

# What Conservation Looks Like In Maine

## TOOLS TO BUILD A FUTURE FOR OUR WOODS, WATERS, AND WILDLIFE

**M**aine has a long history of using and caring for its woods, waters, and wildlife. It is not, however, a perfect history. Even before Maine became a state, white pine stocks were greatly depleted and cod overfished. Later, migrating waterfowl were recklessly slaughtered. Maine's rivers became personal and industrial sewers. Critical winter deer yards were threatened by excessive timber harvesting. When Maine's citizens saw such losses and degradation, they turned their concerns into action. These actions have created Maine's environmental laws and have generated intense interest in finding new ways to permanently protect our most valuable lands and waters.

Long before the recent conservation movement gained strength, many private landowners were already finding ways to keep remote trout ponds remote and coastal islands safe for nesting seabirds. That so much of Maine's landscape is still unspoiled is a tribute to some landowners' foresight, as well as to the land's remote and often inhospitable nature.

However, these individual efforts and the region's remoteness are no longer sufficient to secure what remains of Maine's wild lands. Even our most secluded lakes face development pressures; 52% of all wild land development occurs on Maine's most pristine lakes. As recently as 1996, a forty-one acre lot subdivision was proposed for four remote high-value trout ponds deep in previously undeveloped regions near Baxter State Park.

Conservation in Maine has traditionally followed a number of steps, often initiated by a determined group of citizens. First, the valuable resources are located and evaluated and the changes that threaten them are examined and documented in private, state or federal studies. Then, a strategy to manage or protect the resource is suggested. Finally, a landowner, nonprofit organization or government agency secures conservation of the resource.

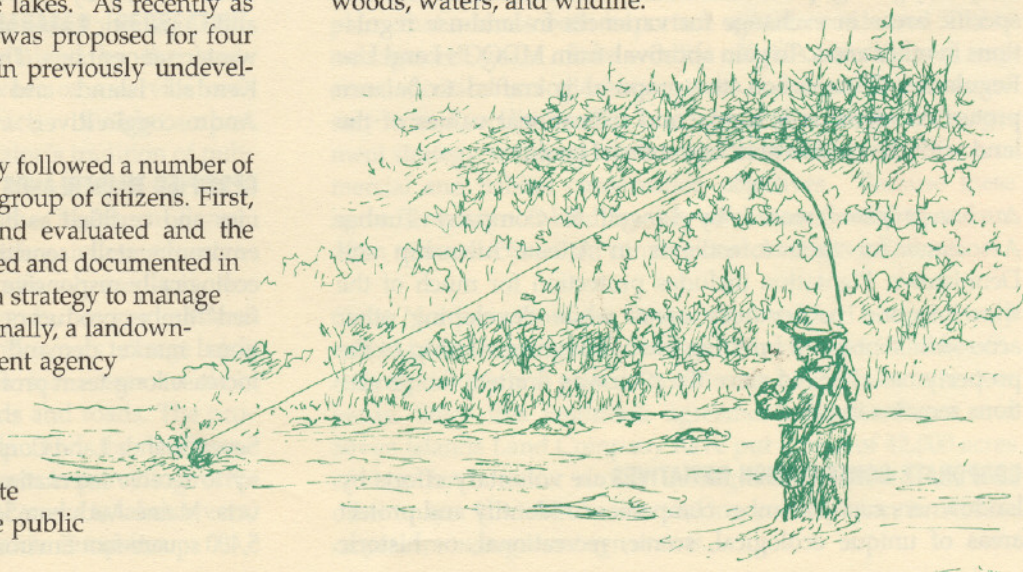
Maine has many successful examples of this process. When a real estate building boom threatened to eliminate public

access to ocean waters, Maine moved to inventory remaining public lots on the coastline, secured local and state ownership, and built boat ramps and parking lots. When federal incentives for local energy production caused a rush to dam the nation's last free-flowing rivers, Maine answered this threat with the Maine Rivers Study and designed first-of-its-kind legislation to protect Maine's most valuable rivers. When piping plovers became endangered, Maine landowners worked with state agencies and conservation groups to protect the birds' nests on their beachfront property.

