

**Maine Department of Conservation Bureau of Parks and Lands**  
**Kennebec Highlands Management Plan**  
**Public Meeting on the Final Draft**

Mt. Vernon Community Center  
June 29, 2011  
6-8pm

**MINUTES**

Will Harris, Bureau of Parks and Lands Director, welcomed the audience and introduced Bureau staff. He gave a brief summary of the history of the Kennebec Highlands Management Plan.

Amy Hudnor, Management Plan Coordinator, gave a half-hour presentation on the Kennebec Highlands Management Plan Final Draft, and then opened the floor for comments.

A participant asked where the location would be for a future parking area on the western side of the Highlands. Pete Smith, Manager of the Highlands, answered that a location had not yet been chosen.

A question was asked about why the original idea of an ATV route that travelled directly north-south was deviated from. Brian Bronson, Bureau ATV coordinator, said that concerns about routing the trail past landowners lower on the Vienna Mtn Rd factored into the trail design. Dialogue with Allen Blueberry opened up new opportunities that led to the current trail proposal.

One participant complimented the Bureau on the plan, saying it took an even-handed approach at handling competing interests.

An abutting landowner expressed concerns that ATVs were being allowed on the Roxy Rand Rd leading to McIntire Pond, and that there would be no way for ATVs to drive to that point without using the town road portion of Roxy Rand Rd. He is also concerned that ATVs will off load at the turn-around on his property—or that they will drive on his property. Amy said that although the way she explained it in the presentation may have been unclear, ATVs were not being allowed on the Roxy Rand Rd leading to McIntire Pond.

There was a concern regarding what happens to the designated ATV trail once it leaves the Kennebec Highlands on to the York Hill Rd. The York Hill Rd becomes a town road in New Sharon which would present problems for ATV use. It is putting the cart before the horse to designate the Highlands ATV route without the other permissions to the north to continue the trail to Farmington. Brian replied that the Highlands trail would not be designated until the connections to the north have been made. The ATV clubs have communicated with the town of New Sharon about the possibility of using the York Hill Rd, as well as other options that have served as ATV routes in the past.

A suggestion was made that information should be posted about areas open to hunting, so that non-hunters would be aware about where and when hunting was occurring and take precautions such as wearing blaze orange.

A comment was made that the blueberry fields on the Kennebec Highlands are looking bad, and that the Bureau should get started in improving and maintaining them.

The legislature just passed a resolve as part of the IFW deer re-building plan regarding implementing predator control on public lands. When will this be implemented on the Highlands? Joe Wiley, IFW Wildlife Biologist assigned to the Bureau, said IFW and the Bureau are to report to the Legislature by February on this plan, and would wait until it is finalized before implementing it in the Highlands.

A concern was expressed that the roads on the west side of the Highlands would be off-limits to hunting now that they are designated as trails. Amy explained that Bureau rules specify hunting is off limits within 300 feet of 'marked hiking trails' so this does not apply to the ATV/snowmobile trails on roads in the Highlands.

A participant noted the scarcity of information on snowmobiling in the plan and wondered if the status quo situation would be maintained. Amy explained that the blue and yellow lines on the maps would be the snowmobile trails and that some would be used as designated ski routes. Brian said that the only change from the status quo was the elimination of the trail over Kidder Pond and an old trail to Rt. 27 that was no longer maintained. The option of these trails re-opening would no longer be available now that they are being allocated 'remote recreation.' The same participant complimented that the plan was well done.

A question was raised about whether Allen Blueberry would allow horseback riding on the ORV route on their property. An obstacle for horseback riders is the condition of the Cross Rd. Brian answered that the focus of the Bureau's conversation was on ATVs and snowmobiles, but they could bring up the subject of horses. The Cross Road would be improved from its current condition for ATV/snowmobile use which will make it more usable for horses as well. The same participant said the plan did a good job in allocated different areas to different uses.

An ATV club representative said that he hoped the ATV route could someday extend to Blueberry Hill as was considered in 2007.

A representative of BRCA said that it is good that a north-south connection has been made possible through Allen Blueberry property. He hopes that if the state were to acquire the property, the configuration of the ATV trail would not be set in stone, but could be reconsidered. Additionally, the Bureau should be very conscious about eliminating conflicts with Allen Blueberry that may make them less amenable to working with the Bureau/BRCA in the future. The Bureau should also be careful about not allowing boat clutter at McIntire Pond, as with many ponds around the state where old boats are abandoned. Pete Smith noted that McIntire Pond would not allow boat storage, as would Boody and Kidder Ponds because it has drive-to access. It was suggested also that particular areas on Boody and Kidder could be designated as boat storage areas so that boats aren't scattered around the ponds.

A participant said the plan notes the potential of erosion if trails are not properly designed, but motorized trails and roads are more of a potential issue. Water quality concerns should focus on all trails/roads alike.

The lack of signage on the west side was noted. More signage is needed so people know how to find areas and also so rules about who uses which trail are clear. A greater staff presence is needed to enforce separation of uses and to make people behave. There are too few Wardens and enforcement of rules is a challenge with such a low Bureau staff presence.

There are some abutting landowners interested in selling their property to the state for use of a parking area on the west side. They own a camp near where the Cross Rd enters the Highlands and there is a big field where hunters currently park.

A question was raised from an abutting landowner about whether the Developed Recreation area on the Dolley Property was going to have parking on the road. Amy answered that the plan doesn't get that specific about where a parking area would be, but a potential would be near the boathouse in connection with an accessible trail to the water. The landowner noted that currently there are parking problems at the current trailhead parking and visitors don't have a good sense of direction or know where they are going. Signage is needed to direct people to the appropriate parking area and to explain uses of roads.

One participant noted that with state government in general falling short on funds he wondered how projects on the Highlands will be prioritized. The Dolley property and mountain bike trails seem to be on the back burner. Pete

Smith said that now that the plan is nearing completion and there is knowledge of roads and their associated rights, more work will be done on signage and plan implementation. This plan sets the priorities for the Kennebec Highlands, and must be balanced with other lands, which is difficult with a limited staff. Its close proximity to Farmington, where the region staff are based, will help with the speed of implementation. Brian noted that the ORV trails will be funded from the Bureau's ORV program, and work may start this summer.

An ATV club representative asked why a connection to Blueberry Hill was not made through the backcountry motorized area. Amy explained that the 2007 interim plan directed the Bureau to designate a connection to Blueberry Hill on a road found to have public rights, but no public rights were found on any of the roads that could connect to Blueberry Hill. Also, the desire of some to see ATVs kept on the west side was considered. The ATV club rep. noted that most club members are over 55 and need a motorized way to see remote areas. It is the club's desire to pool funds with the snowmobile club and design an integrated trail system.

A snowmobile club representative noted the steepness of the Mountain trail which leads from the McGaffey Mtn Rd to toward Blueberry Hill and said it is not usable for ATVs because of erosion concerns. Water bars, if added, would not be good for snowmobilers.

After concluding remarks from Will Harris, the meeting was adjourned at 7:15.