

# Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update

## Pre-Process Informational Session



### FOREST RESOURCES: ISSUES, TRENDS AND PANEL SUMMARIES

#### Topics for Discussion:

- Economic trends in forest products (statistics about annual harvest trends, processing capacity, land holdings, etc.)
- Land management issues (public access, road maintenance, etc.)
- LUPC regulatory issues in terms of permitting and development
- Forest health (e.g., spruce budworm, changes to forest composition, etc.)
- Wildfire risk, prevention, and suppression

#### Session Information:

- **When:** Wednesday, **October 8**, 2025 at 10:00 am
- **Where:** Hilton Garden Inn, 250 Haskell Road, Bangor – **NOTE VENUE CHANGE!**
- **What:** This is the first in a series of informational sessions planned to allow the Commission to learn more about specific topic areas before updating the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP). These sessions will take place during the Commission's regular business meetings and will include presentations by topic experts and/or roundtable discussions, with a question-and-answer portion to allow Commissioners to learn more from subject matter experts.
- **A Key Note:** These informational sessions are not intended to be public hearings, and the public will not be invited to comment. There will be *many* opportunities for the public to provide input and comment during the remainder of the pre-process, including through a public survey and community workshop meetings. People are also welcome to submit comments on the topic in writing to the LUPC by mail to Stacy Benjamin, LUPC, 22 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333, or email to [stacy.benjamin@maine.gov](mailto:stacy.benjamin@maine.gov).

#### Panelists:

- **Maine Forest Service:** Kent Nelson, Forest Ranger Specialist and Federal Grant Coordinator; and Mike Parisio, Forest Entomologist
- **Maine Forest Products Council:** Krysta West, Executive Director
- **Maine Woodland Owners:** Tom Doak, Executive Director
- **Pingree Associates, Inc:** Alex Ingraham, President

The panel presentations will be followed by a Roundtable Discussion with additional invited participants.

## Forestry Related Information and Issues – What We've Heard So Far

### Comments from Initial Outreach Interviews

Economy. The forest economy has changed since the last CLUP update and continues to evolve. The industry is experiencing challenges such as worker shortages and a lack of interest from younger generations to take over long-standing operations and jobs.

Location of Development. As the forest economy shifts and changes, there is concern that land will be sold off for development, particularly for development that is far from organized towns, which provide services to the Commission's service area.

Service Area Character. People are concerned about a shift away from forest-based industries in the Commission's service area, which has ensured that forests are maintained as forests.

Land and Water Access. Recreational access, granted by large landowners and partly managed by North Maine Woods, is important to many people but many users don't understand how access works and some do not respect private land. Users are concerned about losing access to privately owned land while landowners are concerned about potential damage caused by users and the costs to maintain access.

Climate Change. Climate change is predicted to lead to more challenges for the forest industry, such as increased diseases and pests, more severe weather conditions, and increased wildfire risk.

LUPC Process and Administration. As the Commission moves forward with the CLUP process, it will be important to:

- understand regional differences of the Service Area
- ensure that flexibility for uncertain futures is built into the new CLUP
- present data accurately
- recognize efforts by the forest industry to participate in land conservation and protection

### Informational Session and Roundtable Summary

*Presentation #1: Wildfires - Kent Nelson, Forest Ranger Specialist, Maine Forest Service*

#### Current UT Situation

- Maine has the highest number of homes (in the Northeast) located in the urban/wildland interface, and more development is happening in rural areas.
- The number of fires per year has increased, but the footprint of fires is trending smaller. The year 2025 had more fires than the 10-year average, and the fires are occurring later in the year than normally seen. Human-caused fires are the most common for the MFS.

### MFS Wildfire Management

- 2025 was the first year to have an incident command system for the wildfire task force.
- There are new fire suppression resources: multiple unit ranger pickup trucks with pumps and gear, an ATV with a water trailer, a water tender truck, a Type 6 engine and backpack tanks.
- There is a helitack program, which is a rapid response crew for the UT out of Old Town.
- MFS is part of the Northeast Forest Fire Protection Compact, and a federal USFS partnership for access to other kinds of helicopters for wildfire fighting in the northeast. MFS was also awarded federal grants for Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Wildfire Risk Reduction Plans and fuel reduction projects within communities in and around the UT.

### Suggestions for the Commission

- Continue making sure there is accessible water for fire suppression, especially in planned subdivisions.
- Continue with fire prevention education and mitigation efforts.

### Commissioner Questions for Panelist

**Q:** Is defensible space a consideration for insurance companies? Similar to hazard trees.

**A:** Some western states do consider defensible space for insurance, and there is a difference between trees that are a concern for spreading fire to structures and trees that could be a falling hazard for structures.

