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Portland Press Herald

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Mostly cloudy,
humid
High 75 °
Details, C6

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Federal suit alleges abuse at Bath’s Hyde School

A lawsuit filed Friday details claims of forced labor and emotional abuse at the private boarding school that advertises a character-based education.

By RILEY BOARD
Staff Writer
A former student at Hyde School, a character-focused private boarding school in Bath, is suing the school in federal court, alleging it subjected her and hundreds of other students to forced manual labor and emotional abuse. The suit, filed Friday by the Massachusetts firm Justice Law Collaborative and Maine-based Island Justice Law in the U.S. District Court of Maine, alleges that the school has violated human trafficking, forced labor and negligence laws — while

making significant profits — and asks the court to immediately intervene, including by seizing all of the defendant’s assets. The lawsuit names the head of the school, Laura Gauld, her husband, Executive Director Malcom Gauld, and several other members of the Gauld family as plaintiffs. Hyde was founded in 1966 by Joseph Gauld, Malcom’s father, who died in 2023. In a Friday letter to the Hyde community that was shared with the Press Herald, Dana McCavity, chair of the school’s board of governors, said the law-

suit’s claims “grossly mischaracterize Hyde’s policies and practices over time or are patently false.” “Hyde vehemently denies these claims and intends to vigorously defend itself, its reputation, and the character education model that makes Hyde the special and effective school it is,” McCavity wrote. The only named plaintiff in the lawsuit is Jessica Fuller, who attended Hyde in 2014 and 2015 and alleges she was physically restrained at the school and required to attend

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The Hyde School in Bath on Tuesday. The only named plaintiff in the lawsuit is Jessica Fuller, who attended in 2014 and 2015. (GREGORY REC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)



Workers prepare Tuesday to build a bridge spanning the Nonesuch River as part of the Eastern Trail “Close the Gap” project. After years of delays, work began last month on 1.6 miles of new trail in Scarborough. (DEREK DAVIS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

CLOSING THE GAP

Long-sought Eastern Trail project finally moving toward completion

By DREW JOHNSON
Staff Writer
SCARBOROUGH — On the surface, the construction of just over a mile and a half’s worth of trail may not sound like a huge deal for southern Maine. You could also assume a project of that length would be straightforward. But you’d be sorely mistaken — at least when it comes to the “Close the Gap” project on the Eastern Trail, a venture over a decade in the making that conservationists, transportation experts, and municipal and state officials all believe will have a profound regional impact. After years of delays caused by everything from difficul-

ty securing easements to a global pandemic, the 1.6-mile project is — at last — starting to take shape, with construction having begun in June. When the Eastern Trail Alliance launched its first fundraising campaign, it believed the gap could be closed by 2017, at a cost of \$4.1 million. If all goes smoothly from here, it will be just 10 years behind schedule and nearly \$3 million over budget. Just getting to this point has required years of determination, patience and perseverance. “This project is a huge win not only for Scarborough and

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The 1.6 miles of fresh trail in Scarborough will solidify a roughly 16-mile off-road connection between Bug Light Park in South Portland and downtown Saco.

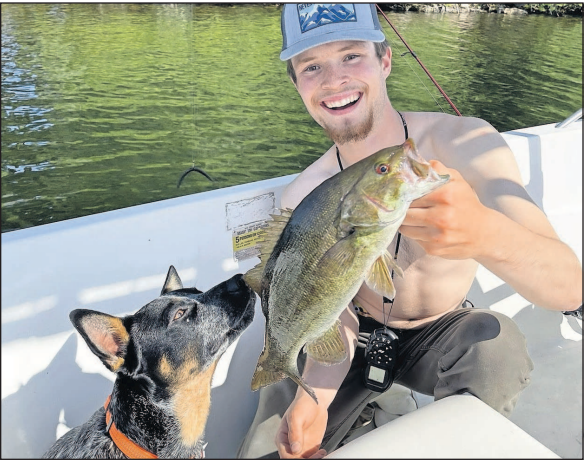


SOURCE: Town of Scarborough

STAFF GRAPHIC | JAKE LAWS

Kennebec drowning victim, 22, loved the outdoors, adventure

Robert Stolt with his Australian cattle dog Buck. The Augusta man’s body was recovered Wednesday night.



