

**LAND CONSERVATION TASK FORCE
BACKGROUND PAPER: RECREATION**

I. Introduction

“Outdoor recreation's contribution to Maine is more than a collection of swimming pools or soccer fields, though they too have their role. Outdoor recreation is a broad umbrella under which Saturday morning baseball games behind the local middle school and ten day canoe expeditions both belong - along with countless other activities. Maine life is richly imbued with opportunities to get outside and experience the benefits of nature, movement, and traditions.”

– Maine Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Outdoor recreation is central to Maine’s way of life and to land conservation programs throughout the state. Recreational resources are protected by diverse stakeholders – from state agencies, to land trusts, to snowmobile clubs, to local conservation commissions – and are supported through a variety of federal, state and local funding sources.

II. Existing Public Land Conservation Programs that fund conservation of recreation resources

Land for Maine’s Future Program (LMF): While not exclusively focused on recreation projects, LMF considers conserving lands for public recreational access, including water access, as one of its core purposes. Following acquisition, LMF may make grants of up to 5% of the appraised value of land acquired to develop public access facilities, including trails, boat launching sites, parking, camping and picnicking facilities. LMF is close to being out of uncommitted funds.

Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): LWCF is administered by the Bureau of Parks and Lands and provides funds for the State and municipalities for recreation planning, acquisitions with recreation values, and the development of outdoor recreation facilities. LWCF expenditures fluctuate greatly from year to year and the long-term future of the program is currently being debated in Congress.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP): Historically, FLP has been a major funder of large forest conservation projects in Maine, often providing multi-million-dollar grants to one or two projects annually. Recreation is one of many public benefits protected through FLP projects. In Maine, Forest Legacy projects have protected access to remote ponds, miles of snowmobile, ATV and hiking trails, and opportunities to hunt, fish and camp. Maine has not actively pursued FLP funding since 2014.

Boating Facilities Funds: The Boating Facilities Fund, which was established in 1963, is administered by the Bureau of Parks and Lands and is funded with the state tax on gasoline used by recreational motor boats. Funds are used to acquire, develop and renovate recreational boat access sites and to place and maintain navigational buoys on nearly 50 inland lakes and ponds. MDIF&W has a comparable program utilizing separate funding sources.

Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund: The Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund (MOHF) conserves wildlife and open spaces through the sale of instant, scratch lottery tickets. 35% of funds are available for the acquisition and management of public lands, parks, wildlife conservation areas and public access and outdoor recreation sites and facilities

Recreation Trails Program: The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The RTP provides

funds to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for motorized and nonmotorized recreational trail uses. Eligible projects include fee and easement acquisitions of property for recreational trails or recreational trail corridors, as well as projects that involve the development and maintenance of trails.

The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Funds): Funds for this program are received from excise taxes on fishing equipment, fish finders, motorboat fuels, small engine fuels, and import duties. In Maine they are used to acquire fee lands and conservation easements that are directly related to providing water access. They can also be used for the development and maintenance of water access sites including trailer launches, hand-carry sites, and bank fishing opportunities.

Snowmobile Grants: The Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands provides Municipal Grants to municipalities or counties for sharing the cost of the construction and maintenance of snowmobile trails. Snowmobile Club Grants are made clubs to help defray some of the expenses incurred in snowmobile trail preparation, including pre-season work and winter grooming. Capital Grants (for grooming equipment) are available to clubs or municipalities.

ATV Grants: The Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands provides Municipal Grants to municipalities or counties to help defer the cost of the construction or maintenance of ATV trails. ATV club grants are also available to ATV clubs who are on file with the ATV Program and are to help cover the costs of trail construction and maintenance and also include a special landowner appreciation bonus.

FERC: FERC licensing procedures require that recreation facilities and needs are evaluated as part of licensing process for hydroelectric facilities. Conservation easements and recreation facilities have been acquired through this program on many of Maine's waterbodies including Chesuncook Lake, Wyman Lake, Indian Pond and Seboomook Lake.

III. How the Land for Maine's Future Program addresses recreation and public access

Public recreational access is a core purpose of the Land for Maine's Future Program. More than 50% of projects that were funded through LMF had significant recreation benefits. All lands acquired with LMF funding are open to the public (*exceptions include farms and commercial working waterfronts, where public access may not be feasible or desirable*) and generally speaking, are available for hunting, trapping and fishing. Under its Conservation and Recreation Lands Program, LMF designates two of its seven categories of Major Land assets to recreation and public access resources as follows:

- Recreation Lands
- Water Access Lands

The quality of the proposed parcel in one of these categories is an important component of the scoring system. In addition, the LMF scoring process gives additional points to projects that have robust access from public roads and legal rights of way. And additional points are awarded for projects that are part of:

- A greenbelt, trail network or river corridor
- A local or regional recreation plan
- A recognized route such as an "island trail" or "birding trail"

