

CURRENTS & COMMUNITIES

FALL 2024



OUR MISSION

We promote and steward our water trail and support communities, waterways and paddling across the Northern Forest.

OUR VISION

An unrivaled network of paddling opportunities across the Northern Forest will inspire ongoing experiences and stories, enticing people to fall in love with the region. Their passion and commitment will contribute to the health of our communities, landscapes and waterways.

OUR BOARD

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Noah Pollock, Trail Director
Alex Delhagen, Assistant Trail Director
Chris Morris, Communications Director
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Facebook: @paddlenfct
Instagram & TikTok: @northernforestcanoetrail
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Cover photo: 2023 NFCT thru-paddlers Robert & Katrina Luff set out on another beautiful day on the canoe trail. (Photo provided by Katrina Luff.)

Learning the Ropes

During my first summer as board chair for the NFCT, I had a chance to see our events up close. While I wasn't surprised by the work of our staff, which juggles a dizzying array of logistical details every summer, I was surprised by the incredible volunteerism on display.

At the first-ever Rangeley Oquossoc Adventure Rendezvous, there were many volunteers from the local community who weren't paddlers. Rather, they were residents of the Rangeley area — first responders, camp owners and others who were proud to have this race come to their community and experience this special part of the world.

A few weeks later on the Rapid River near Lake Umbagog, I met volunteers who took a full weekend out of their busy summers to give back to the paddling community. And while they might never use those stream crossings or the new privy on the famed Carry Road portage, they enthusiastically helped build things that others will use. Instead of, "How does this help me?" there was a feeling of, "What can I do to help others in the paddling world?"

Finally, at the 90-Miler, I met many volunteers who just wanted to be part of this iconic event. They may not have the training base, Vo2MAX or shoulders to do a 90-mile race, but they were all in on three long days of helping out and being part of something that unites this community.

I hope when you see notices from NFCT about next year's work trips, races and other events, you'll consider volunteering. You may be surprised at how much you enjoy it!

— Warren Whitney, Chair

CONNECTING YOUTH TO THE NORTHERN FOREST

Stewardship of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail goes far beyond building campsites and maintaining portage trails. It also requires fostering a love of paddling and the outdoors with people from all walks of life — especially the next generation.

The NFCT's board and staff have a longstanding commitment to investing in young paddlers. For over 15 years, the Northern Forest Explorers (NFE) program has facilitated backcountry canoe trips for kids in the four states the trail connects. By providing scholarship dollars and working with local guides, the NFCT has helped hundreds of kids discover the natural world.

This season, NFE branched out even further by partnering with Teens to Trails of Maine to establish Teens to NFCT, a multi-year program that features nine trips taking young paddlers across the entire Maine section of the canoe trail. Initial trips took place in 2023 and 2024, with the final three slated for the NFCT's 25th anniversary next year.

“Part of stewardship is recognizing that we won’t be here forever,” said NFCT Executive Director Karrie Thomas. “On one level, these trips aren’t about anything more than helping kids have a blast and gain confidence out in the wild. In the long term, however, they create a sense of ownership and responsibility among the next generation of paddlers.”

In addition to expanded NFE outings, the NFCT also teamed with Matt Burnett Guiding, Paul Smith’s College, St. Regis Canoe Outfitters, Adirondack Lakes & Trails Outfitters and NRS to host the first-ever Adirondack Youth Paddling Symposium, an idea born from conversations with local outfitters and guides as well as parents.



Matt Burnett, right, demonstrates how to use an old-fashioned can opener to a participant at the Adirondack Youth Paddling Symposium.



Youth navigate a portage in the Allagash Wilderness Waterway in Maine, part of a Northern Forest Explorers trip hosted in summer 2024. (Photo by Matt Burnett.)

“Over the years, we’ve learned that not every kid feels comfortable diving in to a week in the backcountry,” said Matt Burnett, a guide who has run NFE programs for over a decade. “The Symposium introduced a way to teach basic skills in a more controlled environment.”