(COURTESY OF NAHDIA PELLETIER)

Robert Stolt was fishing in the river near Lines Island in Bath on Sunday when he jumped into the water to rescue his dog.

By AMY CALDER
Staff Writer
Robert “Bobby” Stolt spent much of his short life fishing on the Kennebec River and other waterways both summer and winter, hunting in the woods of Maine and sharing his adventures with family and friends. The 22-year-old electrician from Augusta lost his life Sunday while trying to rescue his dog, Buck, in the rough waters of the Kennebec around Lines

Island near Bath. His body was recovered Wednesday evening after a multiday search by the U.S. Coast Guard and Maine Marine Patrol. The Maine Office of the Chief Medical Examiner determined his death was an accidental drowning. “It’s a really tragic loss of an amazing young man,” his stepfather, Jim Kirk, said Friday. Kirk, of Pittsfield, and others

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Trump to hike tariffs on Canadian imports to 35%

Maine’s largest trading partner supplies a key portion of the state’s energy, including about 80% of its heating fuel and gasoline.

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said in a letter that he will raise taxes on many imported goods from Canada to 35%, deepening a rift between two North American countries that have suffered a debilitating blow to their decades-old alliance. The Thursday letter to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney is an aggressive increase to the top 25% tariff rates that Trump first imposed in March after months of threats. Trump’s tariffs were allegedly an effort to get Canada to crack down on fentanyl smuggling despite the relatively modest trafficking in the drug from that country. Trump has also expressed frustration over a trade deficit with Canada that largely reflects oil purchases by America. “I must mention that the flow of Fentanyl is hardly the only challenge we have with Canada, which has many Tariff, and Non-Tariff, Policies and Trade Barriers,” Trump wrote in the letter. The higher rates would go into effect Aug. 1, creating a tense series of weeks ahead for the global

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University of New England professor Noah Perlut heads out into the woods in 2019 to check game cameras near the Eastern Trail extension in Scarborough. His students have contributed to years of analysis into the area’s wildlife.



Crews began construction in June on a 1.6-mile connector in Scarborough that, once completed, will fill the gap in a roughly 16-mile off-road connection between Bug Light Park in South Portland and downtown Saco.

TRAIL

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South Portland, but for the entire region,” said Joshua Reny, South Portland assistant city manager. “The perseverance of all of the stakeholders, partners and donors who brought the project to this critical point deserves acknowledgment.”

‘THE SPINE’

The Eastern Trail, part of U.S. Bike Route 1, runs roughly 65 miles from South Portland to Kittery. While a mere 1.6 miles of fresh trail is being blazed in Scarborough, it will solidify a roughly 16-mile off-road connection between Bug Light Park in South Portland and downtown Saco.

The new section of trail is expected to be completed by November 2027.

“One of the biggest challenges right now for anyone using active transportation is north-south connectivity and doing it in a safe way,” said Chris Chop, transportation director for the Greater Portland Council of Governments. “This project, closing the gap, creates a continuous off-road network that connects recreational areas, downtowns and schools.”

Closing the gap is “a huge deal,” said Chop, who likened the Eastern Trail to U.S. Route 1 for off-road transportation.

In Scarborough, the northern, off-road segment of the Eastern Trail currently ends at the Nonesuch River, where a bridge is being constructed to begin filling the 1.6-mile gap. From there, the new portion of the trail will turn south, then curve east and across some railroad tracks. As it heads east, the path will stretch through a power corridor until it runs into Pleasant Hill Road, where a crosswalk with flashing pedestrian signals will be installed.

From Pleasant Hill Road, the trail will loop around Prouts Pond and north to the Wainwright Sports Complex in South Portland. Wainwright provides a connection to the Greenbelt multiuse path, which extends to Bug Light Park.

Dakota Hewlett, the Maine Department of Transportation’s active transportation planner, described the trail as “the spine for biking and walking” in the region.

