

LAND CONSERVATION TASK FORCE
BACKGROUND PAPER: ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF LAND CONSERVATION

I. Introduction

The link between Maine’s environment and its economy is one of the state’s defining characteristics. The livelihoods of Maine’s residents are still closely tied to the land and several key economic sectors, including forestry, farming, fishing and tourism, all depend on the well-being of the state’s natural resources.

II. Working Forests

Maine is the most heavily forested state in the country, with roughly 17.7 million acres of forest that account for 89 percent of the state’s total land. Maine’s forest industry had an estimated 2016 total economic impact of \$8.5 billion and supports over 33,000 jobs. Maine’s forest industry still includes the traditional timber and paper/pulp industry but other segments, like furniture and related products, and biofuels are on the rise. Independent auditors have certified that 8.3 million acres – about 50 percent of Maine’s working forests – are managed sustainably. Over 94% of Maine’s forests are in private hands - owned by timber investment companies, industrial landowners, large family landowners, conservation organizations and small woodlot owners. In fact, there are more small woodland owners today than at any time in Maine’s history.

Existing Public Land Conservation Programs that fund Working Forest Conservation

Land for Maine’s Future Program (LMF): Land acquisition projects that include a working landscape component, including for forestry, are eligible for LMF funding. Currently working forest projects compete for funds in the Conservation & Recreation category.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP): Historically, FLP has been a major federal funder of large forest conservation projects in Maine, often providing multi-million-dollar grants to one or two projects annually. Forest Legacy projects protect many public benefits while also sustaining local jobs and contributing to the forest product and recreation economy. By helping to prevent the loss and fragmentation of working forests, the program encourages sustainable forest management and supports strong markets for forest products. Maine has not actively pursued FLP funding since 2014.

Community Forest Program: The U.S Forest Service’s Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (Community Forest Program) offers an opportunity for communities to acquire and conserve forests that provide public access and recreational opportunities, protect vital water supplies and wildlife habitat, serve as demonstration sites for private forest landowners, and provide economic benefits from timber and non-timber products.

How the Land for Maine’s Future Program Addresses Working Forests

In 2001, following voter approval of the 1999 \$50 million bond, the LMF Board adopted a set of principles for working forest easements. These principles were based on the understanding that the basic intention of working forest easements is “to protect both the natural values and economic values of the forest, along with its potential to provide traditional recreation opportunities for the public.” If selected for funding, these projects must comply with the Working Forest Easement Guidelines that were adopted by the Board in 2002. While many working forest easements are landscape-scale and cover thousands of acres, smaller LMF projects throughout the state often include a forest management component.

Progress over past thirty years and any major shortcomings.

- Landscape-scale working forest easements, some encompassing several hundred thousand acres, have secured 2.4 million acres of Maine's wood basket ensuring that these lands will supply Maine's forest products industry for generations to come.
- Tools such as working forest conservation easements have evolved to allow forest lands to remain productive, helping feed local economies and create jobs, while still protecting the land from future development
- Despite many challenges, Maine's forest products industry is strong and diverse: Maine's forest products industry accounts for approximately half of the output of the four-state region of northern New England and New York. Even in tough economies, Maine's forest landowners have markets – somewhere – for every tree they harvest (MFS 2010 Forest Action Plan)
- Town Forests are making a comeback. Community-based projects, such as the Farm Cove Community Forest in Grand Lake Stream and the Bethel Community Forest in Western Maine, are embracing a model that promotes conservation alongside community and economic development through community ownership and management of land.

Key Guidance and Resources for Working Forest Conservation

Research and planning related to conservation of Maine's forests has occurred at both regional and state levels. Over the last 30 years, key planning initiatives and resources have included:

- The Northern Forest Lands Council, a 1994 regional study to develop strategies for conserving the Northern Forest.
- The Maine Forest Service's State Forest Assessment and Strategies (2010), identifies key forest-related issues and priorities to support development of a long-term Resource Strategy specific to Maine's forest needs.
- Maine's Forest Legacy Program Assessment of Need, which was most recently updated in 2012, guides implementation of Maine's Forest Legacy Program and sets eligibility criteria for acquisition projects.
- The Maine Forest Service's Healthy Forest Action Plan identifies strategies that lead to active management on southern Maine woodlands. "Active management" in this context means thoughtfully planned and prepared activities that meet an array of woodland owner goals and objectives including cutting trees and supporting the wood-using economy.

Some Key Issues and Questions for the Future

- Do working forest conservation easements significantly improve forest management in Maine
Can new tools be developed that create a healthier forest environment while simultaneously boosting timber production?
- Should more attention be given to smaller working forest projects?
- How might potential for carbon sequestration impact forestland conservation?
- How can forestland conservation help the industry manage the unpredictability that comes with changing technology, changing markets and unexpected pests?