Twenty kids age 8-15 participated in year one, with parents offering glowing reviews. The NFCT will bring back the program in 2025. To learn more about NFE, Teens to NFCT and the Youth Symposium, contact Karrie Thomas at karrie@northernforestcanoetrail.org.

A RECORD-SETTING STEWARDSHIP SEASON

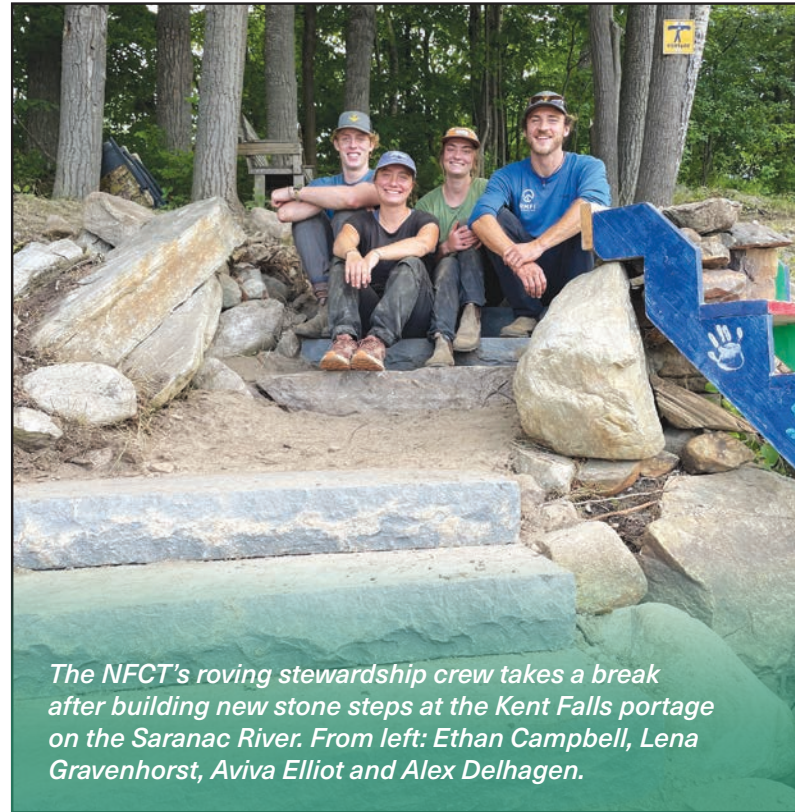
By Noah Pollock, NFCT Trail Director

Forget the Olympics — 2024 was a record-setting stewardship season for the NFCT! Thanks to new state partnerships, increased staffing and strong support from volunteers and donors, we completed more stewardship projects in 2024 than in any other year in our organization's history.

Alex Delhagen, our assistant trail director, led this year's roving crew. Alex joined our team last winter, quickly picking up and running the complex juggling of our program. Alex worked with two stewardship interns, Aviva Elliot and Ethan Campbell, as well Lena Gravenhorst, an international volunteer who joined us for much of the season.

In Vermont, projects included overhauling the Guildhall portage and access on the Upper Connecticut River, restoring Lamoille River portage trails and constructing a new access point along the Missisquoi River near Richford.

On Lake Champlain, the crew repaired Valcour Island's Cross Island Trail. Not too far away in the Saranac headwaters, they rehabilitated a campsite as well as the Lower Locks Carry between the Second Pond Channel and Oseetah Lake, replaced a boardwalk and installed a floating dock at the Five Fahls Campsite, and upgraded the Kent Falls carry trails along the Saranac River. In Maine, the roving crew converted two pit privies into composting designs at the Cedar Stump campsite on the Rapid River and established a new campsite on Moosehead Lake.



The NFCT's roving stewardship crew takes a break after building new stone steps at the Kent Falls portage on the Saranac River. From left: Ethan Campbell, Lena Gravenhorst, Aviva Elliot and Alex Delhagen.



The NFCT's Allagash crew works to stabilize an eroding bank at Scofield Cove with an assist from Sylvan, an aspiring stewardship intern.

