



Advisory Council

Annual Report: September 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009

To: Will Harris, Director, Bureau of Parks & Lands, Department of Conservation

cc: Governor John E. Baldacci, Department of Conservation Commissioner Patrick McGowan, Members, Maine Legislative Council, and Members, Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

From: Donald Cyr; Anthony Hourihan; W. Donald Hudson, Chair; Robert McIntosh, National Park Service; Janet McMahon; Richard Walthers; Donald Nicoll; and National Park Service alternate member Jamie Fosburgh.

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway Advisory Council met formally four times in sessions that were open to the public and included opportunities for public comment: September 26, 2008, January 9, 2009, April 30, 2009 and May 22, 2009. In addition, a work session with Bureau of Parks and Lands staff was conducted on September 25, 2009 that was open to the public, but did not include an opportunity for public comment. The latter meeting focused exclusively on fine-tuning the language of the first Strategic Plan, a provision and requirement of the AWW Advisory Council legislation.

In addition to the regular meetings of the AWW Council, Chair Don Hudson participated in interviews of finalists for the position of Superintendent of the AWW on October 31, 2008 a meeting with the Lock Dam Preservation Association in Pittsfield (November 19, 2008), and, along with Janet McMahon, a meeting of the Citizens to Protect the Allagash in Augusta (October 27, 2008). In addition, Janet McMahon and Dick Walthers met with Paul Johnson to review data collected by the Fisheries Technical Working Group (April 15, 2009).

The potential sale of the Lock Dam Lot, the only land not owned by the state within the Restricted Zone of the AWW was a topic of major interest and concern throughout the year. The AWW Advisory Council had an opportunity to share concerns with the Bureau about a variety of specific issues related to identifying important parcels for acquisition, particularly within the Restricted and One-mile Zones, and in developing strategies and plans for acquisition. The Lock Dam Lot comprises the land around one of three important man-made structures that maintain the character and specific hydrological conditions of the AWW, and thus maintenance and long-term management of the structures (already owned by the state in all three cases) was also discussed. The AWW Advisory Council recommended public acquisition of the Lock Dam Lot at its meeting on January 9, 2009.

Whereas the first year of the life of the AWW Advisory Council was spent in developing a mission and guiding principles, this second year has been spent in writing the first Strategic Plan for the AWW.

The Strategic Plan comprises four sections: Ecological Integrity and Recreation, Historic and Cultural Preservation, Supplemental Resources, and Administration and Management. The discussions amongst AWW Advisory Council members and between the Council and Bureau staff aimed at refining the language of the plan revolve primarily around the intended scope of the authority or interest of the AWW with respect to ecological conditions within the larger watershed. A consensus is emerging that supports the Council's view that the management of the Restricted Zone of the Waterway will be enhanced by better and more comprehensive knowledge of conditions within the larger watershed of the headwater lakes and the Allagash River. Everyone agrees that responsibility for regulating permitted activities like timber harvesting or monitoring natural phenomena like the movement of invasive plants and animals outside the Waterway is not the purview of the AWW. Nevertheless, knowledge of potential impacts upstream and up-slope in the watershed will be extremely important to AWW managers. The need to protect the natural and human resources of the AWW thus provides an opportunity to collate disparate information from scattered sources inside and outside of state government on maps that will be useful and informative for multiple users.

We of the AWW Advisory Council and the Bureau of Parks & Lands are still finding our way through this transition to a new form of public engagement with the AWW. The AWW Advisory Council is different from previous advisory committees. Though independent of the Bureau, with the responsibility to appoint its Chair and set its agenda, the Council is charged with working closely with Bureau staff.

The Advisory Council is intended to work with the Superintendent of the AWW on broad planning and oversight issues, and this process has just begun, a year and a half into the implementation of the new AWW legislation. Economic conditions and hiring freezes precluded hiring of the Superintendent in October 2008, following the final interviews of candidates. Matt LaRoche was hired in April after spending the winter as the Interim Manager of the AWW. The Superintendent now shares weekly reports with the Chair of the AWW Advisory Council, and this mechanism should insure that the Advisory Council is always in touch with activities and issues along the Waterway.

The Council is also seeking to expand communications with Maine citizens and other interested parties on its work and the evolution of the Waterway. We believe our emphasis on public meetings, Internet access to Council proceedings and open and respectful discussion of issues has contributed to more constructive engagement on sometimes contentious questions affecting the Waterway and its use. High on our list of priorities for the coming year is expansion and improvement in the quantity and timeliness of information provided through the Council's Web page in the Bureau of Parks and Lands Web site.

With the completion of the Strategic Plan in 2009, the Advisory Council looks forward to supporting the next round of management planning for the AWW. In addition, we anticipate turning our attention during the coming year to the establishment of a Foundation for the purpose of building an endowment to support the Waterway in perpetuity.