

# Drinking Water Source Protection: Sebago Clean Waters Case Study

Landscape-scale Land Conservation: Steps to Success  
May 21, 2024

Karen Young, Partnership Director, Sebago Clean Waters



# Sebago Lake – A Rare Resource



- Maine's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest lake
- Top 1% of Maine lakes for water clarity – 10.6 M avg. secchi depth
- Pristine water source - 1 of only ~50 US surface water supplies needing no filtration
- Supplies water to 1/6 of Mainers (219,000 people) and its fastest growing businesses
- 22 MGD per day
- 100 years of water in storage



# SCW Watershed

- 234,000 acres
- 84% forested
- High biodiversity & habitat value, important for ecological resilience
- Outdoor recreation and forest products important to local economy
- Scenic, trails, carbon sequestration
- Serves as a green water treatment plant!





# The Challenge

- Watershed needs to remain 76% forested to maintain water quality and filtration waiver – currently at 84%
- Development pressure up into the watershed from the greater Portland urban area is great
- Land is predominantly privately owned with many aging landowners
- U.S. Forest Service: Sebago watershed is one of the drinking water watersheds most at risk for development – 2009, 2014, 2022
- Only 16% of the forests are currently conserved

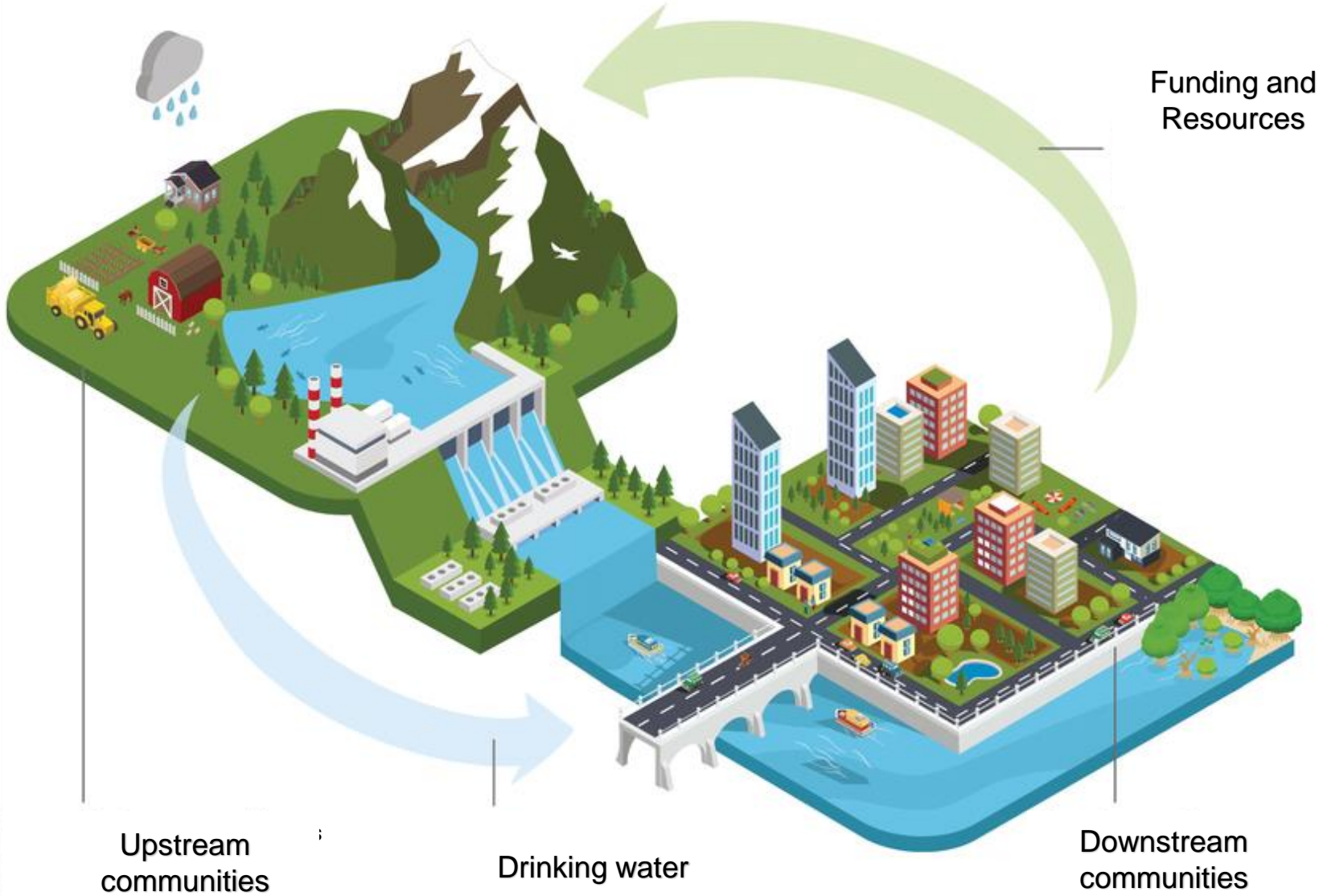


# The Opportunities

- Watershed is 84% forested & currently intact - > conservation – not restoration
- Collaborate & pool resources to increase the pace of conservation
- Leverage PWD \$ (up to 25% of eligible watershed projects)
- Match traditional \$ sources (state, federal \$) and PWD \$ with **new** funding to reach 100% funding for projects
  - Downstream businesses and communities
  - New public and private sources



# The “Water Fund” Model



# 2018 Umaine, Orono Watershed Economic Study



- Watershed needs to remain at least **76%** forested. Losing 8% of the forest could trigger increased sediment & nutrient pollution
- Every \$1 invested in land conservation = up to \$8 in benefits (water quality, air quality, recreation, habitat, etc.)
- If filtration is required, estimated cost of \$150M to build a filtration plant and water rates could increase 84% or \$2.4M/year for top 50 users



# Coalition Members



OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE





## Portland Water District:

- Watershed land conservation helps protect excellent water quality and waiver to filtration
- PWD owns 2,500 acres around intake but doesn't want to own and manage additional land

- Started contributing to watershed conservation in 2000
- Established a formal grant program in 2013
- Contributes up to 25% of land conservation capital to land trusts for qualifying watershed projects
- Provides staff support to SCW and complementary programs



