

Summer 2025

# SEBAGO IN DEPTH

Water, Land, Community



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# PWD'S LAND OWNERSHIP STORY:

## Providing public access while protecting drinking water



**By Nate Whalen**

*Water Resources Specialist Nate Whalen can be reached at [nwhalen@pwd.org](mailto:nwhalen@pwd.org)*

*"Water has a voice. It reveals to those downstream who you are and how you care for the land."*

– Bernie McGurl, Lackawanna River Corridor Association

Our predecessors at the Portland Water District (PWD) recognized the vital connection between land and water and the importance of managing land use near the water intake pipes to ensure clean drinking water. PWD's history of acquiring land to safeguard drinking water began in the early 1900s, resulting in over 2,500 acres of land ownership near the water intakes, including nine miles of shoreline along Sebago Lake.

### Early Milestones



**1923 photo of former Dupont box shop located in Smith Mills, Standish, Maine**

sewage was observed flowing into the lake, which created an "intolerable stench." The E. I. Dupont Company sold the sawmill and its surrounding buildings to PWD in the 1920s for \$90,000 (\$1.6 million in today's dollars).

The 100-acre Smith Mills parcel was acquired in 1923. Old reports refer to a sawmill and an ammunition box manufacturing operation located on the property, noting that raw

sewage was observed flowing into the lake, which created an "intolerable stench." In the decades after the 1913 Maine Legislature enacted a law to protect the water supply by prohibiting bathing within two miles of the water intake pipes, PWD acquired two additional properties. PWD acquired Indian Island in 1923 from a colony of Broadway performers who summered on the island during the teens and twenties. Additionally, the 170-acre Otter Ponds parcel was acquired in 1935 from the Portland Sebago Ice Company.

There are still some properties around Lower Bay that PWD would like to own to better protect the drinking water. Today, land around Lower Bay is purchased only from willing sellers at fair market value and the owners of these properties, now fewer than ten, have been notified in case they choose to sell.

### Being Good Neighbors While Protecting Water Quality

PWD established the Sebago Lake Land Reserve in 2015 to clarify the rules for use of the land around Lower Bay and to establish a system for allowing public access. This change prohibits access to only the land closest to the water intakes while making less-sensitive land open to the public.

Approximately 1,700 acres of land and 14 miles of trails are now available for lake-friendly recreational use, including hiking, mountain biking, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and more. Access to the land is granted through a series of 13 permit kiosks located at various



**Biking on the Sebago Lake Land Reserve**



trailheads, where maps of the trails are also available. Visit [pwd.org/sebago-lake-land-reserve/](http://pwd.org/sebago-lake-land-reserve/) to find a trail to explore.

In 2012, PWD and the town of Standish reached an agreement to develop a piece of PWD-owned land off



**Rich Memorial Beach**

Harmon's Beach Road into Rich Memorial Beach. This beach area was then developed by the town and features a swimming area, picnic facilities, access for paddleboards and kayaks in the summer, ice fishing access in the winter, and restroom facilities. It opened in 2017 for Standish residents who purchase a \$35 parking permit.

In 2018, PWD and the town of Standish also collaborated on the Sebago Lake scenic overlook. As part of a Department of Transportation reconstruction project along Route 35 through Standish, a parking lot was created to provide a view of Sebago Lake. From this vantage point, looking northwest from Lower Bay, one can see over 50 miles to Mount Washington on clear days.



While strategies for protecting the water supply have evolved over the years, the core principles remain unchanged. Maintaining a healthy forest provides natural water treatment. It serves to buffer and filter contaminants flowing off the land and into the water. And a healthy forest also provides many recreational opportunities for residents of Standish and other visitors.



## PWD STAFF PROFILE

**Chad Thompson**  
Source Protection Coordinator

As the Source Protection Coordinator at Portland Water District, Chad Thompson coordinates the four water resources specialists who implement projects and initiatives designed to monitor and protect the water quality of Sebago Lake.

Chad began working for PWD as a 19-year-old temporary summer employee after his sophomore year of college. He studied biology and chemistry in college as a pre-med major. Still, his work as a summer employee was the precursor to his role as a water resources specialist and his current role as the group's coordinator.

When asked how things have changed, Chad says, "I am much older and hopefully a little wiser. I feel the experience of working for PWD for so many years has allowed me to dial in a foundation of knowledge that helps guide lake protection efforts in a realistic and effective way. Many things have changed at PWD, but fortunately, the one constant has been my ability to work as part of a team of conscientious and knowledgeable scientists passionate about protecting the lake. The best parts of my 27-year career at PWD have been the people and the mission."

