

CURRENTS & COMMUNITIES

FALL 2025



Celebrating 25 Years

OUR MISSION

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

OUR VISION

We envision an unrivaled network of paddling opportunities across the Northern Forest that inspires people to fall in love with paddling the region. Their passion and commitment will contribute to the health of our communities, landscapes and waterways.

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Cover: Cassandra Smith takes in the scenery at Grand Falls in Maine. Cassandra and Henry Kohler are official 2024 thru-paddlers who had so much fun, they returned to do it again this year. (Photo provided by Cassandra Smith.)

Onward, together.

At the end of this year, my decade on the NFCT's Board of Trustees will come to a close. It has been an honor — and a lot of fun — to work with our Board, but especially to observe as our outstanding staff delivers on NFCT's mission.

I've seen that NFCT succeeds despite a unique combination of challenges. The canoe trail is geographically spread across four states, and a little bit of Quebec, which makes it challenging to build the relationships needed for this work. In addition, our focus area is a very narrow, 740-mile ribbon that can be a difficult concept to explain. And the NFCT manages this destination with a tiny staff.

The organization overcomes these obstacles through a lot of very hard work by its excellent staff, which knows how to collaborate with other organizations, recruit and coordinate many dedicated volunteers, cultivate business partnerships and more. But I also think the NFCT succeeds due to its ability to balance and tap into the energy of the different branches of the paddling community.

At any given time this organization is balancing the very physical access and trail work of its stewardship program, which supports paddlers doing wilderness trips, coordinating a canoe race for endurance athletes and working with a community to bring new recreational paddlers into the sport. Each of these groups bring different kinds of energy to the organization, and the NFCT is stronger by working with them.

As we wind down our 25th anniversary, I hope no matter what type of paddler you are, you'll see the strength of working with your paddling cousins as NFCT navigates the rapids ahead. When we all dip our oars at the same time, we make great things happen for the outdoor community across the Northeast.

See you on the Trail!

— Warren Whitney, Chair, Board of Trustees

NFCT WELCOMES NEW ASSISTANT TRAIL DIRECTOR

The NFCT is pleased to announce the hiring of Nick Hall as our new assistant trail director. Nick started with our stewardship program in 2024, when he worked as an intern. In 2025, he led the Allagash work crew, executing and completing a series of projects along the Allagash Wilderness Waterway in Maine. He steps into his new role following the departure of Alex Delhagen, who led the NFCT's roving stewardship crew for the last two years.

"Nick knows our program well and he has a deep respect for the paddling community," said NFCT Stewardship Director Noah Pollock. "We appreciate his passion for the waterways of the Northern Forest, his belief in the value of our work, his work ethic and his dedication to community building."

Hall will support the NFCT's stewardship work in a variety of ways, from planning projects and working with landowners and state agencies to training seasonal interns and coordinating with local partners to implement projects that improve access to the waterways of the Northeast. In addition to his past experience with the NFCT, Hall has a background in outdoor recreation, having completed his studies at SUNY Adirondack's Outdoor Education program. To connect with Nick, or learn more about our stewardship program, email nick@northernforestcanoetrail.org.



Nick Hall, right, took over the position of assistant trail director in September 2025. He's pictured here at the finish of this year's 90-Miler with his race partner, former Allagash crew leader and stewardship intern Ethan Israel.

I care about connecting people to the outdoors and making sure trails are well maintained and sustainable. I love working with paddlers, crew mates and volunteers in the field, and I'm looking forward to continuing those efforts on a larger scale.

Nick Hall

ANNUAL FALL AUCTION SET FOR NOV. 15-30

In the market for a new boat? Looking for maps to plan your next adventure? How about outdoor-inspired books and art? Our annual online auction offers up these possibilities and a whole lot more. From Nov. 15-30, you can bid on gear, experiences, books and more, with all proceeds benefiting the NFCT's stewardship and programming. Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/nfctauktion2025 to donate items, bid or learn more. Don't miss out!



REFLECTING ON A SUCCESSFUL STEWARDSHIP SEASON

The 2025 stewardship season is in the books! This year, we were fortunate to have two returning staff, Alex Delhagen and Nick Hall. As our assistant trail director, Alex helped set up summer projects and coordinated our roving crew. Nick, a 2024 intern, stepped in to lead our Allagash crew. I'm so thankful for their enthusiasm and capable leadership this year.