**Using the many tools that already work so well to conserve our natural resources, we can build creative solutions to secure a future for Maine's woods, waters, and wildlife.**

The process of locating and identifying significant woods, waters, and wildlife habitat has intensified in recent years. Maine agencies and several large timber corporations are mapping critical wildlife habitat; the Biodiversity Project has located and studied representative ecosystems; and Maine Audubon Society has created GIS maps detailing concentrations of valuable recreational and ecological lands in our state.

Deciding how to best use, manage and protect these resources may sometimes be a controversial process. Fortunately, Maine has many tested and successful conservation tools designed to secure the future of Maine's woods, waters, and wildlife.



## CONSERVATION OPTIONS WITH PRIVATE LANDS

Maine has a long tradition of land conservation through private ownership. The various conservation goals of landowners include the retention of family lands, tax relief, the opportunity to combine conservation with business objectives, and landowners' desires to protect lands and waters with high-value ecological, recreational, or historical features. In pursuing these goals, many private landowners have provided Maine people with a rich mosaic of conservation lands. Their contributions to secure a future for our woods, waters, and wildlife will continue to be essential if we are to retain and protect our priceless Maine outdoor heritage.

**CONSERVATION EASEMENTS** are voluntary legal agreements that allow landowners to place permanent restrictions on the amount and type of future development and other uses on all or part of the property they own. The easement holder, usually a local land trust or government agency, ensures that the restrictions are maintained in perpetuity. Conservation easements are a flexible tool that allow landowners to meet their financial, personal, and conservation goals, live and work on their land, sell it, or pass it to heirs, knowing that it will always be protected. Easements may reduce landowners' and heirs' tax burdens, and they are less expensive than direct land acquisition.

*Conservation easements* purchased under the federal Forest Legacy Program ensure that 1,800 acres along Cuscutic Lake and 8,500 acres along Pierce Pond will remain "working forests." These easements set standards for environmentally sound timber management, provide opportunities for hunting, fishing, and canoeing, and protect important wildlife habitat. Great Northern Paper Company donated conservation easements to Maine that restrict development along the East Branch and West Branch of the Penobscot River, two of Maine's most valuable and remote river recreation sites.

**CONCEPT PLANS** are land use plans initiated by the landowner and reviewed by the Maine Department of Conservation. They may include permanent commitments to conservation in specific areas in exchange for variances in land-use regulations in other areas. To gain approval from MDOC's Land Use Regulation Commission, the proposal is crafted to balance protection of natural, scenic, and recreational values of the land with the landowners' commercial goals.

A *concept plan* created by Lowell & Company Timber Associates for their forestlands in Attean Township and Dennistown Plantation includes protection for much of the shoreline and backcountry areas while developing other accessible shorefront building lots. Though ownership of the property has changed since the plan was drafted, the protections remains in place.

**CORPORATE CONSERVATION INITIATIVES** are voluntary efforts by landowners such as timber companies to identify and protect areas of unique ecological, scenic, recreational, or historic

importance. Since the landowner designs the conservation plan, this is a flexible way to protect the resource while pursuing business objectives. These initiatives also show tangible evidence of corporate commitment to conservation and may deliver strong public image dividends.

A *conservation initiative* created by Champion International Corporation preserves two areas of the Machias River. "Special Places in the Forest" programs include 30 acres of 100 year-old red pine forest along the river's headwaters and a 55-acre preserve at Holmes Falls, valued for its scenic waterfalls, Atlantic salmon and brook trout spawning grounds, and its historical significance from log-driving days.

**LOCAL LAND TRUSTS** are nonprofit organizations, often staffed by community volunteers, that own purchased or donated properties, hold and monitor conservation easements, help landowners develop conservation plans for their properties, and raise funds for these activities. Land trust holdings are generally small, but represent significant or ecologically important local landscapes. In the last 15 years, over 70 local land trusts have helped secure the future of over 10,000 acres of prime Maine lands.



Rangely Lakes Heritage Trust is a *local land trust* that holds and monitors the conservation easement for large shoreline tracts owned by timber companies on Mooselookmeguntic and Cuscutic Lakes and important trail corridors in Maine's western mountains. The Mahoosuc Land Trust owns 35-acre Kendall Island and 22-acre Philbrook Island on the Androscoggin River.

