

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS RECEIVED IN
RESPONSE TO FIVE-YEAR REVIEW TABLE SENT
VIA EMAIL OCT. 19, 2022**



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS
NEW ENGLAND**

November 1, 2022

Jim Vogel
Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
Jim.Vogel@Maine.gov

Re: Initial Comments on 5-year Review Table

Dear Mr Vogel,

Thank you for sharing the second Five-Year Review of the 2011 Kennebec Highlands Public Land Management Plan for review. I look forward to the opportunity to engage with the Advisory Committee and Department for this update and amendment to the plan.

Natural Resources-

- We appreciate the waterbar work on Cross Road to mitigate erosion and would encourage the department to continue this type of stewardship work.
- The upgrades to Vienna Mountain Road is welcomed to maintain hunting access, we would encourage a discussion about gating the road seasonally to protect the roadbed from rutting and erosion.
- The loss of access at Roxy Rand is troubling for Hunting & Fishing Access. (More in Fishing & Boating)

Recreational Issues or Opportunities

- We support the protection of remote areas from new trails, as a hunter we seek out the challenge, solitude and adventure that only the backcountry can provide.
- In the development of the trails plan we support the Vision of the Unit to provide a “semi-remote “back woods’ experience”.
- We would encourage trail planners to review the study prepared for Vermont Fish & Wildlife, Forest, Parks and Recreation titled *Wildlife & Recreation: Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife*. The guidance to balance protecting wildlife and providing opportunities for trail recreation seem appropriate for this property and in alignment with the management plan:
 - Designate permanent trail-free areas on the landscape
 - Consolidate trails and avoid high value wildlife resources
 - Monitor trailed areas for changes in wildlife, manage existing trails to minimize impact.
- Trialhead Parking Areas
 - During a visit to the parking off Kimball Pond Road there is some ditching and erosion that make access to the parking only available to high clearance vehicles.
 - I would encourage a discussion on small parking area near the town maintained portion of Vienna Mtn. Rd, perhaps before any gates needed to protect the

improvements to the access road. A parking area at this location would be appreciated for users without off-road capable vehicles or wanting to access on foot.

- Fishing and Boating
 - The loss of access from Roxy Rand is a priority issue for the BHA Maine Leadership Team. We have contacted the Department offering to be a partner in efforts to help resolve the concerns of the landowner. We would be willing to help with fundraising and grants if there were structural changes to the access point that would reduce impacts on the landowner.
 - If access from Roxy Rand road cannot be restored we would encourage developing a new access that might allow for portage of a canoe into the pond. Speaking with the Fisheries Resource Supervisor for the region the last net study in 2017 showed 4 different age classes of wild trout, so there is fisheries resource worthy of access.
- Hunting
 - Access has emerged as a priority issue for American hunters and anglers, and lack of access is cited as the No. 1 reason why we stop pursuing our passions. I have observed that many remote areas of the parcel that hunters would seek out have access issues and signs of conflict between private landowners and users. As a public land advocate I am often contacted by new hunters or hunters new the area trying to find a place to hunt. We are not advocating for development of large parking areas, roads or trails, but would encourage some locations where one could park near the boundary for non-motorized access.
 - We would advocate for well thought out designated Public Land Bear Bait sites for individuals by permit from the Bureau of Parks and Lands. The parcel is large enough that sites could be located where they would not conflict with other recreational uses.
 - We understand the reasons for firearm & hunting that indicate no discharge of weapons within 300 feet of any picnic area, parking area, marked hiking trail or other developed area. This buffer results in the loss of hunting access to 36 acres of land for every mile of trail. As hunters we are concerned about balance in the planning of trails and developed recreation areas. We encourage the planners to consolidate development and preserve the remote areas of the project.

Sincerely,

John Simoneau, New England Chapter Secretary
and Maine Chair
Durham, ME
maine@backcountryhunters.org
jcsimoneau@gmail.com

From: [Davenport, Julie](#)
To: [Vogel, Jim](#)
Subject: RE: Kennebec Highlands Advisory Committee invitation
Date: Tuesday, November 8, 2022 10:35:33 PM

Hi Jim,

Thanks again for the opportunity to review the plan and 5 year review for the Kennebec Highlands property.

After reading through both documents, I am impressed by how in depth they were. It sounds like there isn't much planned in the way of timber harvesting (and that makes sense given both the stand descriptions, my own experiences onsite, and the objectives for the property). It appears that the bureau has everything well organized and under control.

