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## Greetings from our President

Matt Quinn

The off season can be difficult. And as I write this, it is right in the middle of the off season. After a non-stop November and December it can be difficult to regroup and focus on the next year. It certainly does not help that the fields many times are covered in snow, it's cold, and dark and there is no sense of urgency to give that extra push. In a sense though, that can prove to be enjoyable. January, February and March offer us a chance to catch up on things.

But, right around the corner is April and May. And just like with the fauna of the Earth, our flora, evergreens, are ready to be plentiful and multiply. For tree growers, that means spring planting. There are always 1000 ways to do one thing when it comes to doing anything, and that seems especially true in farming. Planting is no different. What kind of seedlings to plant, spacing, and planting technique are all important.

As the realtors often say, location, location, location. And for tree farmers that, in essence, is going to direct the next steps. How much land you have will dictate how many trees you can grow, or rather, it will help drive the setup for your fields. Layout is important. Finding the grid pattern that works for your farm will help ensure good growth, while at the same time maximizing your space.

For me a 7x5 grid pattern was the way to go. That's 35 square feet per tree, which is about the same as 36 square feet of a 6x6 grid. Now, I suppose in an effort to man-splain this, in my 7x5 pattern, each row is seven feet wide, while the trees are five feet apart in the rows. For me, this allows enough room for my four-foot-wide tractor to drive down my rows in order to mow, spray or otherwise do tractor things within the trees. I made my brain do some math and concluded that a reasonable base width of a good tree would be three to four feet in diameter. Which would still allow the tractor room to traverse the rows even in the final year of growth.

An acre is 43,560 square feet. There isn't a way to make the math work where the numbers come out right. But that's what we're dealing with. 43,560 square feet. Divide that by the 35 square feet per tree on my 7x5 grid and I can fit 1,244.57 trees per acre (that 57% of a tree can still be a tabletop...). That's quite the number of trees per acre. Unfortunately, it's all but impossible to utilize an entire acre block with planted trees.

When developing your layout, you have to consider the day that they're ready to be harvested. How do we get the trees out? With roads of course! Well, more like lanes I suppose, but they do need to be wide enough to fit a larger tractor and trailer through, and quite possibly a full-sized pickup. How far do you want to drag a tree? This question is the most important when creating your layout and where you plan to put your lanes. I have chosen to skip a row for every 10. The furthest I have to drag a tree is 35 feet. At first thought, 35 feet is not a long way, but traversing other trees, the possibility of snow-covered fields, working from dawn until dusk will make 35 feet feel like 350. My rows are 250 feet long. This allows me to have a block of 500 trees, which is fairly easy to count. A layout like this allows for two blocks of 500 per acre, or 1000 trees, while still creating access points, lanes and landing zones. It also allows for quick math when trying to determine how many acres are needed for whatever you would like to accomplish with your farm.

While everyone's platform is going to be different, we all want to grow the best trees we possibly can. Taking a little time to plan a nice layout can save you a ton of headaches in the years to come. Enjoy your planting season.



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**SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Heidi Watson

Greetings!

“Walking in a Winter Wonderland”... affirmative, we still have loads of snow on the ground! It sure makes our fields picturesque. As we await the arrival of Spring, savour in the moments of rest.

We have 133 Members, and currently have just over \$56,000 in our account.

We recently purchased t-shirts and hats to sell at our events, and I don't mind shipping them if you'd like to cover the cost.

I want to thank the meetings team for another great meeting! I also want to thank our speakers and presenters for all the useful information. The meetings don't happen without participants, and I would like to thank each member who joined us in Augusta at our Annual Winter Meeting!

We awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Annabelle Thone, who is attending Husson University.

I have MCTA hats, shirts and signs available:

Hats	\$30
Short Sleeve T-shirts	\$20
Long Sleeve T-shirts	\$30
Membership Signs	\$100

If you have paid your dues, soon you will receive your membership cards, if you haven't already. The membership dues deadline was January 31st.

Fall Meeting will be September 12th & 13th at Boiling Spring Tree Farm in Dayton, ME!!

Ornaments for Troops packing is on June 9th at 9 AM. Contact Gary & Melba Fisher for more information.

Respectfully,

Heidi Watson

Executive Secretary/Treasurer

***Save the Date!*****Ornaments for Troops - Ornament Packing****9 AM on JUNE 9th**

at Melba &amp; Gary Fisher's home

Call if interested 207 322-8716

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## In Memorium: Dana E. Graves (1941-2026)

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Hermon - Dana E. Graves, 84, passed away peacefully at his home with family by his side on January 12, 2026. He was born in Levant, March 28, 1941, the son of Harry Graves and Amber (Curry) Graves.