Chad has many stories about the old days at PWD but most are best shared as tall tales rather than being put into writing. He will gladly spin a few stories if you catch up with him in the watershed.

When asked what advice he would give future water resources specialists, he said, "My advice is more general, and it's what I try to teach my kids daily. A strong work ethic and being true to yourself will get you where you want to go. Never be afraid to think outside of the box, and actively think of ways to improve things or take them to the next level. If you make a mistake, own it outright. Your integrity is the foundation of your credibility. A big part of success in anything you do is convincing others that your mission is honest and credible. If you're convinced yourself, it's contagious."

# WHAT'S MAKING WAVES: Around Sebago Lake



## Gravel Road Workshop – Thursday, July 31st | 1-5 p.m. | Standish

Do you live on a gravel road on Sebago Lake? Whether you call it a dirt road, camp road, or gravel road, this workshop is for you. Learn the basics of road construction and maintenance and get all of your gravel road questions answered by state experts. Learn how to maintain your road to protect water quality and save time and money! This workshop consists of a 2-hour talk and a 2-hour field visit to a nearby gravel road. All are welcome.

For more info  
and to register  
**SCAN HERE:**



## Demonstrating Water Quality Protection

The Sebago Lake Protection Office at 1 White Rock Road in Standish serves as your hub for landscaping inspiration! If you live on the lake and want to protect water quality or are dealing with water issues but don't know where to start, our office grounds have demonstrations of lake-friendly techniques like rubber razors, a rain garden, and infiltration steps. This year, we've added three new practices, funded in part by the USEPA under Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act. Stop by to pick up a self-guided tour brochure and see the possibilities!



## Submit your photos!

We invite you to submit your photos for the 2026 Sebago Lake to Casco Bay Calendar. Send us scenic photos of Sebago Lake, a tributary of Sebago Lake, the Presumpscot River, or Casco Bay. The photo submission deadline is July 31, 2025. For more details about photo submission, visit [pwd.org/sebago-lake-to-casco-bay-calendar/](http://pwd.org/sebago-lake-to-casco-bay-calendar/)



## Woods Hole Testing Undersea Navigation Systems in Sebago's Clear and Deep Waters

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Falmouth, MA, completed testing on a small robotic autonomous underwater vehicle (REMUS 600) in Sebago Lake this spring. The project was designed to test the undersea navigation system with pre-deployed subsurface beacons. Sebago Lake was chosen as a test site because of the water's depth and clarity.





*The state fish hatchery located in Casco rears landlocked salmon, brown trout, brook trout, and rainbow trout. Steve's 35-year career has involved supporting PWD's TroutKids program, where students raise brook trout in a classroom tank while learning about clean water.*

### Describe what the job of a fish culturist is like.

**Steve:** It's an exciting job because no two days are the same. There is a lot to do because I'm responsible for the fish themselves and all the equipment needed to raise and transport them for stocking. You have to be a jack-of-all-trades. I also get to meet so many really nice people. If you like to fish you are always happy to see us arrive with a truck full of them.

### Is there a busy and not busy season?

**Steve:** Spring and fall are particularly busy. We stock fish each spring and fall, plus in the fall, we're spawning fish for the next generation of fish. Between spring and fall, we are caring for all the fish as well as maintaining our trucks, equipment, and facilities. The equipment ranges from full-sized trucks to containers we wear on our backs for stocking at remote sites. We're on the road a lot because we are the only hatchery in Maine raising rainbow trout and occasionally releasing them to very northern lakes. I get to see a lot of Maine, and sometimes I get home long after midnight.

## PROFILE OF A SEBAGO PROTECTOR

**Steve Tremblay**  
Fish Culture Supervisor,  
Maine Department of Inland  
Fisheries and Wildlife

### When did you know this is what you wanted to do?

**Steve:** I have a degree in business, and I started out in sales right after college. About 35 years ago, a friend and I were fishing in upstate New York, and we stopped by a hatchery where every bit of the operation interested me. I think we were there for two hours and saw the whole thing. I left there knowing it was what I wanted to do. I set my mind on that and spent the next year looking for opportunities. I got a permanent, seasonal position here in Maine and lived in my camper with my dog for three seasons before I got a year-round position. I've since been promoted to the supervisor position. I wouldn't want to do anything else.

