

Task Force to Help Shape the Next Generation of Maine Land Conservation
Meeting Summary
June 29, 2018

Task Force Members Present: John Banks, Adam Bishop, Cathy Breen, John Bryant, Patrick Corey, Hugh Cowperthwaite, Lee Dassler, Tim Glidden, Doug Kane, Don Kleiner, Alex Koch, Janet McMahon, Austin Muir, Nancy Smith, Alison Sucus, Wolfe Tone, David Trahan, Chris Winstead

Task Force Members Absent: Dennis Keschl

Others Present: Jerry Bley (co-coordinator), Liz Petruska (co-coordinator)

Public: Tom Abello (TNC), Eliza Baker-Wacks (AMC), Steve Brooke, Molly Docherty (MNAP/ACF), Rodney Kelshaw (STANTEC/TWS), Mike Maynard (APAW), Bob Myers (Maine Snowmobile Association), Carly Peruccio (NRCM), Lucy Quimby (Bangor Land Trust), Jeff Reardon (Trout Unlimited), Jeff Romano (MCHT), Warren Whitney (MCHT),

The second meeting of the Task Force to Help Shape the Next Generation of Maine Land Conservation (Task Force) took place on Friday June 29, 2018 at 9 am, at the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine in Augusta.

I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order by co-chairs Tim Glidden and David Trahan, followed by introductions by Task Force members. The chairs asked for feedback and comments on the summary of the May 29th meeting that was distributed several weeks earlier. There was none. The coordinators will ensure meeting summaries are available on the website. Tim reported that there was quite a bit of public feedback following the first meeting. People have signed up to stay informed through the website and a few organizations have reached out wanting to be more involved. There have also been a few comments and criticisms on the make-up of the Task Force and a desire to have greater opportunity for public input. David remarked that because the group wasn't created through a government process, there is greater latitude and opportunity to include diverse perspectives and expansive conversation.

The chairs reviewed the agenda for the meeting and explained that the Task Force would hear from two panels: one on "Recreation" and one on "Wildlife and Ecological Resources." Panelists were asked to provide brief presentations, which will be followed by questions and discussions with the Task Force.

II. Panel on Recreation

Liz Petruska provided an overview of the Recreation Panel, stating that outdoor recreation is central to Maine's way of life and is a core component of land conservation programs throughout the state. A wide variety of stakeholders are involved with recreational activities and it takes many shapes and forms. Five panelists were invited to share their perspective on recreation, and to discuss challenges related to infrastructure, trends in their sector, and how future land conservation programs can best support the recreational needs of the future. Key points of each presentation included the following:

Kaitlyn Bernard – Appalachian Mountain Club

- Access to private land, which is a long-standing Maine tradition, is a privilege and an important responsibility. Visiting Maine's north woods is different from visiting Acadia, or the White Mountains,

and there's an important education component to keep in mind, especially with out-of-state visitors. There's an opportunity to invest in collaborative efforts that support visitor education upfront.

- Maine's demographics help inform AMC's recreation efforts. AMC finds that Millennials are looking for a different outdoor experience than previous generations – they want more creature comforts. AMC is able to cater to different audiences because of the varied character of their lodges and a diversity of recreation opportunities.
- An investment in infrastructure can help people feel more comfortable recreating in remote areas.
- Some recreation funding sources, like LMF and LWCF, can be subject to varying levels of political support and it is important to figure out how to better stabilize them.
- There is still a huge opportunity to fill recreational needs. We're not yet at carrying capacity in most areas and there's room to expand recreational access and opportunities.

Bob Meyers – Maine Snowmobile Association

- With 94% of Maine's trails on private lands, maintaining good relationships with landowners is one of the highest priorities for MSA and for local clubs.
- MSA supports funding for Linear Parks. Multi-use projects like the recently approved Pan-Am rail trail are a way to create economic opportunities. And they're one-of-a-kind; it would be nearly impossible to build such a trail with 2 substantial bridges over the Kennebec from scratch today.
- We need to think about where we focus future conservation efforts. Almost half of all LMF acres are found in 2 counties: Piscataquis and Somerset. Some newer LMF projects, like Hope Woods in Kennebunk, are right in the middle of town and provide close-to-home access for a denser population. In looking at future efforts, we need to hone in on what the real needs are, and how we can best meet those.