Dana was a graduate from Hermon High School class of 1958. Following graduation he continued to work for F.J. Witherly Farms in Bangor. In 1974 Dana became self-employed as Co-Owner of G & S Christmas Tree Farms and retired in 2020. After retiring, Dana enjoyed meeting for coffee with friends at the Levant Corner Store every morning to start the day. He also enjoyed playing cards, watching NASCAR, and attending Local Stock Car Races, as well as being with his family and visiting with friends.

Dana was a member of the State of Maine Christmas Tree Association for many years. He was a member of The State of Maine Stock Car Racing Association and was very proud to be in the Maine Motorsports Hall of Fame. Dana was a member of Hermon Lynde Lodge, #174. He was also a member of the Anah Temple Shrine, thirty-second degree.



In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by his loving wife, Dottie, in 2021.

He is survived by his Brothers, Robert and his wife Sharon, Leslie and his wife Donna. Sisters, Norma Jean Jordan and her husband, Herbert; Judith Jewett and Brenda Golder; Sister-in-law, Vicki and her husband, Paul Gonyea; Special nieces and nephews, Jeffrey and Tammy Jordan, Sherry and Rick Ringuette, Brian Graves, Michael and Jay Jewett, Scott and Tracy McLaughlin, Skip and Leaha Hawkes, Clark Gonyea, Keely Gonyea and her fiancé, Gabe; Special friends, Harvey and Diane Sprague, Raymond and Joann Ormsby, Mark and

Cheryl Verrill, Randy and Laurie Gardner, Jeff and Kathy Dow, Alan and Mary Lawrence; as well as great-nieces, great nephews, cousins and friends.

The family would like to show our appreciation by thanking the caregivers from Visiting Angels, Gentiva Hospice and all of the very caring night staff.

Relatives and friends are welcome to call January 19th at 11am at Brookings-Smith, 133 Center Street, Bangor where the funeral service will be held January 19th at 12 noon with Pastor Garnett Chute officiating. The family invites relatives and friends to share conversation and refreshments at the Family Receptions Center of Brookings-Smith, 163 Center Street, Bangor.

Interment will be private for family in the spring. Condolences to the family may be expressed at Brookings-Smith.com. In lieu of flowers, the family ask donations be made to the Shriners Children's Hospital at [donate.shrinerschildrens.org](http://donate.shrinerschildrens.org) in Dana's memory.

**TREASURY REPORT**

Heidi Watson

Summary of MCTA's account balances as of January 25, 2026:

<b>Account</b>	<b>Balance 1/01/2026</b>	<b>Y-T-D Deposits</b>	<b>Y-T-D Expenses</b>	<b>Balance 1/25/2026</b>
General	\$ 18,464.83	\$ 4,032.54	(\$ 2,617.04)	\$ 19,880.33
Marketing	\$ 1,429.99	\$ 0.00	(\$ 260.00)	\$ 1,169.99
Website	\$ 9,000.50	\$ 1,020.00	(\$ 430.00)	\$ 9,590.50
Seed Orchard	\$ 17,960.09	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 17,960.09
Meetings	\$ 1,670.22	\$ 772.82	(\$ 50.00)	\$ 2,393.04
Scholarships	\$ 7,461.82	\$ 0.00	(\$ 2,200.00)	\$ 5,261.82
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 55,987.45</b>	<b>\$ 5,825.36</b>	<b>(\$ 5,557.04)</b>	<b>\$ 56,255.77</b>

**Marketing Committee**

Ryan Liberty

The Marketing Committee looks forward to managing or supporting the following initiatives this year:

- ✓ We'll be huddling up with Gary & Melba Fisher soon to discuss a strategy for a successful 2026 Fryeburg Fair.
- ✓ The Blaine House has committed to Nov 30th as the tentative date for the presentation of the Blaine House Christmas trees and wreaths. We'll be organizing that day's events and will keep all parties updated along the way.
- ✓ We'll continue to survey membership on their thoughts regarding our current image, and whether we should consider a brand refresh.
- ✓ We hope to begin a 'Featured Farmer' piece for our next newsletter – The goal is to hi-light a new farmer in each newsletter.
- ✓ I continue to sort through the MCTA archival material that Joanne gave me so that it can be organized and digitized for future generations. I encourage membership to share anything that they have that helps to tell the story of our organization.
- ✓ We'll once again be working with the Maine Department of Corrections in support of the seedlings that they've planted for a future donation to Trees For Troops. We ordered 500 more seedlings for them this spring. We expect they'll have trees ready for donations in four years.
- ✓ I will be encouraging more MCTA members to participate in future Maine Open Farm Weekend events. It's a great way to hi-light your farm and to enhance the value of your trees by showing all of the work that goes into growing trees year-round.

