

Damariscotta River Association & Pemaquid Watershed Association

A Case for Unification

I. Purpose

On January 18, 2018, the Damariscotta River Association (DRA) and the Pemaquid Watershed Association (PWA) executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), a working agreement whereby the two organizations agreed to work toward a collaboration to enhance the common missions, programs and goals of land conservation, environmental education and preservation of water quality in the geographic areas currently served by the two organizations.

The MOU represented a non-legally binding expression of good faith intent for DRA and PWA to collaborate to minimize duplication of efforts, promote economies of scale and maximize efficient use of resources to improve ecosystems on the Pemaquid Peninsula and the Damariscotta River and adjacent lands.

It is the intent of the DRA and the PWA to work cooperatively, in good faith; to act and plan collaboratively; to think and act strategically; and to work with openness and transparency toward creating a formal collaborative relationship of benefit to both organizations, their members, partners and the community.

II. Background

Both DRA and PWA share a common interest in the conservation of land and water resources on the Pemaquid Peninsula and in the greater Damariscotta River region.

Founded in 1966 as the Biscay Pond Association, PWA has worked since that time to “conserve the natural resources of the Pemaquid Peninsula through land and water stewardship and education,” becoming a land trust in 1988.

Today, PWA owns 14 preserves, has conservation easements on 14 properties in 6 towns and manages the Bristol Recreation Trail for the town of Bristol. The geographic focus of PWA’s land conservation efforts is the Pemaquid River Watershed, and its many other programs benefit the surrounding area as well. From Beachcomber’s Rest at Pemaquid Beach to Keep America Beautiful (KAB), LakeSmart and courtesy boat inspections along with water quality testing, among many other programs, PWA educates and serves communities beyond the boundaries of its watershed.

Seven years later, in 1973, DRA was founded to “preserve and promote the natural, cultural and historical heritage of the Damariscotta River and adjacent areas for the benefit of all.”

DRA now holds more than 40 properties in fee simple along with more than 40 conservation easements in eight towns. The land trust component of DRA's work focuses on properties adjacent to the Great Salt Bay, Damariscotta River and John's Bay, but has at times included properties as far east as Muscongus Bay and as far west as the Marsh River. Educational programs at DRA serve students from Old Orchard Beach to Lincolnville, more than 3,500 students in 2017. Volunteer programs from water quality testing to horseshoe crab monitoring and Trail Tamers engage more than 200 volunteers each year.

DRA and PWA have a long history of partnering to conserve critical lands, the high point of which was and continues to be the Crooked Farm project. In the early days, DRA and PWA had even co-located, sharing an office with the Damariscotta Lake Watershed Association as well.

Beginning in early October 2017, DRA and PWA expressed a mutual interest in exploring a more formal arrangement of collaboration between the two organizations. As a result of this common interest, DRA and PWA began a series of exploratory meetings.

On October 25, 2017, the DRA (represented by Steven Hufnagel, DRA Executive Director and Joel Russ, President of the DRA Board of Trustees) met with the PWA (represented by former PWA Executive Director, Jennifer Hicks, and PWA Board President, Sandi Day). The meeting concluded with a commitment to continue discussions toward some form of expanded collaboration.

On November 15, 2017, DRA and PWA held a second meeting, attended by Steven Hufnagel, Joel Russ, DRA Board Secretary, Carolyn McKeon, Sandi Day and PWA board members Mike Kane, Jim Hatch and Peter Lawrence.

It was agreed at that meeting that further discussions would be scheduled and that DRA would draft an MOU that could, if approved by both organizations, serve as an outline for ongoing discussions and a potential formal working relationship between the two organizations.

On January 8, 2018, the DRA Board of Trustees unanimously approved the MOU and on January 11, 2018, the PWA Board of Directors also unanimously approved the MOU.

On January 18, 2018, the approved MOU was formally executed by the President of the DRA Board of Trustees and the Chair of the PWA Board of Directors. DRA Board member Joy Vaughan also joined the Collaboration Working Group

As a result of the MOU, DRA and PWA agreed to work together to explore organizational structures that could enhance collaborative efforts between the two organizations, in support of their complementary land and water conservation missions, goals and programs.