“From that spine, municipalities are able to connect to that, into neighborhoods or business areas, downtowns, beaches — all those destinations we can think of in southern Maine,” Hewlett said.

The new link could be “a real game-changer,” said



Scarborough Town Manager Tom Hall shows the plans for the “Close the Gap” project on Tuesday along the under-construction portion of the Eastern Trail. The long-delayed project is 10 years behind its original schedule, but workers broke ground in June, and the new section of trail is now expected to be complete by November 2027. (PHOTOS BY DEREK DAVIS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

Scott Kunkler, the Scarborough Land Trust’s conservation director.

“The connection goes beyond just recreation,” he said. “It could encourage more people to choose active transportation options for daily commutes or errands, helping to reduce reliance on vehicles.”

FINDING THE TRAILHEAD

It’s difficult to pinpoint when the Close the Gap project officially came to be.

It can be traced to the early 2000s, when the idea first gained traction, or to 2012, when the first fundraising campaign was launched, or to 2017, when formal plans began to take shape.

The project predates most, if not all, of those involved in it today.

“It’s gone through four different local administrators on our staff who have either moved on or retired,” said Tom Hall, Scarborough’s town manager since 2008. “It ended up on my desk about three and a half years ago, and I’ve been kind of limping along ever since.”

While Scarborough is at the helm, closing the gap has been a product of collaboration, with contributions coming from South Portland, the Eastern Trail Alliance, private donations and the Maine DOT, among others.

Jennifer Grant, Maine DOT’s director of planning, said the project plays well into the department’s goals.

“Part of that vision is really supporting and improving quality of life, access to jobs, education,

recreation and all types of essential services,” Grant said.

The Eastern Trail Alliance got the ball rolling by building community support and raising at least half a million dollars, said Chelsey Berlin, the alliance’s director since 2023.

By 2017, the alliance had contributed \$50,000 and raised another \$130,000 via private donations. Local families, nonprofits and businesses have donated upward of \$300,000.

The majority of the project’s initial funding — a mix of state and federal money exceeding \$2 million — was allocated through Maine DOT, and Scarborough and South Portland contributed \$287,000 combined. When another \$1 million from the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System was pledged, the initial goal of \$4.1 million had been reached.

For a time, it seemed as though closing the gap on time and within budget was in reach.

ROCKY TERRAIN

The list of hurdles that organizers have had to clear since 2017 is lengthy. The COVID-19 pandemic was a momentum-killer, derailing the project for several months.

In late 2020, as things picked up again, negotiations began on easements to make way for the trail.

“Right of way is always a challenge with any federally funded project just because of all the red tape,” said Angela Blanchette, Scarborough’s town engineer. “This one seemed a little more challenging.”

Eventually, the town secured easements from three private property owners. That left Central Maine Power — which eventually permitted the project to run along part of its power line corridor — and Pan Am Railways, which controlled the railroad that the trail must cross.

“As you might expect, railroads don’t like the thought of anything happening remotely close to their active rail line, much less over it,” Hall said.

Project leaders slowly “gained ground” with the railroad company, Hall said. Then, in 2022, CSX Corp. purchased Pan Am.

Back to square one. “The first conversation I had with someone at CSX that I could finally track down said, ‘This is a national acquisition. ... It’s going to take us a couple of years to figure out the real estate end of things,’” Hall recounted.

But Hall credited CSX for moving relatively quickly from there, and in August 2023, he said construction could start that fall.

An agreement was reached about a year later, but by then, the project’s budget had climbed significantly.

Some of the \$4.1 million had been expended in the longer-than-anticipated planning and permitting stages, but the meat of the project — such as bridge and trail construction — was subject to COVID-19-induced inflation. By 2023, the overall cost of the project was pegged at \$6.6 million and has crept to over \$7 million since then, according to Maine DOT. The department is

overseeing distribution of federal funding, which will pay for the bulk of the project.

LIFE IN THE GAP

As project administrators grappled with challenges, students from the University of New England’s School of Marine and Environmental Programs were studying wildlife along the 1.6-mile route.

The original plan was simple: record videos and photos and analyze the data for two years prior to construction, two years during and two years after.