**Northeastern Christmas Tree Research Alliance (NECTRA)**

Ryan Liberty

I continue to represent the MCTA as a liaison to the Northeastern Christmas Tree Research Alliance. This organization's mission is to ensure the prosperity of our industry through the research and study of the trees that we grow.

## National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA)

Ryan Liberty

In my role as the current MCTA liaison to the National Christmas Tree Association, I've joined the NCTA Journal committee. I'll be supporting Rick Dungey in his role as chair. Please reach out with any ideas for future articles.

## Seed Orchard Committee

Calvin Luther

Norridgewock Orchard: Todd Murphy reported late last summer that many of the original seed trees in the orchard were experiencing mortality, and there was not a commercial crop of cones available in 2025. The newer trees (15 yrs old +/-) are doing well, and will be producing the majority of the next crop of seeds.

Ashland Orchard: This seed orchard was not visited in 2025 so the overall condition is not known at this time. There continues to be concern about the spruce budworm infestation in northern Maine, but the bugs were further north and west of Ashland this year.

Huff Hill Orchard: 29 grafted transplants were outplanted this May, and 28 are still alive at the last report. They were fertilized, watered, and the field mowed in 2025.

An additional 30 (1 has died) transplants grafted in May 2025 are doing well under Len Price's care and he will report on this at the 2026 Winter meeting. These will be outplanted in May 2026. And we will have potted MCTA root stock (100 3-2 seedlings potted in May this year) available to accept grafts next year as well, to continue to produce additional seed tree stock.

Regards,

Calvin Luther, Co-Chair

## Fryeburg Fair

Gary & Melba Fisher

I recently received this notice from the President of the Fryeburg Fair:

Dear Friends of Fryeburg Fair:

I'm writing to let you know that due to pending legislation and an adverse decision by the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, we are being denied the ability to open on Saturday and run nine days, as we did for the first time in 2025. We will be going back to eight days for 2026 - Sunday, October 4 thru Sunday, October 11. First, pending legislation submitted by a Representative from Cumberland (LD 2096) proposing, for the first time, to prohibit the operation of a Fair on an unlicensed day, appears poised to become law this year. Under this new law, no Maine fair will be able to run on any unlicensed days as we did on Saturday, September 27th, 2025. Second, the Commissioner denied our petition to have our first Saturday licensed going forward, denying an agricultural fair experience to the 23,000 plus fairgoers who attended on that Saturday last year. While we are disappointed by these developments, we will move forward as the same great fair we have been since 1851 - Maine's Blue Ribbon Classic! Thank you for being part of our Fryeburg Fair family.

Dave Hastings, President

Respectfully,

Gary Fisher, MCTA exhibit "Superintendent"

**Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting - January 12th, 2026**

Jennifer Hicks

**Call to order: 6:19 pm Roll Call**

**Board of Directors:** Jim Corliss, Gary Fisher, Jim Hummer, Ryan Liberty, Calvin Luther, Bryan Mayo, Arianna Meserve, Matt Quinn, Jeffrey Patterson, Heidi Watson **Staff:** Jennifer Hicks

**Motion** to approve minutes from the October 2025 Board Meeting - Bryan Mayo Seconded by Ryan Liberty. Unanimously approved.

**Secretary/Treasurer report - Heidi Watson**

Fund Balance: Just under \$56,000 in checking account / \$1400 in PayPal account

Event expenses vs. revenue:

- \* Fryeburg Fair: Profit to support scholarship program: \$793.34  
Revenue: \$3,842.00 / Expenses: \$3,048.66  
\$2,060.00 for seedlings / \$731.25 for rings and wire  
\$257.41 for expenses reimbursed to Gary Fisher
- \* Meetings in 2025: Income \$9,095 / Expenses \$13,300 / Net Loss \$4,205.00
- \* Membership: 123 members at the end of 2025 - renewals are due in January
- \* Trees for Troops: Paid for 10 trees and the trucking for 50 trees from Canada
- \* MCTA merchandise:  
T-shirts have been purchased and will be given out at Winter Meeting.  
Trucker-style hats are on order.

