

Remarks by Enock Glidden upon receiving a 2024 Conservation Leadership Award

Thank you, Pete, for this incredible award.

As a person with a disability who was born in 1978, I've had the unique perspective of watching the world evolve, from a time before the Americans with Disabilities Act to the present day. I grew up in Northern Maine at a time when people with disabilities weren't always seen as part of society. I had to adapt to the world, rather than the world adapting to me. If I wanted to do something, I had to figure it out on my own.

There's a story from my childhood that reflects this. One day, while playing in the driveway of our log cabin home, which sat in the woods with a dirt driveway, I noticed a natural dirt ramp leading off into the woods. Curious, I thought to myself, "I wonder how far I can go into the woods." So, I pulled a wheelie and used that ramp to access the woods. I pushed myself as far as I could until I got stuck in a pile of wood debris. Undeterred, I hopped out of my chair and started crawling, pulling my chair behind me. I kept going until I found a spot where I could hop back in and continue on my way. Of course, I hadn't told my mom where I was going—probably not the best idea—but I made it.

When the ADA was signed in 1990, things began to change, albeit slowly. Even today, there are places that aren't fully accessible, and I still have to figure things out from time to time. Unfortunately, that legislation didn't cover the natural world, but that has been changing rapidly over the past few years.

About four years ago, I started blogging about my outdoor experiences, and that eventually led to an opportunity to work with Maine Trail Finder. They wanted to assess trails for accessibility throughout the state of Maine, and I jumped at the chance. It allowed me to dive deeper into this work and make a bigger difference for people with disabilities, helping them access Maine's beautiful outdoor spaces.

Since then, I've traveled from Fort Kent to Kittery, and everywhere in between, assessing trails and outdoor spaces to ensure they're improved and made more accessible for as many people as possible. With over 6,000 miles of trails in Maine, it's a massive undertaking, but as long as I'm able, I'll keep pushing the needle forward, creating more opportunities for the people of Maine to enjoy the great outdoors.

Thank you again for this honor, and for supporting this important work.