III. Farmland

Agriculture in Maine is now among the state's fastest-growing industries. And, it's an industry that's getting younger and more diverse. The demand for healthy and local foods is growing, as is the number of farms, despite the ongoing challenges of threats to the land base and changing

demographics. Farming in Maine is changing though. In 1992, when the Department of Agriculture started collecting data on direct sales, Maine had just over one-thousand farms selling goods directly to consumers; that number has increased 69% since then. Yet some segments of the industry, most notably dairy, have seen a substantial decline. As many current farmers reach retirement age, the ownership of up to 400,000 acres of Maine's farmland will be in transition within a decade.

Existing Programs that Promote Farmland Conservation

Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF): Farmland Protection has historically been a separate program within LMF with its own designated funding, but in 2017 was included within in the Conservation & Recreation category. LMF is an important source of farmland protection funding, having conserved farms in all regions of the state throughout its history.

Federal Farm Bill: Farm Bill conservation programs administered by NRCS, taken in total, are the largest single federal source of funding for private land conservation. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), provides funding to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits, contributing up to 50% of the cost for easements that protect working agricultural lands with high quality agricultural soils. Many ACEP projects are matched with LMF funding.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program: The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners through partnership agreements and through program contracts or easement agreements.

Maine Farmland Trust (MFT): MFT has raised substantial funding for its own purchased easement program. In addition, MFT operates Maine FarmLink, a linking service that helps connect people who are seeking farmland "Seekers", with farmland owners who are looking to sell, lease or work out non-traditional tenure arrangements.

New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP): The New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP) assists new Americans to build sustainable farm enterprises that are consistent with their culture and lifestyle aspirations and that strengthen regional, sustainable food systems as a whole.

How the Land for Maine's Future Program addresses Farmland

The LMF Workbook states that "the purpose of the farmland investment is to protect Maine's most productive farmlands from conversion into non-agricultural uses." Over the years, LMF has addressed farmland in different ways. Projects submitted in 2011 and 2013 competed as part of a separate Farmland category. Scoring criteria for these rounds included: Productive Farm Assets; Current and Emerging Threats to Conversion; Significance to and Condition of Regional and Local Agricultural Economy; Open Space, Cultural and Other Public Benefits; and Community Planning and Support for Agriculture. In 2017, farmland projects had to apply using the Conservation & Recreation Criteria and select Farm & Open Space as their Major Land Asset. In this round they competed against other farmland projects and Conservation & Recreation projects.

Progress over past thirty years and any major shortcomings.

While the past generation of land conservation began with a focus on recreational, wildlife and ecological values, interest in farmland conservation has grown exponentially in recent years. Notable trends include:

- Over 45,000 acres of productive Maine farmland and associated woodlots have been conserved, allowing farmers to stay on their land and providing affordable opportunities for a new generation of farmers to acquire their own farms.
- Small-scale farms in Maine have grown, to the tune of 7,000 to 9,000 new farms in the last 15 years, while the number declined nationally by 4%
- Creative programs and tools, such as Farmlink and the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project, have been developed that complement land protection efforts by providing key links between new farmers and farmland.

Some Key Issues and Questions for the Future

- How can farmland conservation priorities better meet the emerging needs of younger and new Mainer farmers?
- Although small-scale farms are growing, commodity farming is in decline. Yet based on the current economics of farming, small-scale farms depend on big ones to lower the price of supplies for everyone. Does land conservation have a role in maintaining this balance?
- Will a changing climate, which brings the possibility of longer growing seasons and a greater supply of water, impact the demand for farmland in Maine?
- Are farmland conservation efforts jeopardized if rural farming communities have inadequate access to health care, broadband, and other vital services?

IV. Working Waterfront

Lobster boats, clambers, fishing wharves and buoys are a constant of Maine's landscape. Working waterfronts cover a mere 25 miles along Maine's 5,300-mile coastline yet they are the heart of many coastal communities. Working waterfronts account for \$740M of Maine's economy and employ approximately 40,000 people. Pressure for conversion to other uses, primarily seasonal or year-round residences, continues to threaten this traditional and significant economy, and fishing communities are being squeezed out of coastal waterfronts.

Existing Public Land Conservation Programs that fund conservation of Working Waterfront resources

Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF): Working Waterfront projects have their own pool of funds which are available to assist commercial fisheries businesses, co-ops, municipalities and other interested parties in securing strategically-significant working waterfront properties to protect vital resources that support commercial fisheries.