**Motion** to accept Treasurer report - Bryan Mayo. Matt Quinn seconded. Unanimously approved

**Administrative Consultant Report - Jennifer Hicks**

Jennifer Hicks is the MCTA administrative consultant and provided the following updates:

- \* Communication activities  
Email blasts between Nov. 1 and Dec. 31: Nov. 2, Dec. 14 and Dec. 29 / 45% open rate, 147 recipients  
Facebook posts including sharing member posts and MCTA updates including promoting the members list on the website.
  - Posted photos and media coverage for the Blaine House Christmas Tree and Wreath presentation, December 1
  - Posted media coverage for Trees for Troops tree loading in Searsmont
- \* USDA Block Grant  
Considered a potential application for MCTA but realized it would be too much of a lift  
Reached out to Brett Johnson with UMaine Coop Extension on collaborating on their grant for education programing - have added MCTA.  
Will hear about whether Brett's application is accepted to submit the next round application by early February.
- \* Started work researching inexpensive membership database software to manage records and dues.
- \* Jeff Patterson suggested that Jenn develops an online survey to find out more about what members want.

## Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting - January 12th, 2026 (continued)

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### Board Nomination Report:

The following are the slate of nominees for the board of directors

Karen Bragdon - Wells

David Karas - Waldoboro

Doug Fortier - Windham

Julie Kearns - Winterport

**Motion** to approve the slate by Calvin Luther, seconded by Jeff Paterson. Unanimously approved

### Scholarship Report:

Applicants weren't already in school in the Fall, but are now enrolled in January so will now receive scholarship. Next deadline is October 1, 2026. The committee recommends that applicants must be enrolled and submits a bill.

### Old Business:

Bryan Mayo presents an overview of a Website Assessment Team and its objectives in response to the discussion at the October board meeting about the need for a website update:

- Evaluate website and its workability
- Determine future needs
- Findings will be recommended to the board

Bryan will put together the team and hold an initial meeting to discuss next steps with a report back to the board.

### New Business:

Heidi Watson brought forward the issue about a discrepancy on the online membership registration fees and the paper version of the membership registration.

**Motion:** Eliminate extra \$30 for a new website listing -Dugald Kell. Seconded by Bryan Mayo. Unanimously approved.

Gary Fisher suggested that MCTA offer an additional membership category for retired growers.

**Motion:** Add a checkbox on the membership registration form that indicates retired status by Bryan Mayo. Seconded by Gary Fisher. Unanimously approved

Jenn Hicks proposes that MCTA explores inexpensive CRM systems (database) to manage membership records. This would also help build MCTA capacity to partner with UMaine on trainings and research.

- Provides a streamlined way to capture and update member records
- Could offer an easier way to integrate membership records with Mail Chimp and website

**Motion:** Jenn Hicks to research and trial out CRM systems that fit the needs of MCTA and report back to Board- Dugald Kell. Seconded by Ryan Liberty. Unanimously approved.

Jenn Hicks presents a newly developed MCTA brochure and proposes that MCTA conduct a mailing to Christmas tree/wreath growers/retailers not already MCTA members. Mailing would include a letter from Matt Quinn and brochure. Jenn would create a mailing list through an internet search and other growers. Board members indicate support for this activity.

## Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting - January 12th, 2026 (continued)

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Jenn Hicks provides a contract renewal for her position as Administrative Contractor for the board's consideration. The hourly pay will increase from \$40/hr to \$45/hr for up to 10 hours a month. Services to be provided:

- Manage regular MCTA outreach through communication with members, partners, and media using social media and email client software.
- Explore and expand revenue-generating opportunities to support desired organizational growth including grant funding, corporate sponsorships, donor contributions, events, and potentially merchandise sales. Areas of funding could focus on supporting the MCTA's seed orchard, needle retention research, drought mitigation, pest management, etc.
- Conduct efforts to recruit tree farm businesses that are not yet MCTA members.
- Identify ways and implement approaches that strengthen MCTA's efforts to support Christmas tree growers and ensure that the necessary resources are available to them.
- Maintain ties with state government and academia including the state legislature, state agencies, and the University of Maine.

**Motion:** Renewal of Administrative Contractor contract for 2026 by Matt Quinn. Seconded by Ryan Liberty. Unanimously approved.

**Motion:** Adjourn board meeting by Matt Quinn. Seconded by Bryan Mayo. Unanimously approved.



## Invasive Species Awareness & Action

### MeshTech - A New Strategy for Managing Knotweed

Knotweed (*Reynoutria* spp.) is a severely invasive plant originating from Eastern Asia. Introduced to the East Coast in the late 1800s as an ornamental, knotweed has since become ubiquitous across North America, reaching over 40 US states and 8 Canadian provinces. Knotweed has proven extremely detrimental to a wide variety of ecosystems in which it has established. Forming tall, dense thickets, knotweed shades out native plants, preventing them from growing. Additionally, knotweed is allelopathic, meaning it releases organic compounds into the soil that inhibits the growth of native plant species.