Barbara Schneider – Maine Adaptive Sports and Recreation

- The organization's roots are in alpine skiing, but they're moving towards more robust year-round programming. The group takes advantage of a wide variety of conserved lands (land trust trails, cycling in Back Cove, Bangor City Forest, public launches at Range Pond and on the Saco River). Where they go is dependent on how accessible the facilities are.
- The biggest challenge is transportation, and this is too frequently overlooked. You can't get to a state park from Portland using public transportation. As we look to the future we need to think about how people get to recreational resources. Maine is still a rural state, but people are gravitating towards service centers for work. Mobility management is key for the future and will most likely involve public/private partnerships.
- Maine's population is aging, and the disabled population is increasing. Recreation needs to serve a collection of people whose needs are vast and diverse. There are innovative public/private partnerships (Royal River Conservation Trust working at Bradbury Mountain, the newly funded Bethel Community Forest) that are using private money to make lands more accessible. With a changing base, we should look to put recreational opportunities where people are.

Carroll and Lila Ware – Maine Guides

- A lot of Maine's recreation takes place on land that belongs to someone else. The future is all about access. We need to educate users about good stewardship and the importance of respecting private lands. There's an opportunity to provide signage, training, brochures to sporting camp owners and guides who are otherwise in their own busy world.

- In the eyes of tourists there are two Maines: coastal and interior. There's a lot we can do to make people more aware of the interior and to help them understand that you don't have to be an avid hunter or fisherman to enjoy this vast area of the state.
- Find that people come to Maine for a "wilderness experience," but that their needs related to that experience are changing. They want more comforts. We need to give people a reason to come and a reason to come back.
- There are so many different types of access and recreation resources throughout the state, but often people just don't know it's there. There's a youth fishing pond in Skowhegan, but it's likely that half the kids in the area don't know it's there. It would be helpful to have mentors to show them the way.

Questions and Discussion

Following the presentations there was time for questions and discussion. Task Force members and panelists reflected on a variety of issues, including:

- Public access is a privilege. There are growing concerns from landowners. IF&W's landowner relations program does a good job, but it is underfunded. Are there funds from that program or others that could help mitigate dumping issues? With so many access points around the state, how should enforcement be prioritized? There needs to be a greater element of personal responsibility, and better funding of programs that sustain good relationships with landowners. Recreational uses and abuses that lead to soil erosion are problematic because they create problems that the landowner can be held liable for.
- There are elements of Maine's culture that are contradictory. Generally, we're a rural state and we want to be alone, but we're seeing greater demand for close-to-home recreation, and greater demand for creature comfort wilderness experiences. We need better ways of getting people to the outdoors and making them feel safe, but we don't necessarily have the population density for mass transit, or a culture that embraces public transportation.
- We need a greater focus on equity in access and recreation. There's a tendency for promotional pictures to include only white and able-bodied people, which is not genuine and will not sell to Millennials and new Mainers. We need more recreational opportunities that don't cost a lot of money and provide easy access to recreation for lower income populations (like the Hills to Sea trail that has a trailhead near low-income housing in Unity center). There's an opportunity for recreational programs to be better focused on specific user groups. AMC's most popular programs are their women-only events. We need to continue youth conservation programs that expand access and develop a stewardship ethic – like 4H and Junior guides.
- We need greater capacity across the board – from local snowmobile and ATV clubs that are losing volunteers, to larger groups like AMC that are facing a changing volunteer demographic, to state agencies that lack sufficient funding and staffing. We could benefit from having a group that advocates nationally for the disabled outdoor industry; from having state staff or a department that coordinates recreational interests amongst agencies. There's so much work that needs to be done all the time and there's a growing stewardship burden and cost of maintaining what we already have. There's a need to build awareness of the resources that are already out there, but not well known.
- Competing recreational interests are a challenge to manage. Is there a point where there's too much access? Maybe we can identify more front-end places where recreation can be focused and

leave others as more remote and still hard to get to. ATVs aren't always the bad guys. There are clubs that have successful stewardship models and there are other abusers of private properties.