Instead, the GapTracks project, which began in 2017, wound up collecting eight years of preconstruction data, with over a hundred students contributing. “But that’s OK,” said UNE professor Noah Perlut, whose terrestrial wildlife students conducted the project. “We’ve been able to really document all kinds of cool stuff out there.”

By 2022, Perlut’s class had identified over 60 different species that visited the gap. White-tailed deer and turkeys were common, but students also spotted coyotes, bobcats, river otters, short-tailed weasels, gray foxes and even a moose.

“Barred owls or moose or flying squirrels — it really varies, but that variation and change in wildlife visiting speaks to how important this area is,” Perlut said.

While recreation and commuting are most-touted impacts of the project, Perlut hopes trail users will take some time to enjoy the abundant wildlife, too.

“I hope that they’ll be able to interact with wildlife, just as they can when they’re going through the Scarborough Marsh,” he said. “I think that this section of trail offers a similar situation, except instead of crossing the marsh, you’re going through a very mature and healthy forest on the edge of a river.”

THE END IN SIGHT

After the years of complications, Shaw Brothers Construction signed on this spring to do the construction work for about \$5.5 million. The Gorham company was the lowest bidder and officially broke ground in June.

Hewlett, the active transportation planner at the Maine DOT, said it hasn’t quite sunk in yet for his team that the project is finally underway.

“I don’t know if we’ll fully realize that excitement until it’s open,” he said. “I’m really looking forward to being able to bike on it.”

Berlin, the Eastern Trail Alliance director, said members of her group are extremely excited and grateful that construction is finally underway.

“This is a significant milestone for the Eastern Trail community and multimodal infrastructure in southern Maine,” Berlin said.

At Scarborough Town Hall, there is excitement, pride — and maybe even a small sigh of relief.

“Folks have been waiting for this day to come,” Hall said, “and thankfully, they have been incredibly patient.”

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HYDE

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“attack therapy” under the threat of being forced to do manual labor as punishment.

But the attorneys are seeking class-action status, which would include anyone who was forced to do labor at the school since 2015, and say there are more than 100 students who fall into the class.

“This lawsuit seeks justice for the hundreds of students who were trafficked, abused and ex-

ploited by the Gauld family’s systematic child labor scheme operating under the false promise of character development and innovative education,” the complaint reads.

The lawsuit also alleges that Hyde benefited from the labor of students, which was part of the school’s discipline system, and included shoveling snow, digging holes, building structures and landscaping, both on campus and at off-campus locations like a wilderness property in Eustis and on Seguin Island off the coast of Popham Beach in Saga-

dahoc County.

According to the complaint, Hyde staff threatened students with labor punishments for reporting medical conditions, asking for psychological help, running away or asking for medicine.

Other punishments included the loss of food privileges, or being sent to Eustis with inadequate food and shelter to do work on the property, the suit alleges.

It also says that despite Hyde marketing itself as an academic institution, curriculum was “secondary to its labor and disci-

plinary systems.”

The suit also describes physical abuse of students including “being slammed into walls by Hyde staff, choked, grabbed, and pushed to the ground.” It alleges students were subjected to constant surveillance, isolation, public humiliation and attack therapy.

McCavity wrote that Hyde representatives have engaged with the plaintiffs’ attorneys with open minds, but that the claims in the suit are inflammatory and disturbing.

“The news you will hear may make you think that

Hyde has skeletons, dark secrets now coming to light. But Hyde, as you know, has always been an open book, a place of extraordinary transparency,” McCavity wrote in her letter to the community. “We take seriously our obligation to investigate and, where appropriate, report to law enforcement. Contrary to the allegations made in the lawsuit, Hyde considers its obligation to protect students to be paramount.”

Hyde was founded on the estate of a Bath Iron Works founding family in 1966 with a focus on the

unique potential in every student, according to Joseph Gauld. The school had a second boarding campus in Woodstock, Connecticut, from 1997 to 2019, and has had partner charter schools, including ones in New York and Orlando, Florida, that still operate today.

The Press Herald has been interviewing former Hyde students about their allegations of abuse and neglect at the school. Read our full story on Sunday.

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