



WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

Week July 31, 2009

State law assigns four core duties to the State Planning Office that include: 1) conducting continuing economic analysis, including economic forecasting, 2) coordinating the development of the State's economy and energy resources with the conservation of its natural resources; 3) providing technical assistance to towns and regions; and 4) providing technical assistance to the Governor and Legislature by undertaking special studies and plans and preparing policy alternatives.

POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Op-ed supports quality of place. A *Portland Press Herald* op-ed written by Dick Barringer and Sue Inches in the aftermath of the Cowan Mill fire in Lewiston illustrates how Maine's historic buildings are part of a community's quality of place that is the basis for economic growth. To read the editorial piece:

<http://pressherald.maintoday.com/story.php?id=270077&ac=PHedi>

CONTACT: Sue Inches at 287-2989 or sue.inches@maine.gov

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Plastic or Paper Checkout Bag? How about neither! Last session's LD 367 would have placed a 10-cent fee on the consumer for each disposable checkout bag received at a grocery or retail store. In the end, the Legislature approved [PL 2009, Resolves 54](#) directing SPO to convene a work group to design and implement a statewide disposable checkout bag reduction campaign.

SPO's work group includes representatives from grocery and retail establishments and their associations, an environmental group, plastics industry, and state agencies. The group is surveying Maine retailers and grocers about their disposable checkout bag usage; establishing reusable bag reduction goals; developing a statewide media campaign to increase the use of reusable checkout bags; and defining a pilot project to test strategies to reduce the use of disposable bags.

The work group's report to the Natural Resources Committee with findings, recommendations and draft legislation is due January 15, 2010. CONTACT: George MacDonald at 287-5759 or george.macdonald@maine.gov

ECONOMICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

	% Change May 2008 to May 2009	% Change 2008 YTD to 2009 YTD
Building Supply	-19.9%	-19.0%
Food Store	3.4%	3.0%
General Merchandise	-6.1%	-4.8%
Other Retail	-6.6%	-0.2%
Restaurant	-2.4%	-0.5%
Lodging	-13.3%	-10.2%
Auto Transportation	-20.0%	-15.6%
Total	-12.3%	-9.2%
Business Operating	-21.5%	-15.8%
Personal Consumption	-11.1%	-8.1%

May Retail Sales. Total taxable retail sales in May 2009 were down 12.3% from May 2008, and 9.2% lower year-to-date compared to the same period last year. Sales from food stores remained positive for the fifth month of 2009 while sales from all other categories of stores were negative. May building supply sales were down 19.9% from May 2008 and down 19% year-to-date compared to the same period last year. Auto transportation experienced the steepest drop this May at -20%. [Detailed reports on Maine retail sales are available here.](#)

Amanda Rector promoted. Amanda Rector has been promoted to senior economist on SPO's economics and demographics team. In her new capacity, Amanda will take a leadership role, overseeing and coordinating special projects, serving as primary staff for the Consensus Economic Forecasting Commission, and continuing her work with the Census Bureau as it gears up for Census 2010. Amanda is talented, professional, and hard-working. Equally important, she brings an energy and dedication to her work that is admirable. CONTACT: Michael LeVert at 287-1479 or michael.levert@maine.gov

LAND FOR MAINE'S FUTURE PROGRAM

Roberts Farm, Norway, Oxford County. With support from LMF, the Western Foothills Land Trust has acquired the 150-acre historic Roberts Farm property at the south end of Lake Penesseewassee in Norway. The Trust plans to establish a conservation and recreational preserve including a network of year-round recreational trails that makes use of the magnificent views to the north over the lake while protecting



the existing vernal pools and natural community on the property. For more information about this site visit: <http://wflmaine.org/index.php?page=roberts-farm-preserve>.

The Land for Maine's Future Program was established to help secure the future economic and social well-being of the citizens of Maine by maintaining the quality and availability of productive lands and natural areas including recreation, working farms and forests, hunting, fishing, conservation, wildlife habitat, vital ecological functions, and scenic beauty. Since 1987 over 230 projects have been completed, with over 350 individual transactions statewide. This work has protected some 498,000 acres with roughly 60% being by easement and 40 % being in fee interest. **CONTACT: Steve Brooke at 287-6736 or [Steve Brooke](#) or Tim Glidden at 287-1487 or [Tim Glidden](#)**

MAINE COASTAL ROGRAM

Coastal film airs on MaineWatch. The Maine Coastal Program, along with coastal partners, recently collaborated on a DVD — *Building a Resilient Coast: Maine Confronts Climate Change*. MPBN aired the film on *MaineWatch* this week. To view the film: <http://www.seagrant.umaine.edu/program/sarp>. **CONTACT: Theresa Torrent-Ellis at 287-2351 or Theresa.Torrent-Ellis@maine.gov**

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY

Heating Oil Price Averages Rise. The Governor's Office of Energy Independence and Security's July 27, 2009, survey found the current statewide average cash price for No. 2 heating oil to be \$2.28 per gallon, four cents higher than last week.

The statewide kerosene price average is \$2.71 per gallon at this time. The most recent average price of natural gas delivered to Maine consumers is \$11.30 for a thousand cubic feet of gas, or equivalent to heating oil at \$1.53 a gallon. The most recent average statewide price of gasoline and diesel in Maine is \$2.56 per gallon for gasoline, and \$2.61 for diesel fuel. At the time of this release the price of WTI crude oil, a major driver of refined product prices, including heating oil was \$68.36 per barrel. **CONTACT: Ian Burnes at 287-8927 or ian.burnes@maine.gov**