Three collaboration scenarios were identified by the Collaboration Working Group and were shared with the respective boards: #1 Joint Projects, Shared Staff and Co-Location; #2 Maintenance of Existing Organizations with Overarching Coordinating Body; #3 Unification.

Unification Agreement

Following several more meetings among the Collaboration Working Group, in February, March, April and May of 2018, a proposed Unification Agreement was drafted and circulated among the governing bodies of both organizations. This document was essentially an extension and broadening of our ongoing efforts.

On June 7, 2018, the PWA Board of Directors unanimously approved the Unification Agreement and on June 11, 2018, the DRA Executive Committee unanimously voted to recommend to the full Board of Trustees approval of the Agreement, subject to member ratification.

Both organizations have also scheduled general informational meetings for members and other interested parties on June 19, 2018 to present our collaboration planning efforts, to answer questions and to elicit ideas and thoughts from interested parties.

On June 25, 2018, the DRA Board of Trustees will meet in a special session to vote on the Agreement.

Finally, no later than September, 30, 2018, the membership of both organizations will have an opportunity to formally express their sentiments for the proposed unification by voting on a proposed board of directors/trustees and by-laws, for implementation, if approved, on January 15, 2019, contingent on satisfactory due diligence.

Why Unification?

1. Inter-connectedness of land and waters: Over the years, DRA and PWA have focussed their land conservations efforts on two significant watersheds (Pemaquid and Damariscotta) that are inter-connected; intermingling lands and watersheds that both converge in the waters of the Gulf of Maine.

To quote a message from a DRA member in response to the public announcement that the DRA and PWA were exploring enhanced collaboration:

“The Damariscotta River watershed and Pemaquid River watershed are so close to my heart and beloved by so many people I know. I see no problem in the strengthening of the collaboration between the two great organizations. First thought is to protect, save and honor nature in its great beauty and glory. How amazing it is to have two beautiful watersheds flowing side by side to the great Gulf of Maine, a place of great history and natural resources.”

DRA Board member and Lead Ecologist for The Wilderness Society, Pete McKinley, prepared a thoughtful description of the interconnectedness of the Damariscotta/Pemaquid watersheds, which is available upon request.

2. Common Missions, Goals and Programs: A careful review and inventory of the missions, goals and programs of the organizations indicates that there is an uncommon alignment that suggests significant potential for coordinated efforts, including joint land purchases, common education programs and a unified fresh/salt water quality program.

3. Common Memberships and Volunteers: Two hundred and five (205) individuals and/or households are members of both DRA and PWA. These represent about 20% of the DRA membership

and 30% of the PWA membership by household. These overlapping memberships indicate that there is broad community interest in the work of both organizations and the geographic areas the two organizations serve.

There are also many individuals who volunteer for both organizations as “trail tamers”, water quality monitors and land stewards.

4. Shared Values; Community-Based and Volunteer Driven: Throughout their respective histories, both organizations have been community-based and volunteer driven. The cultures of the organizations, therefore, appear to be similar, which should lead to successful collaborations.

5. Enhanced Program Effectiveness: While a precise financial analysis or joint budgeting exercise has not been conducted, it appears that enhanced collaboration could lead to improved cost efficiencies and program effectiveness while still remaining local in nature.

- If the organizations could develop a joint, coordinated water quality program, duplication of effort could be eliminated while a more comprehensive, salt/fresh water quality program could be established, using the combined professional expertise of DRA and PWA and the volunteers of both organizations.
- The organizations currently have a total of 15 separate education programs, many of which have overlapping purposes. Working together and coordinating these education programs to serve the students of our region would offer enhanced conservation education benefits to the community.
- If the organizations should decide to share space and staff, there are immediate opportunities for cost-savings and close collaborative work.

6. Advances Existing Successful Collaborative Efforts: Over the years, DRA and PWA have worked successfully together to achieve common conservation objectives. The Crooked Farm Preserve is a perfect example. In 2002, the two organizations entered into a formal agreement whereby the PWA would hold the land in fee simple, while DRA would hold the easement and each would co-manage the property. It has been a successful collaboration which demonstrates that the two organizations have had and could collaborate successfully in the future.

More recently, the two organizations completed a joint venture whereby a critically important Pemaquid River land parcel was purchased and conserved in perpetuity. PWA accepted a major donation and DRA provided short-term bridge financing to achieve the mutually desirable result.