III. Panel on Wildlife and Ecological Resources

Jerry Bley provided an overview of the Wildlife and Ecology Panel, stating that wildlife habitat and ecological resources have always been a mainstay of land conservation programs in the state and nationally. Four panelists were invited to share their perspective on the conservation of wildlife and ecological resources. Key points of each presentation included the following:

Andy Cutko, The Nature Conservancy

- The acreage of conserved lands has increased dramatically over the last 30 years, growing from 750,000 in 1988 to more than 4 million today. Of the state's entire land area, 80.3% are privately owned and not conserved, 10.8% are managed forest conservation easements, 4.8% are fee-owned managed forest, and just 4.1% are "Reserve" lands.
- In comparison to other New England States and neighboring Canadian provinces, Maine is lacking in the percentage of land in Reserves, which are not actively managed for forestry and farming. Reserve lands are important because they provide habitat for significant species and because the condition of the forest is more mature and vastly different than managed woodlands.
- Maine has done a really good job of protecting certain habitats – like wetlands and alpine habitat (alpine habitat is more than 99% conserved). But there are other natural communities which are not nearly as well represented and certain regions, like Southern Maine and eastern Aroostook County where numerous habitat types are not represented.
- Looking to the future it will be important to maintain and improve habitat connectivity. In order to promote landscapes that are resilient to climate change, we should focus on conserving a diverse set of physical landscapes. Our plant and wildlife composition will be different, but if we've got sufficient diversity of the physical landscape then we'll have an appropriate variety of habitats to support biological diversity.
- Need to effectively manage the conservation lands we already have, remembering that these lands are not static, and keeping in mind the impacts that people have on sensitive species such as wood turtles.

Dave Courtemanch, The Nature Conservancy

- Conservation of aquatic resources is different since the state already owns most of the water. Aquatic conservation is about how we manage the resource and lands that are adjacent to water.
- Mainers love water. According to a 2011 survey, Mainers report that Water is the highest valued part of the environment (80% across age, gender, geography, and politics).
- We're doing a good job in many regards: 6% of waters are classified as AA (highest water quality designation), and this is expanding; several Eco-Reserves were picked with water resources in mind; shoreland zoning has had a huge impact on water quality and riparian habitat.
- But we can still do things better. It's important to give greater attention to water in land conservation planning. Land conservation projects often include water values, but they are usually not the central focus. An aquatic inventory would provide needed data on the status of waters throughout the state and would help prioritize them for conservation. We should give greater attention to designing projects around watersheds, rather than corridors along water bodies. We've done great conservation along several corridors (Allagash, St. John, Machias) but we need to look at the whole package of tributaries, ponds and wetlands.

- We should restore and maintain connectivity between critical habitats and look to improve riparian management. In addition to conserving lands, are we implementing BMPs – very important since we know this has the greatest impact on water quality.

Judy Camuso, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

- IF&W owns and manages 110,000 acres and 140 water access sites, which are all open for public access and traditional recreation. The agency has just 300 staff members with 45 biologists across the state – some which focus on geographic regions and some that are species specific.
- IF&W has an ongoing struggle with balancing public access and wildlife protection. The reality of their management is that managing for wildlife is the highest priority, and public use is second, but it's a balance they are constantly negotiating. It's important for this tension to be considered when new lands are acquired.
- There have been some great successes over the last decades – thanks to voluntary cooperation from landowners, the state now has over 600 pairs of nesting eagles (there were only 30 pairs 30 years ago). Species management like this is a challenge because recovery takes such a long time.
- IF&W's goal is to have all of its programs come from robust planning efforts. In 2015 they completed the State Wildlife Action Plan which involved 120 stakeholders and resulted in 140 focus areas of ecological significance.
- The agency sees climate change as one of the biggest challenge but is also focused on getting more people out on the land so that IF&W can have their support. The agency sees a need to engage a broader audience, and to refine its communications to make it clear that they work for ALL the state's wildlife, not just game. IF&W is working hard to reach out to different people and step outside the mold. This is tough for everyone, but especially for a state agency.

Ivan Fernandez, University of Maine, Orono

- A few opening notes on change: Because of change, no single ecosystem has intrinsic value; succession alone demands change; climate demands change, and that change is accelerating.
- The 2009 Report: Maine's Climate Future was important because it brought together academics, practitioners and legislators to examine what was happening with climate change right here in Maine, and why it mattered. This report was updated in 2015 (distributed to Task Force members).
- A few notable trends in Maine include: we're experiencing more periods of drought as well as more periods of rain; groundwater levels are down; the warm season is extended and winters are changing (a group at UME is currently studying the changing characteristics of winter).
- There's no question that climate is changing – and we need a climate-smart framework for land conservation in the future that focuses on 1) Healthy Forested Landscapes, and the ecosystem services they provide; 2) Maintaining Biophysical Diversity; 3) Maintaining connectivity across biophysical and climatic regions.
- Maine's three climate regions (northern, southern interior, and coastal) are transitioning on their own trajectories. The diversity of landscapes and species in Maine is impressive. The 4 degrees of latitude variation in Maine is comparable to 20 degrees of latitude in Europe. It's all right here.