SHIP: The Small Harbor Improvement Program (SHIP) promotes economic development, public access, improved commercial fishing opportunities and works to preserve, and create, infrastructure at facilities in tidewater and coastal municipalities. The SHIP program assists municipalities in improving or creating facilities, such as public wharves, piers, landings and boat ramps. There is a required 50% local share under this program. The SHIP program can provide up to \$250,000 in assistance towards eligible projects.

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. While funds are primarily used to acquire, develop and renovate recreational boat access sites, these sites are often shared with commercial users such as clambers and wormers.

How the Land for Maine's Future Program addresses Working Waterfront

The Working Waterfront program was added to LMF by the Legislature following the 2005 bond. It was created out of a recognition of the need to take action to protect and secure commercial fishing access at a time when increasing demands for coastal waterfront lands and rising land values and property taxes were making it difficult for commercial fishing businesses to retain working access to the water. The program is administered by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR). Eligible applicants include municipalities and non-profits, but also cooperatives and private businesses, which is unique from other LMF categories. Projects require permanent assurance that the land and improvements may not be used, altered or developed in a manner that precludes its use by commercial fisheries businesses. This is done through the conveyance of a permanent Working Waterfront Covenant from the applicant to the State. Scoring criteria for working waterfront projects include: Economic Significance of the Property, Alternative Properties in the Vicinity, Degree of Community Support, Level of Threat of Conversion, Utility of the Property for Commercial Fishery Business, and the Capacity to Create New Shore-side Jobs.

Working waterfront projects can also receive funding under the Public Access to Maine Waters Fund, which is designed to 'get people to the water.' These projects typically involve acquiring fee simple public access rights on small parcels of land to create or enhance access points to lakes, ponds, rivers, and coastal waters. While primarily targeted towards recreational use by the public, these funds can also be used for access to waters for clamming, worming, and commercial fishing or other water contact opportunities.

Progress over past thirty years and any major shortcomings.

Maine's 5,300-mile coastline is one of the most important resources in the state's economy.

- Studies have shown that Maine's working piers and wharves contribute almost two times more to the state's economy than would converting 500 coastal properties and building a \$650,000 house on each one.
- Land conservation is supporting Maine marine fisheries through securing the future of strategic working waterfront wharfs and guaranteeing access to clam flats. The Land for Maine's Future Working Waterfront Program has helped 1,636 Maine fishing families and 941 fishing vessels. Over 7,000 feet of working waterfront shorefront protected

Key Guidance and Resources for Working Waterfront Conservation

There are many resources available to landowners, businesses and communities that are interested in working waterfront protection. From the state's Coastal Program, to toolkits provided by working waterfront coalitions, there has been considerable attention given to planning on how best to protect this important resource. Notable resources include:

- Protecting Prime Sites for Water-Dependent Uses – a 1989 report from the State Planning Office which mapped existing sites and primate water development sites to assist communities in protecting water-dependent uses
- Maine Coastal Plan - Maine is one of 36 states and territories that participate in the National Coastal Zone Management Program, which is a voluntary partnership between the federal government and U.S. coastal and Great Lakes states. The current areas of focus for Maine's Coastal Program include: waterfront planning and revitalization, land use planning technical assistance to municipalities, adaptation to shoreline erosion and sea level rise, habitat restoration, seafloor mapping, public access and public education.

- The Governor’s Task Force on the Planning and Development of Marine Aquaculture in Maine (2004) – which was convened to determine how to balance the range of potential uses of state waters and plan for the growth of marine aquaculture while considering all applicable scientific data and all reasonable constraints and opportunities
- Review of the Effectiveness of Maine’s Coastal Plan in Meeting the State’s Public Access and Working Waterfront Goals (2002)

Some Key Issues and Questions for the Future

- With Maine’s fisheries facing an uncertain future, marine-related economic diversification can help support Maine’s island and remote coastal working communities. How can future working waterfront projects best support this need?
- How might working waterfront conservation be used to help support Maine’s growing aquaculture industry?

V. Tourism

Maine’s tourism industry is inextricably tied to Maine’s scenic beauty and the multitude of outdoor recreational opportunities. Tourism is one of Maine’s largest industries, and conserved lands are key to its success. During 2017, visitors spent more than \$6 billion in Maine, with an estimated \$620 million spent on recreation alone. Maine’s tourism industry avails itself of a diverse landscape – from sandy southern beaches, to the rocky Downeast coastline, to urban rail-trails, to the High Peaks and the North Maine Woods.

Funding

While the acquisition of lands primarily for tourism is not supported by any one funding program, most conserved lands will either directly or indirectly support visitors’ interests in exploring the state and in outdoor recreation.