### Talk about the work IF&W is doing with PWD and why it's important.

**Steve:** For many years we have provided fish to Portland Water District and Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District to support your TroutKids program. I believe the work with schools and young people is really important so the kids learn about the fishery and also share that with their parents. I love the family connection because it was my dad who taught me to fish. He's 86 now, and I still remember those experiences. Many people don't really know the hatcheries exist and what we do to support the fishery. When they find out they are grateful and support us. It really sticks with a lot of kids. It might even give one of them the idea that this is a job they may want to pursue. I wish I knew about it when I was young.

### What's your favorite thing about your job?

**Steve:** I love that each day is different and poses new challenges. I love fixing things and there's always something. I start with a plan and adapt as needed to what comes up. And I really love the people I meet. We are doing a good thing – building and supporting the fishery. Fishing makes people happy. One day I watched a boy catch a really nice salmon. You should have seen the thrill on his face. I had been stocking there just a day before so I'm sure it was our work that provided him with that opportunity. How many jobs give you that kind of experience?

### Can you tell us an unusual story about your work around Sebago Lake?

**Steve:** I used to stock fish off the ferry to Frye Island. One year I spent a day with the Commissioner of IF&W who wanted to see the Sebago Lake operation so I rode with him on the ferry and released fish to the lake. He was a really great guy and it was nice to be seen doing what we do. Oh, and years ago an air boat sank in the lake, and I spent a day helping the warden's service retrieve the boat. That was an adventure.

### What would you want people to know about the state of the Sebago Lake fishery?

**Steve:** Sebago Lake is a legendary lake and everyone has a story. I've heard it all, good and bad. As far as the coming year goes, all I'll say is last fall when we were collecting brood stock from the Jordan River at Panther Run, I saw more salmon than I ever have. That's in 35 years! In a typical year we might trap 150 or 200 salmon there to harvest eggs. Last year we trapped 487 fish. The fish looked great and there were a lot of them, so I expect a good year.

# SEBAGO LAKE STEWARDS:

## A Community Connected by Water



**By Carina Brown**

*Water Resources Specialist Carina Brown can be reached at [cbrown@pwd.org](mailto:cbrown@pwd.org)*

The Portland Water District implements programs that have immediate and long-term impacts to safeguarding the drinking water for Greater Portland. That work is

made easier by some of Sebago Lake's natural features that contribute to its excellent water quality. These include being very deep, its immense size, and having a primarily forested watershed. While the depth and size are not likely to change noticeably in our lifetimes, the amount and health of forests around it could certainly vary.

The percentage of the watershed that remains forested plays a significant role in the long-term health of Sebago Lake's water quality. Studies indicate that if the watershed drops below 76% forested, we will see measurable signs of water quality decline in Sebago Lake – more algae and harmful bacteria, less clear water, and warmer temperatures. Development in the watershed could happen quickly due to its proximity to Greater Portland. The land is 84% forested, but only 16% of those forests are protected from development through conservation. This is what has motivated us to support land trusts with forest conservation efforts and also to encourage stewardship among woodland owners.

While our involvement with forest conservation began in 2000, supporting woodland owners with their forest stewardship has a shorter history. In 2017, we began brainstorming how we could effectively engage with all the woodland owners whose forests protect Sebago Lake. The benefits of forests to Sebago Lake are numerous. By allowing trees to grow, their forests drop leaves and pine needles and entangle root systems with soil, which provide filtration and erosion prevention as



Photo by: Sebago Clean Waters

runoff moves through the land. And not just that, the woods also serve as a scenic backdrop for our rural communities, provide wildlife habitat, and most allow access for

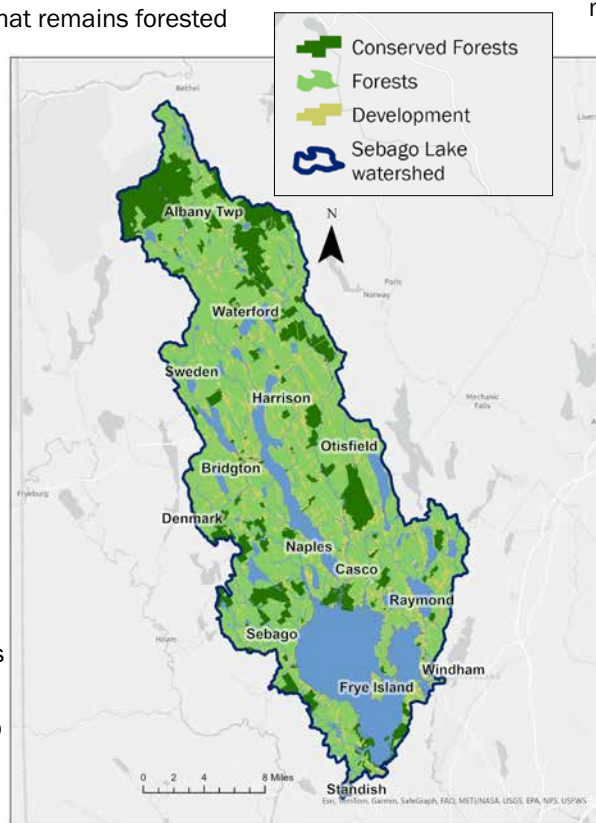
hunting, fishing, and other types of recreation integral to the Maine way of life.