Questions and Discussion

Following the presentations there was time for questions and discussion. Task Force members and panelists reflected on a variety of issues, including:

- Do we know what the new “problem species” of the future will be (like deer and turkey populations that have exploded in recent years)? Already see signs today with more wild pigs, with stripers overwintering in lakes, and seal populations growing by orders of magnitude. And invasives pose an

even bigger threat. These threats highlight the importance of monitoring our ecological systems. Monitoring will help us know when some of these surprises start to show up. Citizen science can be extremely powerful, and especially today when technology makes it so much easier. Doing more monitoring is one of the best lines of defense we have – surveillance is critical because the ability to predict far out is so difficult. Would be helpful to have data, and not just anecdotes, about how the spread of invasives intersects with human impacts.

- How well-equipped are we to deal with new pests and invasives? Ticks are a growing problem, but they're a climate problem and there's not a simple pesticide solution. It's interesting that there are more deer ticks in southern Maine where there's the least amount of access to the public for hunting. Northern Maine is pretty much a black hole when it comes to invasives – there are very few so far. We have a real opportunity and obligation to maintain that frontier. This is another area where a citizen science effort is needed. Maybe the invasives frontier should be considered as we consider how to expand recreational access, and how to improve transportation networks.
- Are regulations enough, or do we need to go further with actual conservation? Regulations do a decent job, but very few regulations prohibit harvesting in riparian areas, and there's a benefit to having those untouched areas. Regulations also can't accomplish landscape-level conservation goals.

IV. Working Lunch

The Chairs asked for feedback on the current meeting format and the information being provided to Task Force members through background materials and panels. Task Force members contributed the following feedback:

- It would be helpful to have more detailed data on trends related to the topics being discussed. For recreation it would be good to have a sense of where the actual demand is. Task Force members were reminded that they themselves are an important source of information and were encouraged to contribute data and knowledge they have on these topics.
- There were generally positive feelings about the panels, with some people finding the information familiar, some finding it to be too much, and others feeling it provided a good way for members to be on equal footing and stimulated new ideas. Across the board there was interest from the Task Force in continuing to hear from experts, but in ensuring that there was sufficient time for robust discussion.
- Task Force members were asked to provide input to Liz and Jerry on potential panelists for the July meeting. There was discussion about doing a better job of incorporating the landowner perspective, especially since that was so key to the morning's discussion.
- The group talked briefly about the road map for the Task Force and agreed there is sufficient urgency to this work that a report should be ready in the first quarter of 2019. Task Force members asked for a way to flag key themes and questions that come up for further exploration and discussion. They agreed that having the public listening sessions prior to making preliminary findings makes sense. This will better allow the public to inform the growing conversation about what the real conservation needs of the future are.

V. Public Comments

The Task Force welcomed comments from the public. Comments were made by Steve Brooke (Farmingdale), Jeff Reardon (Trout Unlimited), and Rob Kelshaw (STANTEC). Key points included:

- Task Force members should make sure to visit the public lands of Maine, and especially land trust preserves. Land trusts have brought significant private investment to conservation and have done an impressive job of creating infrastructure that facilitates recreation.
- State agencies don't have sufficient staffing or capacity to monitor easements and LMF project agreements, and this is important because of the significant investment of public dollars.
- Need to remember that there are some rare species that we are just starting to understand, and that protecting these species does not mean opening trails to get to them.
- Management of conserved lands is key, and we should manage lands differently based on their different conservation values. It is a challenge to get the appropriate mix of management and uses.
- There needs to be greater emphasis on the management plan that gets put in place after the acquisition – who should own it; who should manage it; what's the appropriate level of access?
- Long-term management is the key because perpetuity is such a long time.
- We need to look at whether we are currently protecting and managing lands for the reasons they were originally acquired.

Liz reported that other comments had been received by email and through the website. She would work on collating them and ensuring they were accessible to the Task Force.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:30 pm.