In response to some of the statements about assessing use and parking, I will offer my own anecdotal two cents that I hike Sanders Hill a couple times a month in the summer months and never see the lot empty but always meet smiling faces on the trail.

I hope this is the feedback you were looking for. Everything was very clear so I don't really have any questions and all that I read made good sense to me.

Julie
(207) 592-2238

From: [Gibbs, Ann](#)
To: [Vogel, Jim](#)
Subject: KHMP comments
Date: Thursday, November 10, 2022 4:35:01 PM

Hi Jim,

I wanted to get this to you as promised. A couple of comments:

Page 6 – Cross Country skiing – I might be useful to create some trails that are a little wider to accommodate snow shoes and/or Nordic skiers in the winter and could be more leisurely hikes in the other seasons. These might be on less steep terrain and more accessible to all levels of abilities.
Page 7 & 15 – Prioritizing new trail development – with regard to keeping the Allen parcel (blueberry fields) open it is really important that something be done about this sooner than later. The hardwoods (mainly birch) are filling in very rapidly and the views will be lost if something isn't done soon. I have hiked the area recently taking in all the view points and a few of them are already almost filled in and will take a lot of effort to clear. Given the interest in keeping this area as a focal point for all (folks with physical challenges etc.), clearing this area needs to be a priority and it has to be done in an efficient systematic manner. This is also important if the blueberry fields are to be managed for some berry production.

Page 12 – Road closures – it would be good to get some clarification regarding what can be done on Vienna Mtn. road. Can it be closed for a period of time in the spring during mud season or must it remain open? Will KHMP be upgrading the portion of the road adjacent to where the town maintained portion ends? If it is not upgraded and vehicles are permitted access during mud season the road will not be available for folks accessing the top of Vienna Mtn.

I wanted to get these to you almost on time (I hate it when folks push deadlines). Thanks for the opportunity to comment and I look forward participate in the process of continuing to make it the greatest backyard.

Cheers,

Ann

Ann Gibbs | Director, Division of Animal & Plant Health
Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
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Comments on the Kennebec Highlands Management Plan: Elizabeth Payne

Overall, I approve of the 2011 management plan and the items in the 2011 Kennebec Highlands Management Plan: 2022 2nd 5-Year Review. The overall goal seems to be to maintain the wild, relatively remote character of the land. I want to urge advisory committee members and others to honor this ideal.

As a landowner on the discontinued part of York Hill for about 50 years, I love the remote, wild character of the land there, the solitude I experience there, and above all the quiet. Sometimes many minutes go by when I hear no human sounds at all. I guess my overall comment is this: Just because you can add trails and extend recreational opportunities doesn't mean you should. It would be very easy to compromise the goal with overdevelopment, upgraded trails, loud signs, and easy access for more people, more bicycles, and more motorized vehicles. These things cannot help but domesticate and even suburbanize the wildlands. I'm sure you've discussed all of this.

A few other concerns:

I understand a trail to McIntire Pond is planned on the newly acquired Allen land. This trail would begin at a location close to my land. My questions are these: Is this trail necessary if McIntire Pond has other access points? How would people access this new trail, on foot or by car? Would York Hill Road get improved? Would a parking lot be created with signs and kiosks and other artifacts? Wouldn't it be better for wildlife to leave the Kidder Pond, Boody Pond, McIntire Pond area unfragmented as it is now? And what are the plans for the barrens? When would I learn about such a plan and what kind of input could I have? I would want the new trail to be a low grade as possible with few, unobtrusive signs, minimal parking and other amenities.

I'm opposed to expanding ATV access in the Kennebec Highlands. As a long-time summertime walker on the Solon to Bingham rail trail along the beautiful Kennebec River, I have watched over the years as that trail has grown insanely crowded with ATVs and dirt bikes. I don't see where ATV club management of the area has improved it. I have also watched many bad actors defy the rules of the road, the speed limits, and common courtesy. It's a noisy, smelly, unpleasant experience now to visit that recreation area on the weekends. The rail trail is essentially wrecked for weekend walkers.