Progress over past thirty years and any major shortcomings.

Over the past decades, the relationship between conserved lands and tourism has been very successful: conservation of wildlife habitat continues to support a multi-billion dollar hunting and fishing industry; ATV and snowmobile riders have access to an impressive network of trails, including 1,200 miles of ATV trails and 1,700 miles of snowmobile trails found on conserved lands; hikers have access to thousands of miles of trails; and anglers and boaters have access to more than 500 water access sites throughout the state. Not to mention the scenic viewsheds that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

And the economic impact of these lands, which is evaluated by many funders is considerable. The most recent analysis from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Census Bureau shows that in a single year, 1.1 million people participated in wildlife-related recreation and spent \$1.4 billion on wildlife recreation in Maine.

Key Guidance and Resources for Working Waterfront Conservation

While there are fewer statewide planning initiatives related to tourism, research abounds. The Maine Office of Tourism, which is housed within the Department of Economic and Community Development, reports that research is the foundation from its marketing strategy is built. Visitor research offers useful information about our visitor’s expenditures, demographics and interests. A few notable reports include:

- The Maine Office of Tourism issues an annual Visitor Tracking Research report.
- In 2015, the Maine Office of Tourism partnered with the Department of Inland Fisheries on a Recreational Hunter and Angler Market report.
- The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (Survey) has been conducted since 1955 and is one of the oldest and most comprehensive continuing recreation surveys. The Survey collects information on the number of anglers, hunters, and wildlife watchers, how often they participate, and how much they spend on their activities in the United States. The most recent state-specific report was issued in 2011, following the 2010 census.

Some Key Issues and Questions for the Future

- How does visitation data align with the location of conserved lands? What are the pressures on conserved lands in regions that see the highest visitation (in 2017 the two most visited regions were Maine Beaches and Downeast/Acadia)?
- How should data on tourism trends be used to shape land conservation priorities? Are tourism priorities potentially in conflict with priorities for Maine residents?

VI. Suggested resources for those who want to dig deeper

Valuing Maine's Nature: (Manomet)

https://www.manomet.org/wp-content/uploads/old-files/Manomet_ValuingMainesNature_May2012.pdf

LMF Working Forest CE Guidelines

<https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lmf/docs/FinalForesteasementguidelinesV6.4.doc>

Return on the Investment – Land for Maine's Future (Trust for Public Land)

<http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/local-maine-conseconomics-2012.pdf>

Evaluating the Economic Benefits of Land Conservation in Maine

http://digitalmaine.com/lmf_docs/1/

Maine Forest Products Council 2016 Economic Value Report

<http://maineforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Maines-Forest-Economy-10-12-2016.pdf>

Maine State Forest Assessment and Strategies

https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/publications/reports/maine_assessment_and_strategy_final.pdf

Community Forests Make a Comeback in Maine (Portland Press Herald)

https://www.pressherald.com/2013/10/16/community_forests_make_a_comeback/

Your Maine Ag: Report on Maine's Agricultural Statistics from the Maine Farm Bureau

<https://www.maineighbureau.us/your-maine-ag/maine-agriculture-facts/>

City of Auburn: Study to Support and Enhance Auburn's Agricultural and Resource Sector

http://www.auburnmaine.gov/CMSContent/Planning/Ag%20and%20Resource%20Protection%20District/2018/FINAL_Ag%20Economy%20%20Committee%20Report_7_9_18.pdf

On a Maine Farm, African refugees go back to their roots:

<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/Change-Agent/2014/0903/On-a-Maine-farm-African-refugees-go-back-to-their-roots?cmpid=shared-email#>

2016 Maine Coastal Plan <https://coast.noaa.gov/czm/enhancement/media/me309-2016.pdf>

The Governor's Task Force on the Planning and Development of Marine Aquaculture in Maine:
Report and Recommendations

https://www.maine.gov/dmr/aquaculture/reports/documents/AQTF_FullReport2-13.pdf

A Review of the Effectiveness of the Maine Coastal Plan in Meeting the State's Public Access and Working
Waterfront Policy Goals

<https://www1.maine.gov/dmr/mcp/downloads/coastalplans/revieweffecmplanaccesswwpolicygoals.pdf>

Maine Office of Tourism: Visitor Tracking Research 2017 Calendar Year Annual Report

<http://9d1bab51e5ab74c4944f-483d7c2d30991038dc16c042d6541655.r25.cf2.rackcdn.com/downloads/2017-MOT-Annual-Report.pdf>

2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation: Maine

<https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/fhw11-me.pdf>