Our newly-minted Allagash Crew, led by former intern Ethan Israel, included four interns: Nick Hall, Audrey Michener, Evan Dietter and Henry Lopez. The crew, based on Churchill Lake, braved remote roads, rain and waves while successfully completing a suite of improvements to the iconic campsites on the lake. Projects included installing dozens of stone steps, restoring extensive eroded banks, establishing level tent pads and constructing an accessible campsite. A hallmark project transformed the failing, ripped bank at the Scofield Cove campsite with an innovative, ecologically sensitive

“living” design incorporating stone, logs, soil and native plants. I’m so proud of the crew’s efforts and dedication this summer, and hope this season’s work sets the stage for future success.

We ran seven volunteer work weekends — another record — with 85 people providing the two crews with much appreciated reinforcement and camaraderie. Alex also coordinated additional river cleanups along the Lamoille River, focusing on restoring conditions after extensive 2023 and 2024 floods. Thank you to all that joined us this season!

Quantity isn’t everything. The work I’m most proud of highlights our unique expertise in tackling challenging projects at the interface of land and water. A changing climate is making waterway stewardship more complex and humbling than ever. Thanks to all that support this work. See you in 2025!

Learn more about our stewardship: email noah@northernforestcanoetrail.org.

2025 Stewardship Partners

Allagash Wilderness Waterway
Lamoille River Paddlers’ Trail
Steering Committee
Lake Champlain Basin Program
Maine Appalachian Mountain Club
Maine Bureau of Public Lands
Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
Neil & Louise Tillotson Fund
New York State Department of
Environmental Conservation
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation:
Upper Connecticut River Mitigation &
Enhancement Fund
Northern Waters Outfitters
Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust
Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge
Upper Missisquoi & Trout Rivers
Wild & Scenic Committee
Vermont Outdoor Recreation
Economic Collaborative
Vermont Watershed Grant Program



Thank You to Our Volunteers

Amanda Barker • Anders Morley • Anne Ingerson • Ann Eiseman • Anne O’Shea • Asa Nijensohn • Bill Conner
Bob Lagrander • Brian Dolloff • Brian Lynch • Brittany Durgin • Bryon Rosenberg • Callie Willis • Cassandra Shaffer
Chip Kimball • Damian Privitera • David Brown • David Casey • Delia Lagrander • Denis Caron • Eileen Liseno
Emily Zimmermann • Eric McIntyre • Gerry Sawyer • Henry Mears • Jean Hubbell • Jeanine Libby • Jeff McCabe
Jennifer Ward • Jim Farrell • Jim Sausville • John Freeman • John Marona • Joseph Geronimo
Katherine Kasacek • Kelly Lagrander • Leah Hilliard • Leonard A. Weiss • Margaret Curtis • Mark Joyce
Martin Hatcher • Marty Hilliard • Melissa Dolloff • Mike Zimmermann • Nicholas Samek • Pamela Mitchell
Paul Glasscock • Peter Kaurup • Peter Roderick • Randall Hamilton • Robert Beirman • Robert Liseno
Samuel Nijensohn • Sarah Meixell • Sven Lee • Taylor Hamilton • Teddy Lagrander • Thomas McCleary
Wendy Kuceyeski • William Burns • William Eiseman

NFCT EVENTS: CELEBRATING CONNECTIONS, OLD & NEW

This past season was our busiest yet on the event front. Beginning in April with our first film festival and continuing all the way through the end of September with our final river cleanup, our staff, board and volunteers worked hard to connect paddlers and communities.

In Maine, we hosted the first-ever Rangeley Oquossoc Adventure Rendezvous, establishing a two-day, 40-mile stage race in one of the state's most picturesque settings. In New York and Vermont, we worked with local partners to host community paddles, helping paddlers make new friends and explore new waters. Our races attracted a diverse array of competitors, from 40-year veterans to first-timers. To learn more about our events, visit our website: northernforestcanoetrail.org.

Collage, clockwise from top left: Hundreds of spectators line the shore of Old Forge Pond to watch the start of the 90-Miler; cyclists cross the finish at the Missisquoi Paddle-Pedal; NFCT Trustee Brandon Devito awards the Founder's Cup to Sue Dyer at the 90-Miler; Iris Li and Jonny Gustafson refuel during a community paddle on the Raquette River; volunteers help clean the Lamoille River; Russ Ford and Patty Gill finish day one of the Rangeley Oquossoc Adventure Rendezvous.