In addition, I live in Orono near the Caribou Bog Recreation Area. Great things are happening there—bait ponds are being returned to wading bird habitat, bike and groomed ski trails zigzag every inch the area, and wet trails are being drained and upgraded. Beaver deceivers have sprung up in every culvert. A new recreation center is being developed. There's an American chestnut grove. From one perspective all these changes are wonderful, and they enhance educational and recreational opportunities.

On the other hand, the upgrades draw more visitors: more birders, more walkers, more joggers, more cyclists, more skiers. The upgrades and the increased use domesticate the area and

contribute to user conflicts, which are often based on unrealistic expectations about what kind of experience one gets to have there. The intensive use affects wildlife, too. Two years in a row, now, someone has randomly shot a resident porcupine. Encounters with the juvenile moose that wander through the trails endanger both moose and people. Whole areas in spring and summer are roped off for nesting birds—an acknowledgement at least that humans disrupt wildlife.

I know recreation is a significant reason to preserve the land—and I know I'm part of the problem (I like to hike and ski) -- but I'm not sure having people overrun every bit of the land is a good idea. I currently allow a fat bike trail through my York Hill land during winter. While I'm happy enough to allow the winter trail, delighted to walk and ski on it, and frankly thrilled to have a place to park in winter when I visit my land, I'm also a little appalled at the flood of people that cycle through during high-use times. I have also climbed Sanders, Roundtop, and French Mountains. Those are lovely, but well-used trails. With all the use they get, they lack the feeling of remoteness and undevelopedness that the land around York Hill retains. Maybe it would be best to keep the upgraded trail development near the Watson Pond side of the Highlands and leave the York Hill side of the Highlands wild?

While I understand land conservation is largely for people, the land is also home to plants and animals that need to be allowed to flourish. Carving trails on every inch, nook, and cranny and creating easy access will only wind up fragmenting the ecosystems, domesticate the land, and destroy the wild character. I urge caution at any new development on the west side of the Highlands.

P.S. I believe I'm quoted in the 2011 management plan but misnamed Emily Payne😊?

ROME RUFF RIDERS SNOWMOBILE CLUB

Member of the Maine Snowmobile Association

PO Box 575H
Belgrade Lakes
Maine 04918

Date: November 21, 2022

To: Kennebec Highlands Public Land Management Plan Advisory Committee
Att: Jim Vogel
From: Rome Ruff Riders Snowmobile Club
Re: Five year review and update of the Kennebec Highlands Public Land Management Plan Snowmobile Use.

The Rome Ruff Riders Snowmobile Club maintains all of the snowmobile trails on the Kennebec Highlands with material and manpower and is supplemented with a grant from the Maine Snowmobile Association. The trails are connected to the State wide network and are used by local Maine residents as well as numerous out of state summer residents. Often times some of the summer residents come up to snowmobile on our trails and with no place in the Highlands to park their vehicle and trailer, have parked in the parking lot on Watson Pond Road as this is the only place that is close to the trail. This lot is not large enough to provide parking for two or three trucks and trailers as well as a number of vehicles that often use it for winter hiking. This has caused some abusive notes to be placed on their vehicles that note that this lot is not for snowmobile parking. I notice in the plan that it is the objective of the plan to be as inclusive as possible and that the snowmobile trails that are maintained by Rome Ruff Riders are also used by others. It only seems that the parking lot might also be shared. This would require that the lot be further expanded to include room for possibly three (3) trucks and snowmobile trailers .

Over the past two years the Snowmobile Club has rebuilt a total of five (5) Bridges and made improvements as directed by the State. If the committee would approve the increase in the lot size, the Snowmobile Club would work with the state on this project with manpower and equipment.

We request that this parking issue be considered by the Advisory Committee in their five year review. I understand that the request date was 11/09/22 but this just got to our attention this week.

