

# **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding CREA and BTLT's Unification**

## **Why do CREA and BTLT want to merge?**

We want to join forces because together, we can more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the community.

By joining forces, we will enhance our ability to support the community through conservation, education and engagement, and agricultural programs; expand our audience; reduce our administrative burden; and more.

Our union will be a net positive in the communities we serve. We will be using limited resources (e.g. staff, funding) more effectively, resulting in richer programming and robust support for protection of land and natural resources. We will use efficiencies achieved through unification to improve and expand the high-quality programs and activities that we offer. These include: CREA summer day camp, school-based outdoor science education, the Farmers' Market at Crystal Spring Farm, stewardship of land and trails, nature-based programs for adults, and the Tom Settlemire Community Garden.

Supported by a dedicated and energetic Board, staff, and volunteers, we are confident in our ability to continue the high-quality work of both organizations. By working together, we will strengthen our organizational resilience. One plus one will equal three.

## **Why is this a good idea for CREA?**

We believe this unification does more to secure and strengthen the educational mission than if CREA continues as a very small organization. As part of BTLT, staff will have better support for funding, expanding, and communicating about programs. We will also have access to a much more diverse land and resource base on which to conduct programs. A number of factors limit our ability to expand camp and school programs at the Preserve.

Also, BTLT's more robust employee benefits will contribute to staff retention and longevity, an important factor in maintaining the high quality of educational programs.

## **Why is this a good idea for BTLT?**

BTLT recognizes that effective nature-based education is essential to raising the next generation of conservationists. Through this alliance, BTLT gains a fully formed educational

program and proven educational expertise that can be applied to BTLT landholdings and agricultural programs. This union also fulfills the community's desire for more educational programming as expressed in BTLT's 2019 community survey.

### **How long have CREA and BTLT been considering this change?**

A work group comprised of Board members and Executive Directors has been in discussions for over three years. Having collaborated in various ways over the years, we have come to recognize the many benefits of working more closely together. In recent decades, BTLT has expanded its focus to include more community and educational programming, recognizing that an engaged and environmentally aware populace is necessary to a healthy, sustainable future.

Our longstanding collaboration and periodic overlap in Board membership resulted in an easy, productive relationship between our organizations. In 2020, BTLT and CREA co-located our offices at Brunswick Landing with the goal of facilitating collaboration and creating opportunities to share certain common administrative and other tasks. At the same time, challenges brought by COVID prompted both organizations to look at whether we were maximizing our resources to best serve the greatest possible number of people in the community.

We are also aware of national trends that highlight the benefits of merging:

- Foundations are increasingly interested in funding mature, stable organizations that are sophisticated enough to recognize the advantages of joining forces to become more effective and efficient, and better serve community needs;
- There is a shortage of experienced leaders due to accelerated retirement rates and other factors. Even larger nonprofits are challenged to replace senior staff;
- Experienced and effective development professionals are in very short supply and there is high turnover as staff move to higher paying positions;
- Staff retention is difficult in small organizations that cannot match wages and benefits of larger organizations;
- The pandemic was a catalyst, a reminder that circumstances can change quickly. We will be stronger together.

The timing is right to combine our organizations now. The leadership of both organizations is stable, supportive, and well-positioned to make this change.

## **How will a merger affect CREA and BTLT's existing programs?**

All our programs will continue, including CREA summer camp and school programs, BTLT's Farmers' Market and community garden, and community events and activities. Regular community events hosted by both organizations will continue, such as speakers, guided walks, and events, but the merger will eliminate duplication of effort and expand our reach to new audiences.

A big benefit of the merger is the potential for growth of programs that isn't currently feasible. For example, we will be exploring opportunities to expand CREA camp — currently at capacity in its current location — to another campus on a BTLT property. Staff will have access to a wider range of expertise in their co-workers, e.g. education, agriculture and local food, and communications.

Also, administrative and operational efficiencies achieved by combining two organizations into one will free up staff time for programming and program evaluation. In short, we will be more efficient and more effective in identifying and serving the needs of our communities.

## **What will the combined organization be called?**

The combined organization will continue as Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, but CREA's signature camp and school programs will be referred to as *Cathance River Education Alliance (CREA): A program of BTLT* for at least ten years in recognition that these highly regarded programs are strongly associated with the CREA name. At some point in the future, the combined organization may go through a re-branding exercise in search of a name that conveys the totality of our combined mission.

## **How will this affect my membership?**

It will take some time to combine our administrative and other systems, including donor databases, communications, etc., so BTLT and CREA members won't see a tangible change right away. CREA members will continue to receive communications and membership reminders from CREA for a period of time, during which donations from CREA members will continue to support educational programs and management as before.

In the coming months, CREA members will begin to receive communications from BTLT. When our donor databases are completely merged, you will receive a renewal reminder at the appropriate time from BTLT and your BTLT membership will support the continuation of CREA programs. This transition will likely occur within the next 12 months.

## **Will CREA members be able to target their donations for education?**

Once our donor databases are fully integrated, renewal reminders will come to you from BTLT and you will have the opportunity to restrict your donation for CREA's educational programs if you wish.

For those who are current members of both CREA and BTLT, we hope you will consider maintaining or increasing the same levels of support as continuity of funding support is important to our success.

BTLT is planning a capital campaign that will include an option to support a permanent fund to support educational programs. We hope supporters of education will consider contributing to this fund, or making legacy gifts, to ensure we maintain our stable foundation for educational programs.

## **How will volunteers be affected?**

Most volunteer needs will not change, and all volunteers will be welcomed and encouraged to continue to volunteer in whatever capacity they wish within the combined organization. We will have a more diverse array of needs and tasks to offer volunteers.

## **What will the management team look like in the combined organization?**

BTLT's Executive Director will continue to lead the unified organization. CREA's Executive Director will become BTLT's Deputy Director and will serve as its Director of Education and Community Engagement.

## **How will staffing be affected?**

Staff roles in the two organizations are complementary. All staff will continue in their current roles with a few adjustments. CREA staff will assume primary responsibility for their existing programs, and BTLT staff will continue to oversee BTLT programs such as the community garden and Farmers' Market. CREA and BTLT co-located our offices in the same building in 2020. Staff will continue to work in these office spaces which are adjacent.

## **What will happen to CREA's assets?**

Ownership of the Ecology Center will transfer to BTLT. Funds held by CREA that are restricted for a particular use will carry those restrictions with them and will continue to be

used in accordance with restrictions. Unrestricted funds will be transferred to BTLT and will become restricted for use in support of educational programs.

### **How will CREA's Board of Directors be integrated into the new combined organization?**

Up to six of CREA's Board members will join the BTLT Board, including CREA's Board President. Other Board members will join BTLT Committees so that CREA is broadly represented across BTLT's governance structure. CREA Board members will serve on the newly-formed Education and Community Engagement, Governance, Finance, and other committees. One or two CREA Board members wishing to reduce their time commitment will continue to serve as advisors.

### **How will you ensure a smooth integration of the two organizations?**

We are working with a consultant who has extensive experience with nonprofit mergers. If the merger is approved by memberships, she will continue to advise us on process and implementation, making sure we take time to be intentional about transferring knowledge, building relationships, and creating a positive and productive culture within the combined organization.

### **What is the next step?**

Following an information session for our memberships on March 16, CREA and BTLT will hold separate membership meetings on March 30 in accordance with their governance procedures to ask for approvals to move forward with the merger. If approved, the staff and Board will immediately begin work to integrate systems and operations, although full integration could take 12-18 months. Legally, to facilitate financial reporting, the merger would occur on or around July 1, 2023, the beginning of BTLT's fiscal year.