**CERTIFIED TIMBERLANDS** are evaluated by independent companies and certified as being managed and harvested on an environmentally sensitive and sustainable basis. By adopting ecologically responsive forest practices, Maine's "green certified" timber producers meet increasing domestic and international market demand for certified wood products, and can increase long-term profitability of their timberlands.

Seven Islands Land Corporation is the first Maine timber company to receive international *green certification* for its forest products. Maine Audubon Society used Seven Islands lumber in its 5,400 square-foot Environmental Center building, which includes

an exhibit that explains green certification and cites the progressive timber management of the Seven Islands Land Corporation.

**RESOURCE PLANS** are negotiated agreements made with the Land Use Regulation Commission that define standards for timber harvesting, road building, and development, and are customized to protect wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Since nearly all of the Northern Forest is under LURC's jurisdiction, this approach allows comprehensive land use planning to protect the ecological and recreational values of large areas. These plans have the flexibility of being opened for renegotiation after a specified period.

A resource plan negotiated by ten commercial landowners and the Maine Department of Conservation protects the exceptional recreational, ecological, and historical character along the St. John River corridor. The voluntary plan restricts commercial and residential development and sets standards for timber management that protect rare plant communities and ensure managed access to remote sites and whitewater river recreation.

**NONPROFIT CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS** may be owners and caretakers of lands with important natural or cultural characteristics that are preserved for public benefit. Because nonprofit organizations are less pressured to manage their land for profit, they are more able to conserve it in its natural state. Public access is usually part of the purpose of such preserves and may even be a condition for tax exemption.

Throughout the state, Maine Audubon Society owns 13 small properties; The Nature Conservancy owns over 80 properties; and the Thorncrag Bird Sanctuary in Lewiston, owned by the Stanton Bird Club, is among New England's largest bird sanctuaries. These areas preserve a variety of habitats, most of which are open to the public for passive recreation; some of these prop-

erties have facilities to provide public educational programs, while some are set aside to protect sensitive ecological communities.

**MANAGED RECREATION**, maintained by the landowner or a service contract, builds upon Maine's tradition of public access to private lands in the Northern Forest. Facing increased recreational use and demands, some Maine landowners charge visitors for access to their lands and roads. The proceeds fund the landowners' costs in providing recreational access to lakes, rivers, and remote campsites.



North Maine Woods, Inc. is a consortium of private forest landowners and state agencies that manages recreational use on 3 million acres of commercial forest lands in northwestern Maine. Dramatic increase in recreational demand in this region spurred landowners to form a nonprofit organization to manage public use of these large private forestlands. Nearly 100,000 people hunt, fish, camp, paddle, snowmobile, and hike this region each year.

**PARTNERSHIPS** with user groups and conservation organizations help landowners manage public access, maintenance, safety, and stewardship in a cost-efficient way. Rather than prohibit public access to their property, landowners work in alliance with organizations to ease land management challenges created by public use, thereby increasing public access.

The Maine Island Trail Association is a nonprofit organization that works with private landowners and state agencies to help oversee recreational access to a network of public and private coastal islands from Casco Bay to Machias. To help island owners allow public access to their property, MITA educates island visitors about fire, litter, and erosion control, monitors island use trends and issues, and protects fragile areas. Many of the islands are publicly owned, but MITA members, versed in voluntary stewardship, are also allowed access to private islands participating in the system. This partnership has linked a 325-mile "trail" of 80 island camping sites.

**COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS** are long-range land use plans that address both important wildlife needs and timber management goals. State wildlife officials identify and map areas of critical ecological importance and describe the necessary habitat conditions. The landowners then design a management strategy, reviewed by state agencies, that meets both commercial and habitat conservation objectives. Because these agreements are non-binding, they offer more flexibility, and are often more effective than conventional zoning regulations.

Great Northern/Bowater Corporation worked cooperatively with Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife officials to identify and protect 26,000 acres of critical winter deer yards. Since this landmark agreement, Frasier Paper and Seven Islands Land Company have put a total of 42,000 acres of their lands under similar management, and at least four other major landowners are seeking participation in similar cooperative management agreements.