# SCW Mission and Goals

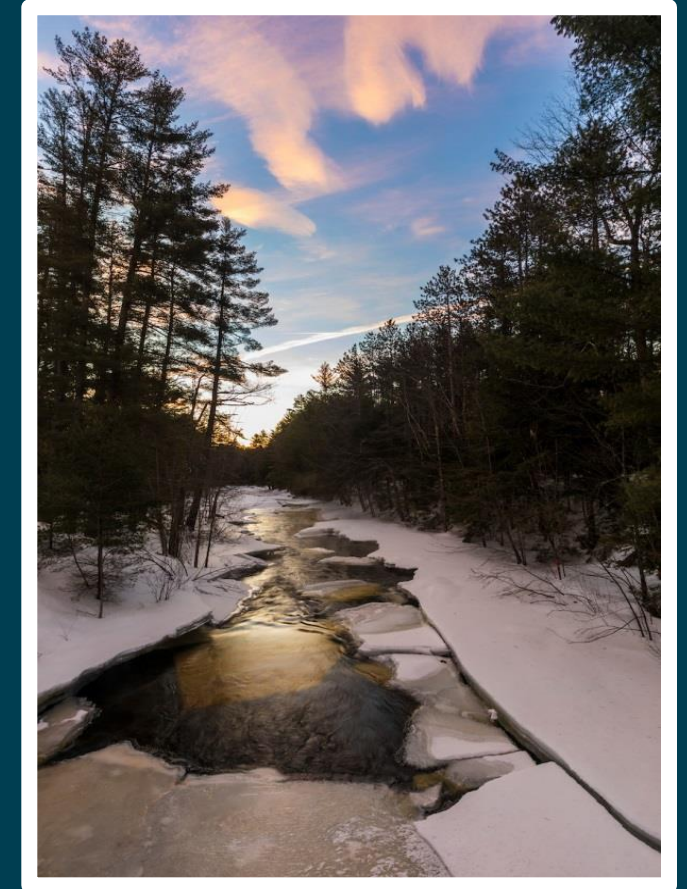


## Goals:

- Conserve 35,000 more acres by 2032 to reach 25% conserved
- \*Leverage NEW funding\*
- Implement complementary watershed protection
  - Streamflow restoration
  - Forest management
  - Landowner outreach and education

## ***Mission:***

*Protect water quality, community well-being, a vibrant economy, and the health of fish and wildlife...through voluntary forest conservation and stewardship.*



# Other SCW Initiatives



- Watershed restoration & protection work
  - Streamflow restoration and aquatic organism passage
  - Forest management & implementation



# Other SCW Initiatives

- Community Engagement
- Landowner Outreach and Education



# From 2000 to today



First  
PWD/Land  
Trust Deal

PWD  
Policy Adopted

PWD  
Program Created



\$350,000 Healthy  
Watersheds  
Consortium Grant

\$8 million  
NRCS RCPP  
Award

2000

2007

2012

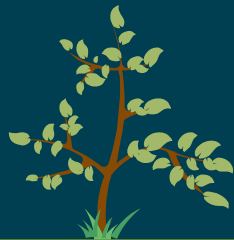
2017

2018

2020



366  
acres



1,605  
acres



4,180  
acres



5,930  
acres



13,630  
acres

# SCW Success



- Over 11,790 watershed acres conserved since 2018
- Raised over \$10 million to support conservation
  - \$8 million USDA NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program federal funding award
  - Engaged twelve+ business partners
  - Leveraged federal, private and partner funding
- [SCW Impact Report 2018-2022](#)