The positive energy, teamwork and eagerness of our two crews was remarkable. Isla Chadsey, Nate Lennard, Lillian Cadwell, Brett Karpf, Bryn Tiernan and Tana McLean spent the summer with us as our stewardship interns and synced together with remarkable results. In the Adirondacks, we continued rehabilitation of the Brown's Tract Carry and Lower Locks Carry, two key portages along the 90-Miler race route. In Maine, in partnership with the Maine Conservation Corps team, we overhauled dozens of campsites on Chamberlain Lake in the Allagash, complete with stone steps, formal tent pads and restored riparian areas. Additionally, the crew made significant improvements to the East Twin Brook campsite on the Allagash River, including a new bench cut trail and eight new tent pads; we also rehabilitated portage trails along the South Branch of the Dead River. In Vermont, we improved access to the Missisquoi River with rebuilt portage trails and a new put-in ramp in Swanton; we also added a new campsite on the Upper Connecticut River.

The NFCT is a team effort involving a myriad of partners and donors. Thank you to those who supported this work, whether it was chipping in to our stewardship fund or joining us as volunteers. We can't do this work without your help. We're already looking forward to another successful season in 2026!

— Noah Pollock, NFCT Trail Director



Staff and volunteers with the NFCT's Allagash crew braved some unpredictable weather while working on projects at the Boy Scout Campsite this summer, one of several Waterway Work Trips along the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.



Clockwise from top left: the stewardship crew finishes a new stone staircase at a popular swimming hole in Fayston, Vermont; interns and staff build a new accessible mouldering privy at the Gravel Beach campsite on Chamberlain Lake; the crew takes a much-deserved break during a work trip at the Boy Scout Campsite in the Allagash; interns and volunteers rebuild portions of a boardwalk along the Brown's Tract Carry.

Stewardship Season Fast Facts

16	10	72	1,500	
projects	work trips	volunteers	hours logged	
70	31	35	2	3
stone steps	tent pads	feet of riparian area restored	new campsites	new privies

"It was beautiful to see the happiness that rang through even on the hardest workday. On one occasion, while Isla and I were leading the construction of a privy with a couple of volunteers, there was a mandatory photoshoot with the toilet seat. Our whole group took turns posing in the (unused) privy, which led to a multitude of giggles." — Lillian Cadwell



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS: VITALITY & GRATITUDE

Twenty five years ago, the NFCT officially became a nonprofit dedicated to reestablishing, promoting and maintaining this historic paddling route. The idea was both simple and visionary: develop a destination for paddlers that would connect people to this landscape and its history, and support the local economy by adding value to a healthy ecosystem. In 2000, the concept inspired enthusiasm and also a healthy dose of skepticism. In the intervening time the US outdoor recreation economy has become recognized as a significant contributor to our GDP, regional jobs and economies. At the NFCT, we have, in essence, remained focused on the same basic mission we adhere to today. We promote and steward our water trail and support communities, waterways and paddling across the Northern Forest.

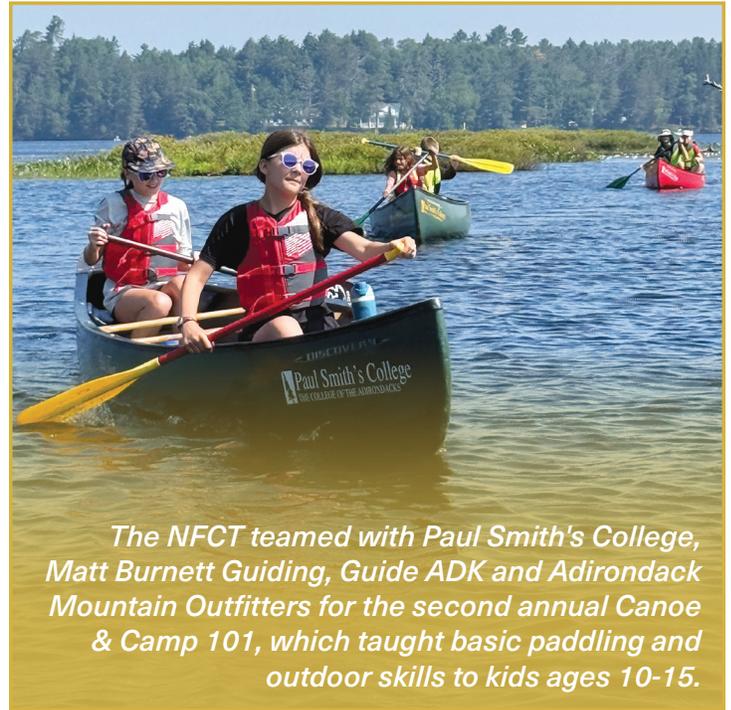
Access is at the heart of everything we do. Clearly our stewardship work allows people to get in and paddle, but we enable people's adventures in so many other ways. A less salient component of our operation is collaboration: with 5 staff and 740 miles, we would not get far without friends. This collaboration was on full display throughout our 25th anniversary.