Rome Ruff Riders Snowmobile Club, Hal Garnett Secretary

CC; Lincoln Nye, President Rome Ruff Riders

Natural Resources Issues	Page	7Lakes comments
Sensitive Natural Areas	1	Is there an updated assessment of species populations and sensitive habitats completed later than 2017? Recommend designing a process to identify/map vernal pool habitat across the ownership.
Forest Continuity	1	How is forest continuity modeled in future harvesting plans for the highlands? Considering potential for improvements (i.e. road tie-ins to McGaffey Mountain Road, or areas in the Kimball, Kidder and McIntire Ponds) for future recreational activities, how will collaborative partners be advised of specific planning windows for these activities?
Water Quality	1	We recommend all management activities place a priority on balancing multiple uses (harvesting, hunting, recreational access) with the site specific and regional needs for habitat and water quality.
Deer Wintering Areas	2	Are there any updates on potential enhancements to existing DWA's? As with sensitive habitats on page 1, we recommend a management approach that favors intact DWA's with limited entry for extraction of forest products. This is especially critical for water quality and habitat integrity in wetlands adjacent to DWA's.
Historic/Cultural Resource Issues		
19 th Century Homestead Sites	2-3	<p>We agree with continued consultation with MHPC on homestead sites across the KH landscapes. We recommend adherence to the 2021-2026 Statewide Historic Preservation <u>Plan</u>.</p> <p>We also encourage a management approach that ensures adequate research and knowledge on tribal usage of the landscape are incorporated into the management process.</p>

Recreational Issues and Opportunities		
ATV Riding	5	<p>Consider the installation of seasonal gates. This will likely help reduce road and trail damage, and thus reduce costs for repair. Vienna Mountain Road and the Welch Rd could be candidate sites.</p> <p>On existing trails, create/enhance standard signage for users. This could include a comprehensive interpretative sign at a central parking location (i.e. winter parking area along the Vienna Mountain Road).</p> <p>In areas such as Kidder Pond, limit access to protect water quality and habitat.</p> <p>Use appropriate sized barriers to minimize incursion and potential damage from larger ORV's.</p> <p>If new trails, work with 7Lakes and ATV constituents (as needed) to design and site trails to minimize recreational conflicts, protect water quality, and limit environmental impacts to the habitat.</p> <p>Consider methodologies for tracking usage.</p> <p>Continue to engage with ATV/snowmobile clubs on project work/enforcement of rules and regulations for usage.</p>
Snowmobiling	5-6	<p>Similar recommendations as listed above for ATV riding. Continue to consult with collaborative partners if the need arises for new trails.</p>
Cross-country Skiing	6	<p>We agree with the continuation of listed actions for cross-country ski activities.</p>
Hiking	7-8	<p>Continue proposed actions in consultation with collaborative partners.</p> <p>Consider a methodology for tracking usage across the trail system. Usage numbers are valuable for future grant related efforts that can support multiple recreation activities.</p>
Universally Accessible Trails	8	<p>Continue proposed actions to include an assessment of some portion of the Allen's lands for a universally accessible trail.</p> <p>Continue working in collaboration with 7Lakes on the suitability of a UA trail on the Dolley Parcel and the adjacent KH lands.</p> <p>Recommend engaging UA experts such as Enock <u>Glidden</u>. Work with 7Lakes staff who participated in a</p>

		<p>conference on UA trails with Maine Coast Heritage Trust and multiple land trusts in October of 2022.</p> <p>Recommend consultation with the Travis Mills Foundation to learn about from their experiences with universal access for veterans.</p>
Horseback Riding	8	As with all recreational activities, ensure that habitat and water quality are protected.
Mountain Biking	9	Continue working with 7Lakes on conservation issues including erosion control, water quality, and habitat quality and with Central Maine chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association when planning new trail locations and design features.
Trailhead Parking areas	9	<p>We support the concept of parking areas north of the town snowplow turn around and in the farmhouse area.</p> <p>We also recommend seasonal gates to reduce roadbed damage during “mud-season”. If usage increases in the Kimball Pond and or the York Hill Road areas, we agree that parking areas should be considered.</p> <p>We recommend an expansion of the Sanders Hill parking area to accommodate additional vehicles.</p> <p>We also recommend that the following infrastructure be considered at primary trailheads, especially as use grows: Outhouse facilities, interpretative signage, and a use tracking system for vehicles and users.</p> <p>Consider teaming with social media platforms such as All Trails to assist with information dissemination to user groups.</p>
Fishing and Boating	10-11	As mentioned under “Water Quality”, continue protection of key waterbodies/watersheds by limiting vehicular access with seasonal gates to prevent impacts to roadbeds and protect associated hydrological connections to Kidder Pond, Kimball Pond, and McIntire Pond. Design and implement a usage tracking process in these locations.
Hunting	11	We support listed actions, including non-hunter recommendations for using hunter-orange colorations for humans and for pets.
Camping	11	We recommend that the future creation of campsites in the KH lands be designed with known issues (positive/negative) at the two user-created sites on Kidder Pond.