# Forestland Conservation Progress

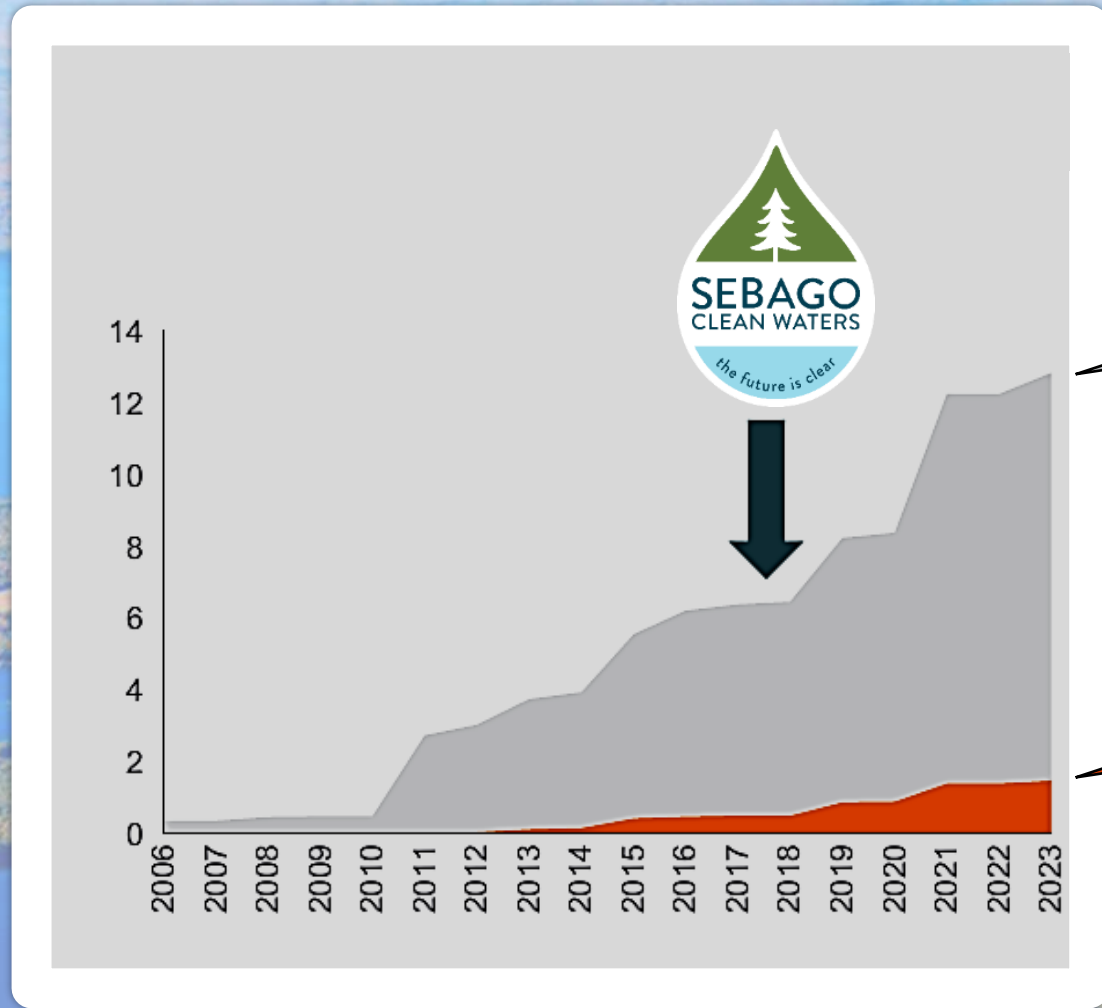


May 2024



**WE'VE REACHED ONE  
THIRD OF OUR GOAL  
OF CONSERVING  
35,000 MORE ACRES  
BY 2032**

# The Value of Partnership



**ALL  
\$14 M**

**PWD  
\$2.2 M**



# Water Quality as a Catalyst for Conservation



- Bipartisan voters nationally rank pure drinking water as the/one of the highest priority environmental issues
- Engages local water utility/ies
- Attracts other new and non-traditional partners
- Incentivizes downstream investment, interests new funders
- Portland Water District 2023 customers priorities:
  1. Safe water that tastes great
  2. Protect the water source, Sebago Lake
  3. Reasonable water rates
  4. Meet environmental goals
  5. Maintain water systems and infrastructure



# Collaboration: Some Lessons Learned



- Choose partners strategically – identify common interests and understand each partner's priorities
- Establish trust – no internal competition, center equity in internal culture
- Honor each partner's unique expertise and role
- Develop guiding documents – decision-making, etc.
- Need coordination capacity - Communicate/meet regularly
- Build partner capacity
- Invest in relationships - have fun together!



# Business Partner Engagement - Incentives

- ✘ Save future water costs
  - Protect water used in products, services (e.g. beer is ~90% water)
  - Support local communities of employees and customers
  - Support the environment
  - Meet sustainability goals
  - Visibility & positive PR
  - Associate with Maine, outdoor brand