With our partners, Lakes Environmental Association and Sebago Clean Waters, we've held Woodland Owner Appreciation Day each fall since 2018 to acknowledge the

many benefits forests provide, with an emphasis on water quality protection. Maine Forest Service, Maine Audubon, Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, land trusts, foresters, and other organizations attend so they can connect with woodland owners. Woodland owners walk forested trails with these resource professionals and learn, socialize, and connect. We offer raffle prizes, lunch, and donated craft beverages made from Sebago Lake water to show appreciation. We've held the event at a new location each year so that we can showcase various approaches to land management that exemplify stewardship.

Sebago Lake watershed forests produce clean, cold, naturally filtered water in all of the rivers, lakes, and ponds that they surround, which eventually flow to Sebago Lake. The

cold-water fisheries, campfire sunsets, swimming at dawn, the call of the loon – it would all be quite different or maybe impossible if the lake bloomed green with algae. Although it encompasses parts of 24 towns, the Sebago Lake watershed is a broader community where water connects you and these woodland owners. We hope you'll care for the lake's water as your community members upstream have.





# 7 YEARS of Woodland Owner Appreciation Day



**Check out what our lake protection partners are planning! Supporting their work helps protect Sebago Lake.**

## LEA PADDLE BATTLE | Saturday, July 5th Highland Lake, Bridgton



Race with paddle boards and single kayaks on 2K or 5K courses on Highland Lake. All proceeds from this event will benefit the

Lakes Environmental Association, a non-profit regional lakes association dedicated to preserving and protecting lakes. Enjoy Maine's pristine inland waters from the vantage point of a paddler! **Register and more info:** [mainelakes.org/paddlebattle](https://mainelakes.org/paddlebattle)

## LELT'S TREK FOR THE TRAILS September 1 – October 31

Get out on any trail of your choosing and log your miles of walking, biking, rolling, or hiking to support Loon Echo Land Trust. LELT receives \$1 from local business sponsors for each of your miles. Funds go directly to building and maintaining LELT's Lake Region trails systems. **Register and more info:** [lelt.org/trek](https://lelt.org/trek)

## WFLT'S NORWAY TRIATHLON Saturday, July 12th

The event is a United States Triathlon sanctioned sprint triathlon that combines swimming, bicycle riding, and running. All proceeds will benefit Western Foothills Land Trust to support their mission of the conservation and preservation of native ecosystems, farm and forest lands, watersheds, and scenic landscapes for the benefit of wild and human communities in western Maine. Open to individuals and teams 18+. **Register and more info:** [wflmaine.org/norway-triathlon](https://wflmaine.org/norway-triathlon)

## MLT'S MONARCH FEST Sunday, August 24 | Bethel

Join Mahoosuc Land Trust for the Monarch Festival, a two-day celebration of the incredibly diverse natural world that



surrounds us! This family-friendly event promises fun and educational activities for all ages. **Register and more info:** [mahoosuc.org/events-calendar](https://mahoosuc.org/events-calendar)



# SEBAGO LAKECAPING

Improve your property and protect the lake!



## Is your property within 250 feet of Sebago Lake or one of its tributaries?

PWD provides free site visits and reports on how to make your property more attractive and lake friendly.

**Bigger grants now available!** Private landowners may now be eligible for a Lakescaping Grant of up to \$1,500 (but no more than 50% of the total project cost). Associations, municipalities, businesses, or other groups may be eligible for a matching grant of up to \$2,500.

If your property is within 250 feet of Sebago Lake or the Crooked River, Songo River, Muddy River, North West River, Panther Run, Rich Mill Outlet, Smith Mill, Sticky River, or Standish Brook, contact us at [sebagolake@pwd.org](mailto:sebagolake@pwd.org) to set up a free consultation and get started!



**CONNECT**  
WITH PWD'S SEBAGO  
LAKE PROTECTORS

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printer to add their  
FSC logo.