

Bald Head Preserve: History, Management, and Partnerships

Bald Head Preserve is a 296-acre preserve in Arrowsic, Maine, located at the meeting point of the Kennebec and Back Rivers. The property was donated to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 1980 and has been managed to protect its unique natural communities, rare species, scenic values, and wildlife habitat while also providing space for people to connect with the natural world.

Today, Bald Head serves as an excellent example of conservation success achieved through partnerships between TNC, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), the Town of Arrowsic, and community organizations such as Citizens for Squirrel Point (CSP).

A Brief History of the Landscape

The Bald Head peninsula sits within the ancestral homeland of the Wabanaki people. Since time immemorial, the Kennebec Estuary provided important travel routes, fishing grounds, and gathering areas for Wabanaki.

European settlement began in the 1600s, and the surrounding Arrowsic area became an important trading center in the 1700s. While the preserve itself appears to have remained largely undeveloped due to its isolated location and difficult access, the land was used over time for hunting, grazing, and eventually extensive logging during the 1940s and 1950s. The forests visitors see today are largely second-growth forests that have regenerated since those logging operations.

Why Bald Head Matters

Bald Head contains a remarkable diversity of habitats, including:

- Approximately 50 acres of salt marsh
- Rare Pitch Pine Woodland communities on exposed granite ridges
- Forested wetlands
- Wildlife habitat for bald eagles, osprey, waterfowl, wading birds, deer, fisher, and bobcat
- Habitat for rare plant species, including smooth sandwort and saltmarsh false-foxglove

The preserve is part of the larger Kennebec Estuary conservation landscape and contributes to the protection of important coastal habitats and wildlife corridors.

Community Involvement and Stewardship

One of the most important aspects of Bald Head Preserve's story is the role of local community members and partner organizations in helping care for and improve access to the area. While TNC owns and manages the preserve, many of the conservation successes visitors see today have been possible because of decades of collaboration. The broader Arrowsic community has long demonstrated strong support for conservation. The town contains a high proportion of conserved land, and residents have historically been supportive of protecting the natural character of the area.

Beginning in 2019, TNC, MDIFW, and CSP a volunteer-driven organization dedicated to protecting and maintaining public access to the nearby Squirrel Point Light, began exploring options to replace the aging and unsafe wooden bridge providing access to both Bald Head Preserve and Squirrel Point. The project involved a complex set of stakeholders: the bridge had originally been constructed by the U.S. Coast Guard, which maintains Squirrel Point Light in partnership with CSP; the land is owned by MDIFW; and the rights-of-way held by TNC and CSP cross different portions of the property. In addition, the bridge's location near the shoreline required coordination with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the Town during the permitting process. While the path forward was not always straightforward, the partners remained committed to finding a solution.

In 2024, TNC provided significant funding to CSP to support construction of a new 115-foot aluminum bridge and ramp system designed to withstand storm surges and rising sea levels. CSP secured additional funding from other organizations and managed the construction contract with a local builder, who also contributed to the project. TNC staff and volunteers helped prepare the site by widening the trail to the bridge, allowing equipment and materials to reach the work area. The completed project stands as a testament to the power of community stewardship and collaborative conservation.

Another inspiring example of community stewardship came from two Arrowsic youth who approached TNC with an idea to clean up Squirrel Marsh and transform the collected trash into a public art installation. Their goal was to raise awareness about marine debris and highlight the important role salt marshes play in filtering and protecting water quality. Volunteers of all ages joined the cleanup effort, spreading throughout the marsh with reusable trash bags, boats, and even a drone. The following weekend, community members gathered again to turn the debris into a large sculpture that was displayed at the Arrowsic Town Hall, accompanied by educational signage. The project not only engaged the community in conservation but also inspired future generations. In fact, one of the young organizers later wrote his college application essay about the experience and credits the project as one factor in his acceptance to Yale University.

Forest Stewards Guild

This trail begins on Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife conservation land and provides access to the Squirrel Point Light to the west and The Nature Conservancy's Bald Head Preserve to the south. The peninsula at the southern edge of this 296-acre preserve splits two tidal waterways—the Kennebec and Back Rivers. Separated from the mainland by a large salt marsh, two main ridges rise dramatically from the Back River on the eastern side of the preserve, reaching heights of over 160 feet and offering good views of the confluence of the Back and Kennebec Rivers as well as Georgetown Island.

Bald Head Trail Characteristics: 3.6 miles round-trip. First 0.2-miles (4-10 feet wide) gradually descend over roots and protruding rocks to a ramp and bridge. Another 0.1 mile of heavily rooted 2-4 feet wide trail leads to the junction of the Bald Head Trail on the left. Squirrel Point Trail continues straight. The Bald Head Trail gradually climbs for a hundred feet followed by mostly flat ground with some roots and bog bridges for 0.4 miles to the crossing of a salt marsh that floods over during high tides making it impassable. The trail continues for 1.1 miles (2-4 feet wide) over relatively flat terrain with occasional inclines, significant presence of roots, rocks and several bog bridges over wet areas. The final hundred feet of the trail is a steep climb to exposed rock.

Squirrel Point Trail continues straight for 0.4 miles with occasional rises and descents to the Squirrel Point Lighthouse overlooking the Kennebec River.

Thank you for helping to protect the natural resources.

- To avoid disturbing the natural inhabitants and other visitors, dogs and other pets are not permitted on TNC's Bald Head Preserve. Registered service animals are welcome.
- The preserve is open for day use only.
- Leave only footprints, take only photographs.



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This preserve is in the homeland of the Wabanaki. We respectfully acknowledge these People of the Dawn—past, present and future—and their sacred connection to these lands and waters.

Scan to learn more about our commitment to Indigenous People.