## CONSERVATION OPTIONS WITH PUBLIC LANDS

Only 5% of Maine is public land, owned by municipal, state, or federal government, the lowest percentage of public land in the nation. However, Maine's public lands, from local boat ramps and municipal beaches to state forests and national wildlife refuges, are critical elements of recreation and conservation strategies. They provide diverse recreational opportunities ranging from snowmobiling to backcountry hiking, hunting and fishing to whitewater paddling. Some public lands serve specialized conservation purposes for rare plants and animals; others, such as national forests, are managed for multiple uses, including regulated timber production, diverse outdoor recreation, and the protection of significant ecological communities. Maine is fortunate to have available such a diversity of conservation strategies.

**PUBLIC RESERVED LANDS** are maintained by Maine's Bureau of Parks and Lands, an agency of the state's Department of Conservation. Nearly half a million acres of Maine wild lands are managed for a variety of resource values including recreation, wildlife, and timber. Management priorities are guided by a "dominant use" system which balances the different demands of recreation, timber, and wildlife.

The largest of the *public reserve lands*, the Nahmakata Reserve encompasses 43,000 acres, 24 ponds and lakes, the 9,000 acre Debsconeag roadless area, and some of the state's most scenic peaks. Purchased with funds from the Land for Maine's Future program, the parcel is owned by the state. Its management plan allows timber harvest, provides "Special Protected Areas," and delivers diverse recreational opportunities from accessible campsites to remote wilderness.

### WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

are owned and managed by Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. Some 75,000 acres of public land are managed to conserve habitat for game and non-game species and provide much of Maine's finest recreational opportunities from hunting and fishing to boating and wildlife observation.

The Gordon Manuel *Wildlife Management Area* in Hodgdon is managed for diverse wildlife habitat and provides boat access, hiking, and hunting and fishing within nearly 6,000 acres of wetlands, upland forest, and open fields.

**MAINE'S STATE PARKS**, with the exception of 200,000-acre Baxter State Park, are usually small. They are managed by the Bureau of Parks and Lands to maintain access to waterways and trails, and provide amenities for day use and overnight camping. Park style management is most effective in areas of highly concentrated recreational demand.

*Lily Bay State Park*, on 40-mile long Moosehead Lake is one of over 30 state parks that offers public camping, trails, beach swimming, interpretive programs, and boating

access to one of Maine's premier lakes. *Cobscook Bay State Park* in Washington County offers campsites, trails and boat access to Maine's dramatic rocky coastline.

**FEDERAL CONSERVATION STRATEGIES** are extremely diverse, ranging from tax incentives to major land holdings. National parks are managed primarily for recreational, scenic, and ecological values; national forests are managed for multiple uses, ranging from timber reserves to designated wilderness; and national wildlife refuges are managed principally to provide wildlife habitat. Management of federal conservation lands is guided by long-range, multiple use plans, drafted with input from local residents, abutting landowners, and park personnel to meet its goals.



*Acadia National Park* is one of our nation's most popular federal preserves. A portion of the *White Mountain National Forest* that lies within Maine includes the 12,000-acre Caribou-Speckled Roadless Area. *Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge* near Calais provides habitat for unique bird populations and game bird management and also

offers hunting, fishing, camping, and boating.

**COMBINED CONSERVATION STRATEGIES** are a "hand-tailored" mix of conservation tools that allows a targeted, efficient and flexible approach to land use planning. Ownership, management goals, and resources may vary even within a single parcel of land, and combining conservation methods brings the benefits and flexibility of several options to a single project.

Race Point is a 100-acre peninsula that juts into Cobscook Bay. A family who could no longer afford the cost of ownership sought the help of *The Nature Conservancy* to craft a plan in which the family retains ownership and residency on half of the peninsula. They donated a *conservation easement* for 48 acres to the *Quoddy Regional Land Trust*. Because the shoreland included critical habitat for a variety of waterfowl, 52 acres qualified for purchase by the *Maine IF&W*, with a grant provided by *federal conservation funds*.