

Belknap Range Conservation Coalition

**2015 Annual Report (October
2014 to October 2015)**

The Belknap Range Conservation Coalition (BRCC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the conservation of open space, responsible stewardship, and low impact public enjoyment of scenic, natural, recreational and historical resources of the Belknap Mountain Range. Participating members include individuals/conservation commission members from the project area towns of Alton, Belmont, Gilford and Gilmanton as well as dedicated individuals such as Dave Roberts who share an avid interest in the many resources that the Belknap Range provides. Conservation organizations with participating members include: UNH Cooperative Extension; Society for the Protection of NH Forests; Lakes Region Conservation Trust; Belknap County Sportsmen's Association; Belknap Range Trail Tenders (BRATTS); Gilmanton Land Trust; New England Forestry Foundation and the Belknap County Conservation District. The town of Barnstead has also supported the BRCC with a membership.

Along with working to protect the largely unfragmented natural landscape that makes up the Belknap Mountain Range, the BRCC also educates the public about the significance of the resources of the Belknap Mountain Range; develops, promotes, and implements methods and strategies for ensuring the long-term protection and responsible stewardship of these resources; and promotes opportunities for low impact public enjoyment and recreation.

The BRCC strives to facilitate cooperation and communication among conservation organizations, municipalities, other governmental entities and area landowners, and helps coalition members secure funding, technical assistance and other resources for carrying out programs in support of this mission.

During the year, the Directors met monthly at the Gilman Museum in Alton. The monthly meetings offer important opportunities for members to share information about parcels within the focus area.

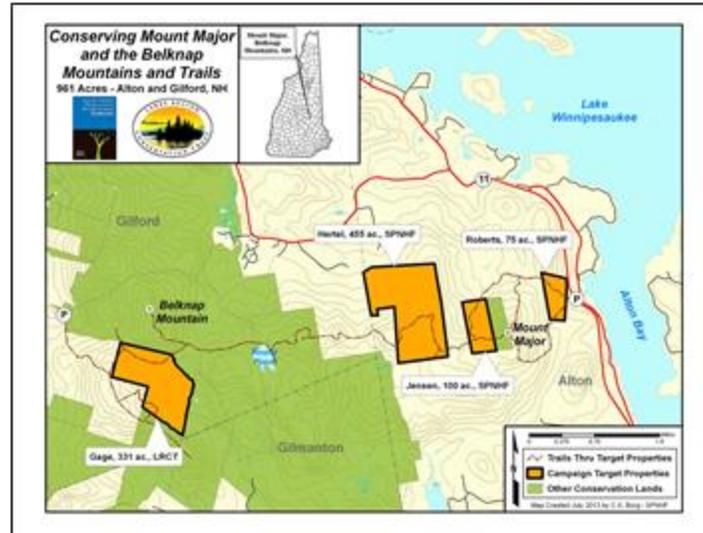
At the annual meeting in October 2015, Don Berry, John Jude, Amanda Stone and Russ Wilder were reappointed to the Board for 3-years. The current officers, Chairperson-Russ Wilder, Vice-Chairperson-Bruce Jacobs, Secretary-Lisa Morin and Treasurer-Nanci Mitchell, were also reappointed.

The most notable accomplishment this year was BRCC's continuing support of the completion of the campaign led by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF) and the Lakes Region Conservation Trust (LRCT) to conserve 4 parcels of land totaling 961 acres around Mount Major, Piper Mountain, Belknap Mountain, North Straightback and Quarry mountains. The trailhead parcel at Mount Major Petition to Quiet Title process has been completed and SPNHF expects to close on the property by the end of 2015. Pending an agreement with the Town of Alton for using the Class VI town road (Ames Road) as a trail, work can begin on improving trail conditions. The Lakes Region Conservation Trust acquired the Gilford parcel and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests acquired the three parcels in Alton. The fund raising goal was \$1.8 million and was completed in September 2014. This included land acquisition costs, transaction fees, legal expenses and surveys and some preliminary stewardship improvements. The towns of Alton and Gilford committed conservation funds in support of this project. Alton committed \$230,000 and Gilford \$110,000. The New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) also provided a grant of \$340,000.

BRCC continues to monitor management activities on the newly acquired parcels and as we continue to pursue additional conservation possibilities in the Belknap Range. BRCC directors organized a hiker education and thank you event at the Mount Major trailhead on Columbus Day weekend this year to let hikers know that the campaign was a success and what conservation efforts are continuing. BRCC had conducted a survey of hikers during the summer and fall of 2012. That information showed that hikers were from all over the United States and the world! We estimate that perhaps 80,000 people climb Mount

Major every year with the busiest time being Columbus Day Weekend (~4,000 hikers). The next step, in conjunction with the Forest Society and other stakeholders, is to develop a management plan that will improve the outdoor experience on the acquired parcels and to address impacts to the trail system that has seen so much heavy use over all these years.

We expect that another parcel in the Belknap Mountains Focus Area will be permanently conserved in late 2015 with the purchase by the Lakes Region Conservation Trust of 87.5 acres of land on Guinea Ridge Rd. in Gilmanton, encompassing part of a significant wetland and perennial stream resource, including land identified as having the Highest Ranked Habitat in NH (2010 Wildlife Action Plan), and contiguous to other conserved lands totaling over 7,000 acres.



Other activities/items of interest include:

- BRCC continued to maintain the Kiosk at the Mount Major Parking Lot.
- Don Hughes continued as Webmaster to maintain the website (belknarange.org) and has been doing a great job.
- Assisting with Stewardship issues and working with the BRATTs who have volunteered time to work on trail rebuilding and maintenance
- Supporting Prospect Mountain High School students who have worked on removing graffiti
- Continued to support working with landowners on conservation

For more information on the BRCC, please contact the Belknap Range Conservation Coalition at PO Box 151, Gilmanton IW, NH 03837 or email us at info@belknarange.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell J. Wilder
Chair