IV. **Progress over past thirty years and any major shortcomings.**

Maine's conservation lands attract tens of thousands of anglers, hikers, hunters, boaters, mountain bikers, birdwatchers, ATV and snowmobile riders, and other outdoor enthusiasts each year. Over the last 30 years there have been notable accomplishments in protecting key recreational resources and ensuring public access for the people of Maine. Conserved lands in the state are now home to:

- 1,200 miles of ATV trails
- 1,700 miles of snowmobile trails
- 150 miles of multi-use trails that were converted from abandoned railroad beds
- Over 500 boat launch sites

And the diversity of Maine's recreational lands is astounding both in type (*municipal parks, land trust preserves, State Parks and campgrounds, Public Reserve lands and wilderness waterways*) and landscape (*coastal islands, ballfields, multi-use trails, community forests, lakes, rivers and mountain peaks*).

However, protection of recreational resources is not without its challenges:

- Maine's long-standing tradition of public use of private lands is increasingly threatened. A recent study by the University of Maine found that more than 50% of landowners are considering restricting recreation on their lands in the future (Leahy 2016).
- It's estimated that 80 percent of Maine's population lives within 15 miles of a state park. In 2016, Maine's more than 50 state parks and historic sites reported nearly 2.9 million visitors, which was an attendance record for the second straight year. Yet Maine's state parks are understaffed and underfunded. In 2011, more than \$30 million was needed for capital repairs (Chan, Padelford, and Papademetriou 2011). Similarly, in a recent survey of Maine land trusts, over 80% responded that one of the biggest stewardship challenges they face is ongoing maintenance. And 67% reported that the amount of time devoted to stewardship is increasing.
- Trends in licenses for hunting and fishing and for registrations of ATVs and snowmobiles are concerning. The number of sportsmen who come to Maine to fish and hunt, particularly hunters has declined over the past decade. In the five-year period from 2009 through 2013, the change in numbers of licenses to hunt and fish in Maine has been mostly negative (Southwick Associates 2015). And while ATV registrations have climbed steadily in recent years, snowmobile registrations peaked about 10 years ago at 100,000 and have been as low as 60,000 in more recent years.
- Maine's demographics are complicated and changing. While the majority of Maine residents live in the southern portion of the state, most Mainers also live in rural areas. In fact, Maine has the nation's highest percentage (61.3%) of residents living in rural areas. Maine is also the oldest state in the nation and its percentage of residents with a disability is higher than the national average. The state is also home to a growing immigrant community that now makes up 3% of the population.

V. Key Guidance and Resources for Protection of Recreation Resources

There is an abundance of agencies, organizations and professionals that provide resources and guidance for conservation efforts targeted at recreation.

State participation in LWCF requires preparation of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and approval of the plan by the National Park Service (NPS). This plan, which is submitted to the Legislature every 5 years, involves studying the demand for, and supply of various

types of outdoor recreation facilities and activities in order to prioritize outdoor recreation needs throughout the state. This information is then used by citizens and law makers when planning for future recreational development.

In 1995, the Boating Facilities Program of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, in cooperation with Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW), produced a document titled, "Strategic Plan for Providing Public Access to Maine Waters for Boating and Fishing." This document provided lists of water bodies that were identified as: offering recreational fishing and/or, other recreational opportunities but which lacked assured public access. This document is updated periodically and used by the two agencies to direct their water access programs.

Interest groups of all shapes and sizes are involved with recreation throughout the state. To name a few: statewide and local land trusts protect significant recreation lands, create trails and water access sites, and host events for the public on conserved lands; the state ORV program, snowmobile and ATV clubs create and maintain trails and work with landowners to ensure access continues; conservation commissions connect people to the woods and waters within their communities; fish and game clubs maintain local shooting clubs and host youth fishing events; registered Maine guides help Mainers and visitors explore the outdoors; and outdoor groups, advocacy organizations and collaboratives work to promote recreational opportunities throughout the state.

VI. Some key issues and questions for the future

- Is Maine's long-standing tradition of public use of private lands sustainable into the future? How can we help ensure it continues?
- Recreation requires an investment beyond land acquisition. Have we sufficiently invested in our recreation infrastructure? Do we have the capacity to maintain it?
- Recreation preferences change over time. Do existing recreation lands match current interests, needs and demographics?
- How should recreation in sensitive ecological areas be managed?
- How can future land conservation efforts best support recreation?

VII. Suggested resources for those who want to dig deeper

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

http://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/publications_maps/docs/final_SCORP_rev_10_15_plan_only.pdf

The State of the State Parks:

<https://wiki.colby.edu/display/stateofmaine2011/The+State+of+State+Parks>

Recreational Hunter and Angler Market Report: Maine

<http://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/recreationalreport.pdf>

Public Access to Private Lands: Research Summary

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.bing.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1000&context=sfr_facpub

State Park Access to People with Disabilities: <https://www.pressherald.com/2017/11/12/maine-lags-in-providing-state-park-access-to-people-with-disabilities/>