		Additional sites will require a thorough vetting process. If campsites are planned in the future, consider increasing the on-site stewardship to control negative impacts to these sites and adjacent habitat.
Annual Recreation Forum	11	We support the creation of an annual recreation forum to include groups and topics listed. We also suggest outreach to all groups such as those requiring universal access trails, and non-traditional groups.
Transportation and Administrative Considerations		
Roads for general Vehicular Travel	12	As mentioned above, under Recreational Issues and Opportunities we support seasonal gates to limit resource damage during portions of the year.
Abutting Property Owners	13	Consider inviting adjacent landowners, local community members and town officials to annual recreation forum as a way to inform and listen to their concerns. This will help build trust.
Host Communities	14	Employ same process as with abutting property owners.
Potential for Vandalism	14	We support the “volunteer host” concept with increased communications with 7Lakes stewardship staff.
Public Information	14	We suggest incorporating a social media platform to reach users prior to their visits to the KH. This may lessen incidents and will yield a data set that can inform partners of usage/issues.
Written Agreements	14	We support written agreements that are reviewed annually with 7Lakes and other user groups including snowmobile clubs/CeMeNEMBA, and ATV clubs.
Structures on the Highlands	14	We support listed actions regarding derelict structures.
Blueberry Field Management		<p>We support continued management of the blueberry lands to include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include communities/individuals who have had free access to pick berries. Include towns/groups in outreach and ensure they are involved in future events and activities. Delineate a specific portion of the habitat for this activity. • Consider future operations of the upper fields by delineating commercial areas and non-commercial areas. • Develop an annual plan to maintain existing habitat (burning) and address portions of the fields (northern) that require brushing. • Manage the viewshed to maximize the scenic value of the area.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We favor an organic approach to blueberry cultivation for the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Potential for value added product ○ Limited impact on water quality and other flora and fauna that utilize the habitat. • Use visitor use data to manage impacts to the habitat and the experience.
Monitoring and Evaluation		
Recreation – Public Use and Use Management	15	We also request that data gleaned from this process is shared with collaborative partners on a regular basis.
Wildlife	16	Continue consultation with MDIF&W.
Special Protective Areas	16	Continue consultation with MNAP and MHPC.
Timber Management	17	Provide periodic updates for 7Lakes regarding proposed harvest areas.

Issues for Advisory Committee Attention

New Issues or Circumstances Not Addressed in the Plan (Allens)

Road/Access and potential new parking areas.	18	See comments under trailhead parking areas.
Potential new trail (including UA trails and connections to existing non-motorized trails	18	See comment under Universal Access Trail.
Disposition and potential uses of the farmhouse and adjacent barn, and associated maintenance/upkeep.	18	<p>Based on the November 17 visit to the farmhouse we recommend the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace locks on barn and farmhouse (completed by 7Lakes on 18 November) • Cover broken window on south facing SW side of farmhouse (completed 18 November) • Assess potential leaks in the chimney area. <p>7Lakes believes there are possible uses of the building if it is rehabilitated including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science and Land Stewardship Hub • Outdoor Recreation Hub • Special Activity Hub

Timber Management	18	Maintain communications with stakeholders regarding proposed timber harvesting activities.
Potential Bear Baiting Sites	18	Kimball Pond property may have some activity close to the boundary.
Resource Allocations		
Special Protection areas (mapped/historic homestead sites)	18	Continue consultation with state agencies to include MHPC and MNAP. Share information with collaborative conservation partners.
Wildlife areas (Riparian buffers/other wildlife habitat protections)	18	Continue consultation with state agencies to include MEDIFW and MNAP. Share information with collaborative conservation partners.
Backcountry and Remote Recreation areas (integrated with existing zones)	18	In collaboration with partners, ensure that remote recreation areas receive appropriate protections to maintain habitat quality, water quality, viewshed, and a positive visitor experience.
Developed Recreation areas (parking areas, other rec. facilities)	18	See comments above under trailhead parking areas.
Timber Management areas (primarily as secondary use)	18	Maintain communications with stakeholders regarding proposed timber harvesting activities.
Other (future leased blueberry fields)	18	See comments above under Blueberry field management.
Other Items of Special Concern or Interest		
Development of a Trails Plan	18-19	We support a comprehensive trail planning effort in collaboration with conservation partners and communities recreational entities such as CeMeNEMBA .