# Allagash Brew Co.



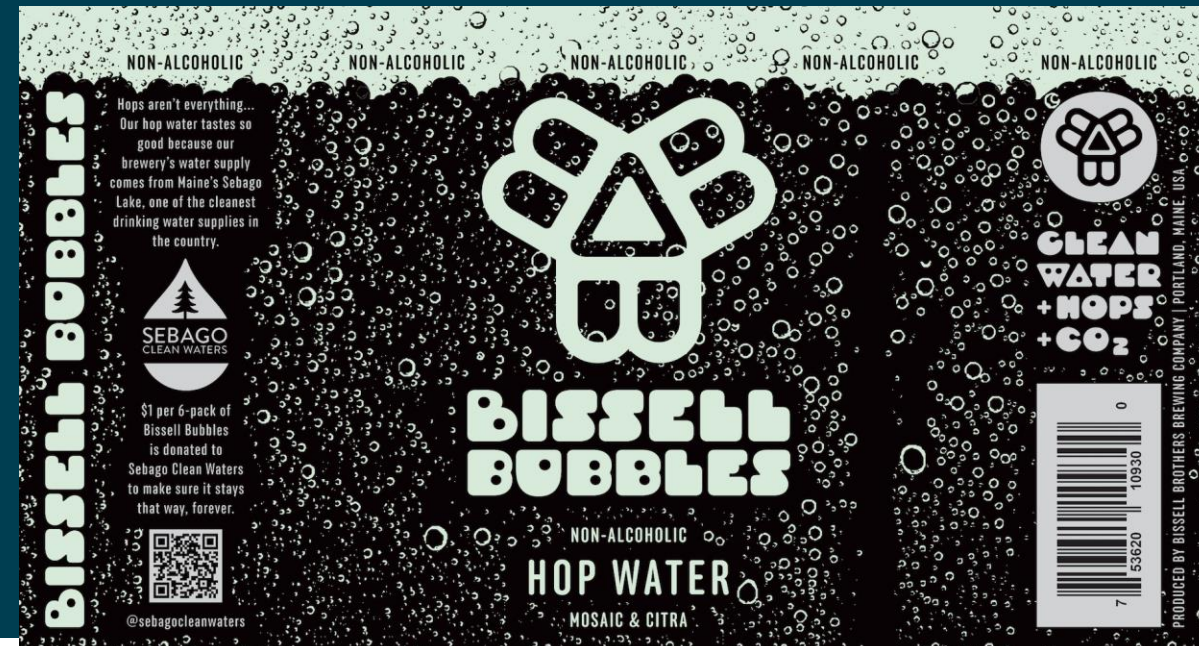
- Very first business partner
- Donates \$.10 per barrel of beer brewed annually = ~\$12,000 per year in 2022 and growing
- Excellent opportunities for visibility
  - Collaborative social posts
  - Event(s)
  - Allagash press references to SCW - in Forbes magazine, etc.
  - Content - photos, etc.
- Certified B Corp





# Bissell Brother Brewing

- Started small with sales of co-branded water bottles - initially \$1/bottle, now \$5/bottle proceeds to SCW
- Hosted several large events for SCW
  - BBB x SCW videos
- **NEW** co-branded hop water – Bissell Bubbles!



# Bissell Brothers/Sebago Clean Waters Video

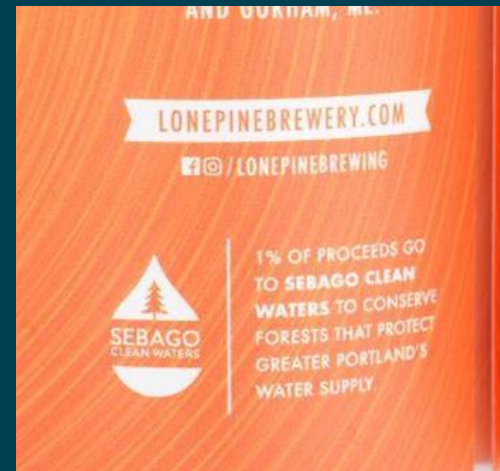




# Lone Pine Brewing

- “1% for the Waters” - 1% of proceeds of all craft seltzers support SCW
- Visibility - press, social media
- NEW co-branded product – Lone Pine Craft Vodka

Lone Pine 1% for the waters webpage





# Woodard & Curran Foundation



- “Giving While Living” grant recipient 3 years in a row - nominated and voted on by employees
- \$10,000 per year unrestricted funding
- Collaborative outreach programs







