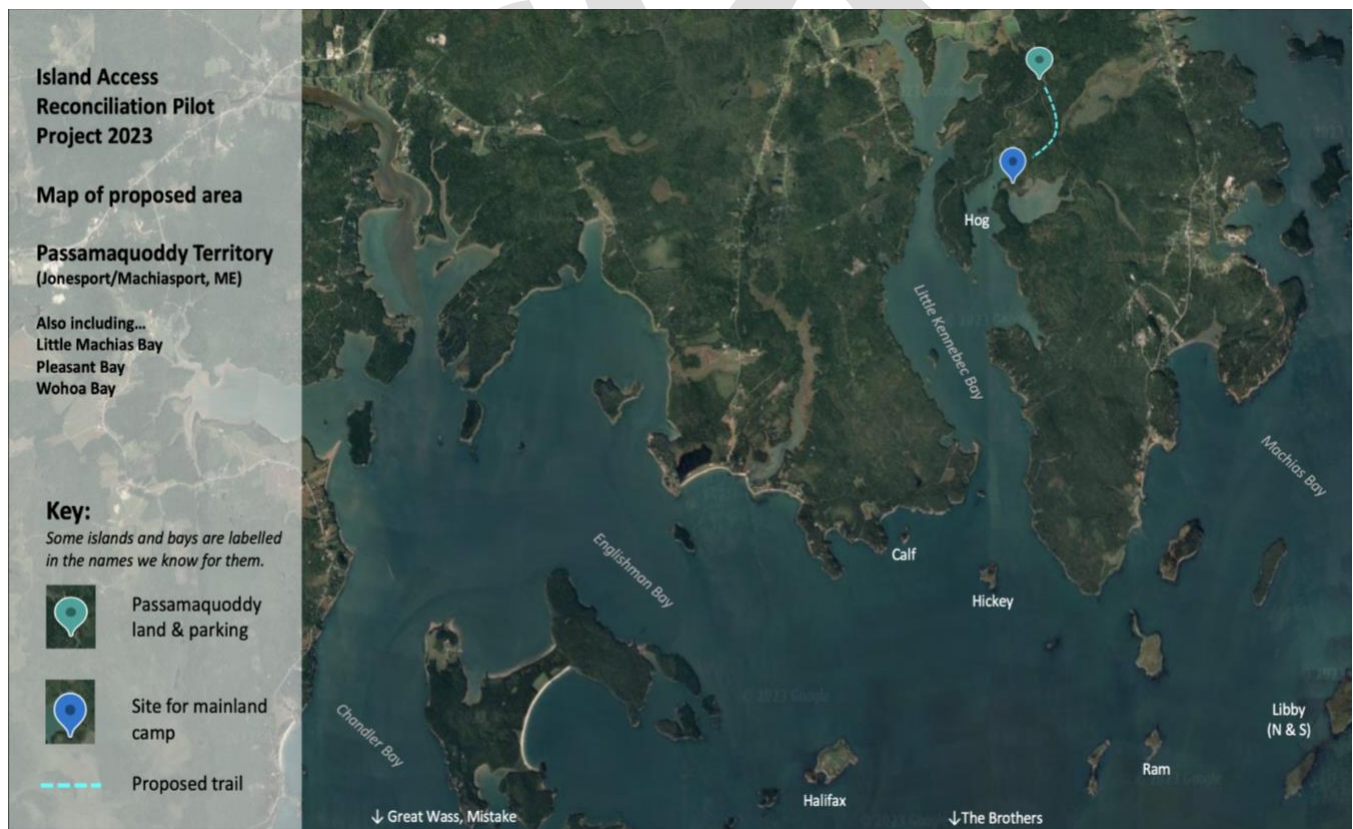
Passamaquoddy families and Tribal staff to determine what islands will be most important for Wabanaki to access and ensure Passamaquoddy families feel welcome in this space.

Nonnatives in First Light will prepare safe, practical, culturally appropriate access on the mainland. This mainland camp will include prepared food, camping gear and guidance, space for parking, boats, captains, and personal safety gear for families.

For the pilot year, we propose hosting the mainland camp on a 100-acre private holding on the tidal pond called Herons Rip, with deep water access to Little Kennebec Bay. This private holding is directly adjacent to a large blueberry barren holding of the Passamaquoddy Tribe with vehicular access.

Parking for Passamaquoddy families could be on their own land, in which case we will jointly build a trail from the Passamaquoddy parking lot to the mainland camp. Alternatively, they could park at a safe location at Duck Cove and be picked up by boat.

There are more than 20 islands that could be accessed from this location, including Halifax, Hickey, The Brothers, Ram, Hog, Calf, North Libby, South Libby, Mistake, and Great Waas This is just a starting point of potential islands, described in the settler names we know for them. As Wabanaki community members identify islands they would like to visit, nonnative collaborators will work across our networks to ensure welcome, safe visits to these or other islands.



### **Timeline for Pilot Project (2023):**

- Winter/spring: Discussions among all potential collaborators on roles and responsibilities. What are the needs and wishes of the Wabanaki Commission and the Passamaquoddy Tribe in this project? Who carries what roles in designing and carrying out this project? How do we center Wabanaki leadership? What's the role for the Island Access Working Group?
- May: If desired by Passamaquoddy Tribal staff, this is a potential time to construct a good foot trail from the Passamaquoddy blueberry barrens to Herons Rip.
- June: First Light hires a Wabanaki researcher/community organizer to work in Sipayik and Motahkomikuk to understand what islands are most important to visit and what families might be most interested.
- September: Pilot project happens over 9-10 days. 3 days of preparing the camp and readying boats, 4 days of welcoming and caring for Passamaquoddy families, 2 days debriefing together about what worked well and less well. What will we do differently to make the program more successful the next time?