

NRCM speech – for 2022 Conservation Leadership Awards ceremony
Dr. Robin Hadlock Seeley

A month or so ago, when Nick Bennett told me that I would be receiving a Conservation Leadership Award from NRCM, I first thought I had misheard him. I have long admired NRCM as an organization for its willingness to lead on important issues in Maine, through advocacy and the law. I've deeply appreciated Nick's support on both the issues for which I am being honored tonight. Congratulations to fellow awardees, past and present.

This is a leadership award and so I accept it with humility, conscious of the partners that have supported both the mine and the seaweed work. The mine work led to defeat of a [proposal to site a Wolfden silver mine](#) and [bring their Pickett Mountain mine waste](#) to our small town of Pembroke, on the shores of Cobscook Bay. But this defeat required the singular focus and smarts of our small, hardworking core team from Friends of Cobscook Bay, who must share this honor with me.

We are proud to be the [first town in Maine](#) to resoundingly reject commercial scale mining through a town ordinance. This achievement was the direct result of NRCM's work to pass new state mining regulations in 2017.

Another statewide issue is the virtually unlimited commercial cutting of a critical habitat-forming seaweed that forms a marine forest. It's known locally as "rockweed", and even if you don't recognize the name, if you live in Maine, you know this seaweed. It lies down at low tide and creates a wide brown border on our rocky shoreline at low tide. At high tide, the rockweed "trees" stand erect in the water and [fish swim through this forest](#).

This remarkable marine forest provides critical services to wildlife in decline. If you love shorebirds, you should know that migrating yellowlegs, sandpipers, and plovers all [forage in floating rockweed canopies](#). If you prefer herons, common eiders, terns, or black ducks - they all depend on rockweed too, for fishing habitat. NOAA has identified rockweed as essential fish habitat, or EFH, for juvenile cod. Many other fish species, including commercial species in Maine, are found in these marine rockweed forests at high tide, as well as lobster. The state's "Maine won't wait" climate plan also recognizes rockweed's role as "blue" carbon, along with salt marshes, eel grass beds and kelp forests. Maine's rockweed beds are carbon absorbing superstars, sequestering 14 times as much carbon as eel grass.

A full [80% of the U.S. wild harvested seaweed is rockweed from Maine](#). After processing, it is fertilizer for golf courses and feed supplements for cattle and horses.

It makes no sense that Maine is trying, on the one hand, to protect these species like shorebirds, herons and cod in the face of population declines, ocean warming and

biodiversity loss; and yet on the other hand Maine also encourages widespread extraction of the very seaweed habitat these species depend on.

Commercial voices have a lot of power in this debate, while there are few to speak for the wild species. By raising these issues I am now in a select group of people being sued by the rockweed industry. Which I take as recognition of my effectiveness in this [campaign to protect rockweed](#). But I much prefer the recognition that comes from being a Conservation Leadership Awardee. Thank you, NRCM. I also want to recognize important rockweed allies, some of which are here tonight - most of all, my family - Ken Ross, other board members of the [Maine Rockweed Coalition](#), and also Coleen O'Connell of the [Center for Ecological Teaching and Learning](#) on Cobscook Bay. Thank you.