Allagash guide Tom Gerard, left, who led NFE trips for many years, ran into NFCT Executive Director Karrie Thomas, center, and Teens to Trails Executive Director Alicia Heyburn at the Allagash Falls portage during the final Teens to Trails venture in June.

Our partnership with Teens to Trails, to get outing clubs on every section of the NFCT in Maine, culminated this year with a final trip where the organizers spent a few days on the water together from Michaud Farm on the Allagash to Fort Kent on the St. John River. We took the time to evaluate the impact of our work and look at what might lie ahead. Nine trips took place over three years from Lake Umbagog to the St. John River. To prepare for these, NFCT and Teens to Trails put together detailed descriptions of each trip from put-in to take-out, which are available now to you and everyone who might want to follow their paddle strokes. Check out the wonderful stories from each adventure on the Teens to Trails blog, and find the trip descriptions on the NFCT website's Suggested Trips page.

On the other end of the trail, we have been working with partners to hone Northern Forest Explorers trips and help young people dip their toes in the water. We have been providing scholarships for two Adirondack trips for kids 10-15 each summer for over a decade, and for the past two summers our guide partner Matt Burnett has been bringing a group of Adirondack kids to the Allagash. We also noticed that some kids weren't comfortable with a week-long overnight, so we took a page from the Adirondack Paddling Symposium playbook and created Canoe & Camp 101. This four-day clinic gets kids comfortable with all things canoe tripping from a single base-camp at Paul Smith's College: sleeping in tents, cooking over fires, paddling canoes and generally having fun in the water.



The NFCT teamed with Paul Smith's College, Matt Burnett Guiding, Guide ADK and Adirondack Mountain Outfitters for the second annual Canoe & Camp 101, which taught basic paddling and outdoor skills to kids ages 10-15.

Improving accessibility for people with disabilities and mobility challenges has been part of our focus for a few years now. We are making slow progress including an accessible campsite on the Allagash and dozens of assessments in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. We have plans for several additional projects and are seeking funding to make them a reality. In the meantime, we are working to use the detailed information we collected at the assessed sites to provide helpful information for people to use when deciding if an access point is a place they can use given their particular set of needs. It seems simple, but most descriptions use qualitative language like “relatively easy” instead of specifying the width, slope, camber and surface of a trail. They leave out details like the presence of designated accessible parking or bathroom facilities. We are beginning to provide better detail in some of our suggested trips, so keep your eye out for more, and if you have mobility issues, we invite you to share your stories — good or challenging — about your adventures.

This burst of energy working to build resources for youth trips and accessibility is just a portion of the events and activities bringing people together on the water. Races, clinics and community paddles took place from New York to Maine. Each time I was part of one of these gatherings this year I left with an incredible sense of vitality and gratitude. When I connect with people who share my love for the landscapes, the waterways and the joy of paddling I come away with new inspiration and drive to share this trail and this community as widely as we can. I first learned about the NFCT in 2013, and my first response was that I needed to be part of this! More than a decade later, I am still invested in the simple vision of this destination and the interwoven capacity of people and paddling to contribute to the future of the Northern Forest. We are poised for another 25 years.



The NFCT and Adirondack Lakes & Trails Outfitters lead a community paddle on Lake Kushaqua in June.

— Karrie Thomas, NFCT Executive Director



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COMING SOON:

25 YEARS OF TRAIL TALES

In celebration of 25 years, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail is pleased to share a special anniversary coffee table book: ***25 Years of Trail Tales***.

The book explores the canoe trail's origins, the history of our organization, our stewardship work and, of course, stories by thru-paddlers, day-trippers, racers, volunteers and more, all accompanied by beautiful photos of the woods and waters of the Northern Forest.

This book is perfect for the paddling enthusiast in your life, and will be on (virtual) shelves in time for the holiday season. Keep an eye on our website for details, and be sure to bookmark our online store: **bit.ly/shopnfct**