By the #s



5 races in 3 states



4 film fests in 4 states



2 symposiums
serving 19 youth
and 45 adults



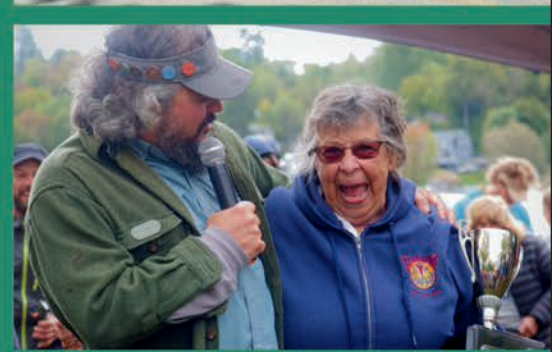
15 community
paddles with over
100 participants



123 community
partners supported
NFCT events



1,000 people
paddled in NFCT
races



MAKING PADDLING MORE ACCESSIBLE

It's easy to take paddling for granted. We check the weather, load our boats, find a put-in and shove off. But for many, it's not that easy. From physical disabilities and mobility impairments to bad backs, creaky knees and limited experience, a variety of factors can keep people from getting on the water.

This year, the NFCT stepped up efforts to increase accessibility in paddling and recreation. The first step was to assess the landscape to better understand existing infrastructure and identify locations for improvement. Through a partnership with the Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance program of the National Parks Service, we issued a survey to communities across the Northeast to collect data and feedback. Concurrently, the NFCT partnered with five outdoor organizations under the umbrella of the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council to form the Vermont Trail Accessibility Hub, an initiative funded by the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative that aims to provide resources and information needed to make Vermont's trails more accessible to more people. Since forming, the NFCT and its partners have conducted 16 assessments and developed a list of future projects.

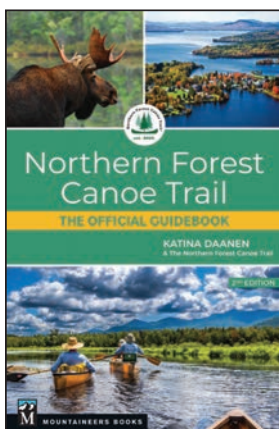
We want to do whatever we can to meet people where they're at. We can't make every remote pond and stream accessible, and that's not the point. Rather, we want the infrastructure in peoples' backyards to be safe and easy to use, for everybody.

Alex Delhagen

"Much of our stewardship work already addresses accessibility," NFCT Assistant Trail Director Alex Delhagen noted. "Leveling and widening portage trails, installing wider, less-steep stone staircases at access points — these things make a difference. But there's more we can do to more proactively address accessibility, and we look forward to implementing some of these projects in 2025."

To learn more about our accessibility work, email alex@northernforestcanoetrail.org.

NEW GUIDEBOOK + ONLINE AUCTION



By the time this newsletter hits mailboxes, the holiday season will nearly be upon us. If you're looking for the perfect gifts for the paddlers in your life, we've got you covered. This fall, the NFCT published the second edition of its official guidebook, the first revision since its original publication 15 years ago. The book includes color photos, new GPS coordinates, recommended trips and a lot more. Buy it today from our online store: bit.ly/nfctguidebook.

You can also score some great swag *and* support our work during the online auction, running Nov. 15-30. Gear, art, books, experiences — we've got it all. Learn more and bid: bit.ly/nfctauction2024.



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GET READY TO CELEBRATE WITH US

Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail. Mark your calendars NOW to save some dates and join the party!

'Round the Mountain Race: May 10

Adirondack Paddling Symposium: June 13-16

Rangeley Oquossoc Adventure Rendezvous: June 21-22

Missisquoi Paddle-Pedal: July 12

Adirondack Youth Paddling Symposium: July 14-17

Adirondack Canoe Classic: Sept. 5-7

Long Lake Regatta: Sept. 20

Scan the QR code to learn more!