Knotweed also increases erosion along streams and riverbanks. By shading out native groundcover species and reducing the diverse root reinforcement provided by native species in riparian zones, riverbanks lose considerably more soil when infested with stands of knotweed (Hammer 2019, Matte et al. 2021). This erosion can increase turbidity of waterways, potentially affecting fish and other aquatic species (Henley et al. 2000). The reduction of native plants in riparian zones paired with winter dieback of knotweed stems also leaves riverbanks extremely vulnerable to winter and early spring flooding. This degradation of the riparian area creates a feedback loop in which floods carry knotweed propagules downstream, where they can colonize and increase erosion in new areas (Colleran et al. 2020).



*Knotweed stem forced to grow through wire fencing*

Historically, management of knotweed has been extremely time-and-resource intensive. Large populations require years of consistent treatment, often combining mechanical and chemical approaches to be effective. This commitment to diligent, multi-year mechanical treatment can be discouraging and can lead many to abandon treatment plans before completion. However, a new knotweed management technique could reduce labor inputs.



Base of girdled knotweed stems

Developed by Dr. Eric Donnelly, the [MeshTech management technique](#) has produced promising results at managing the growth and spread of knotweed while dramatically reducing labor inputs. This method involves cutting knotweed stems down to the soil level and laying ½-inch galvanized steel hardware fencing over the cut stems. When knotweed resprouts, it grows through the openings in the fencing. As stems mature and thicken, the metal fencing will begin to cut into the stems.

The knotweed will continue to grow through the fencing, effectively girdling itself at its base. This method aims to impact knotweed's nutrient pathways while also damaging the structural integrity of the plant. Alone, this method cannot eradicate knotweed populations. However, the MeshTech method can potentially reduce the health and vigor of knotweed, thus reducing the amount of cutting required in a growing season and the rate of spread in an area.

### A New Strategy for Managing Knotweed (continued)

At the Pleasant Hill Preserve in Scarborough, the Scarborough Land Trust (SLT) has begun implementing the MeshTech method to manage a portion of their knotweed infestation. An effort led by SLT's Stewardship Director Sami Wolf and Nathan Hjort, owner of Absolutely Complete Property Services, initial results indicate that the hardware fencing is proving successful. The knotweed forced to grow through the hardware fencing at Pleasant Hill Preserve showed clear signs of strain. Stems demonstrated significantly stunted growth and had even begun flowering early, an indication that a plant is under stress. While knotweed struggled to grow through the ½-inch holes, native flora had begun to sprout up through the hardware fencing. Other knotweed management practices, such as tarping or mowing, often discourage the growth of native species in a management area. Over time, the presence of native flora could provide an extra level of biotic resistance that could help slow the growth of knotweed and help kickstart native revegetation efforts. Eventually, supplemental plantings of native woody species can take place by cutting openings in the fence to allow for these larger species to grow. The fence can also be easily staked down, preventing knotweed or moving water from moving it out of place.

It is important to note that knotweed is a resilient plant and there is no single management action alone that will completely eliminate a population. The most effective knotweed management strategies use creative combinations of multiple approaches. Knotweed is a rhizomatous species, meaning it has an extensive, underground nutrient storage system made up of horizontal rhizomes that store nutrients. Draining this underground nutrient storage is the key to effectively managing an infestation. Consistent cutting of knotweed forces the plant to exhaust its below ground resources. By combining a cutting regimen with the MeshTech method, land managers could potentially see a significant reduction in their management timeline.

The effectiveness of this method provides promising implications for the future of knotweed management in Maine. Paired with consistent management, the MeshTech method could provide Maine with another tool to mitigate the spread of knotweed and reduce our reliance on chemical treatments.

#### Sources:

Colleran, Brian, et al. "[Invasive Japanese Knotweed \(\*Reynoutria japonica\* Houtt.\) and Related Knotweeds as Catalysts for Streambank Erosion.](#)" *River Research and Applications*, vol. 36, no. 9, 17 Sept. 2020.

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Matte, Rébecca, et al. "[Japanese Knotweed Increases Soil Erosion on Riverbanks.](#)" *River Research and Applications*, vol. 38, no. 3, 11 Dec. 2021, pp. 561–572.



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