# Grove Collaborative



- NEW: Sebago Clean Waters featured in online “Environmental Impact Shop”
- Customers can choose to donate to protect 50, 100 or 200 ft<sup>2</sup> of water-purifying forest

[Protect Safe Drinking Water in Maine](#)





# The VIA Agency



- Pro Bono Summer Intern Program (10 interns)
- Storytelling Video
- Website and social media recommendations
- Slide deck
- Graphics



# Lessons learned 1: Partnering with businesses



- It really is all about who you know - leverage your relationships no matter how indirect they seem
- Need to work at the pace of business, not conservation
- Many businesses want to give back to their communities & see it as an important part of what they do - especially B Corps
- An RCP partner/brand can offer them value and they are willing to “pay” for it

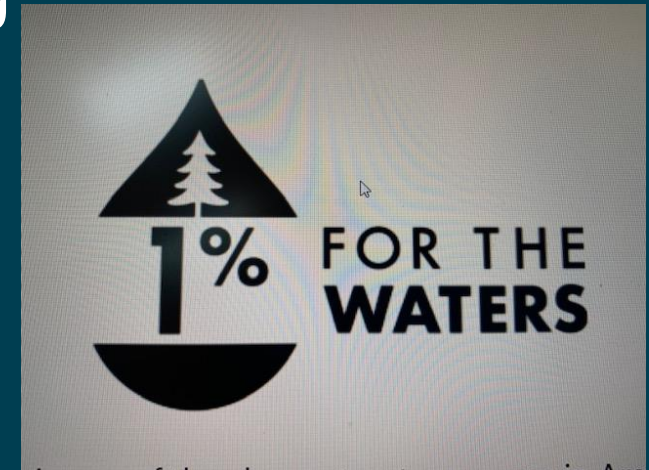


# Lessons learned 2:

## Partnering with businesses



- Temper funding expectations -
  - [SCW Impact Report 2018-2022](#)
- The larger the corporation or gift, the more reporting likely will be required
- Get a written agreement in place if you will be sharing your logo or other intellectual property
  - Marketing/messaging review & approval
  - Modification to your logo or other IP
  - 'Truth in advertising' with source of water in their product
- Helpful to have someone with legal expertise available to review agreements/contracts



# Lessons learned 3 - Partnering with businesses - engagement



- Businesses seek fresh, fun content for their marketing regularly
- Collaborative communications/outreach are a great opportunity
- Businesses want to get their employees involved
  - Volunteer opportunities
  - Get them out on the land/water
  - Support in other ways (e.g. drone photos, coloring page design)



# Lessons Learned with NRCS RCPP-AFA Award



- First round of NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) awards
- One of ten awarded nationwide
- \$8M total (2nd largest)
  - \$5M for easements
  - \$600K for aquatic organism passage
  - \$200K for forest management planning
  - \$134K for innovative projects
  - \$1.6M for project support
- Completed one 12,000+ acre easement (EHE) utilizing \$1.86M



# Lessons Learned with NRCS RCPP-AFA Award



## 1) Develop an Appealing Application

- 10% of 2018 Farm Bill funds for source water protection
- Water district as lead partner + sig. federal funding experience
- Innovation, Economic & social outcomes, multi-faceted approach

## 2) Build Agency Relationships

- Pre-application meetings with State conservationist
- State staff “kick-off” watershed tour
- NRCS Chief visit
- Weekly standing meeting
- Collaborate on events, press



# Lessons Learned with NRCS RCPP-AFA Award



## 3) Lead Partner Capacity is Key

- PWD has sophisticated financial tracking, staff support, can front money and has the ability to bond \$

## 4) Set Realistic Expectations

- “Negotiations” take LOOOONG time – build into budget planning
- Project approval lengthy, payments slow

## 5) Elevate your value and stay yourself

- Landowner relationships, local knowledge, leveraged funding, partner experience, media connections





**Please reach out with any questions:**

**Karen Young, Partnership Director  
kyoung@sebagocleanwaters.org**