**Q:** Are there repercussions for individuals who do not get burn permits? Does the MFS evaluate burn sites like municipalities do?

**A:** Law enforcement is a major component of the MFS's work, and individuals may be subject to fines or liable for damages if a fire spreads. The MFS has information on the website for proper burning practices, but the information could be improved in the future.

**Q:** Who is responsible for water resources for fire response (e.g., dry hydrants)?

**A:** The MFS likes to work with homeowners, camp, or road associations to maintain those resources, and some areas are served by fire departments in neighboring or nearby municipalities.

**Q:** What distances are included in the three zones for defensible space.

**A:** Zone one ranges from zero to five feet of fine fuel management, zone two ranges from five to thirty feet for management of softwood fuels, and zone three includes management for proper tree spacing.

**Q:** Does road width matter for fire response?

**A:** This is a concern for fire response. If a road is not safe, then a department will not use it.

**Q:** Do the Commission's clearing standards, especially on waterfront properties, conflict with defensible space recommendations?

**A:** MFS recommendations for defensible space do not overrule shoreland zoning rules, and it is not likely that a fire would come from the direction of the water. Camp-to-camp spread of fire is a possibility. The Commission is working to resolve conflicts and has added language to building permits to recommend structure setbacks of 130 ft. from the normal high-water mark to account for defensible space.

*Presentation #2: Spruce Budworm - Mike Parisio, Forest Entomologist, Maine Forest Service*

### Overview and Recent History

- Outbreaks occurred in the 1940s and 1970s, with "The Big One" from 1967-1993. During that outbreak, there was an estimated 20-25 million cords of spruce-fir mortality, a huge loss (\$100s of millions) in revenue to the forest industry.
- Every outbreak is unique, regional, and does not only occur in Maine.

### Current Outbreak

- There has been a regional outbreak since the early 2000s with SBW movement into Maine in 2019.
- MFS uses pheromone traps and aerial surveys for monitoring.
- There is clear evidence of tree mortality by aerial surveys in 2024 with almost 3,500 acres documented.
- Labs at UMaine Orono and Fort Kent analyze tree specimens for overwintering larvae (L2) and create digital models to identify when treatment should occur (Early Intervention Strategy, EIS).
- SBW Management Activities:
  - Harvesting trees for SBW management falls under the Forest Protection Act or Outcome-Based Forestry. The rules for pre-salvage/salvage due to SBW are still under development (Spruce Budworm Management Act).
  - Spray activities: In the 2025 EIS Treatment Program, there was aerial spraying of almost 240,000 acres, which was mostly in the UT (Northwestern Maine/Canadian border). The 2025 spray program was reviewed by all appropriate state and federal agencies. All aerial applications were applied according to the minimum regulations set forth by the above regulators or exceeding minimum requirements.

### Commissioner Questions for Panelist

**Q:** How does the forest change after an outbreak?

**A:** Continuous spruce and fir forest set the stage for the last major outbreak, and many areas have grown back to that forest composition. There are active efforts to manage forests for trees that SBW doesn't like.

**Q:** What are some takeaways from the last outbreak

**A:** Early intervention strategies, such as comprehensive population monitoring and early intervention, were important lessons learned and practices put in place for the current outbreak.

**Q:** Is a forest's age composition a factor in an outbreak?

**A:** 40-year-old trees are a preferred food source, which is why outbreaks occur on a 40-year cycle.

**Q:** Do landowners manage for species less desirable for spruce budworm?

**A:** Management is in the hands of landowners, and economics largely dictate management practices.

*Presentation #3: ME Budworm Response Coalition - Alex Ingraham, President,  
Pingree Associates*

#### The Maine Budworm Response Coalition

- The Coalition was formed by private landowners in Northern Maine with the goal of managing forests to avoid SBW damage by avoiding pure balsam fir swaths, interspersing spruce and hardwood on the landscape, and increasing the range of age classes of timber stands.
- The Coalition uses the Early Intervention Strategy (EIS) mentioned in the previous presentation to treat the millions of acres susceptible to SBW in northern Maine, along with state, federal, and UMaine Orono and Fort Kent partners.

#### 2025 Response

- Using a digital model in conjunction with UMaine and the Maine Forest Service, around 300,000 acres of Aroostook County were identified for EIS aerial treatments for the summer of 2025. The Western area was treated using fixed-wing planes, and the Eastern area was treated using helicopters for further target treatment around towns and residential areas.
- The 2025 cost was roughly \$13-14 million. \$12 million in federal funding and \$2 million in state funding were provided. Private funding covered approximately 10% of the overall cost, plus management, in-kind donations, contracting, and coordination from the Coalition. Leftover funds will be used in 2026.

#### 2025 Treatment Outcomes

- The treatment was successful! There are very positive trends being seen on the landscape. Samples of tree data needed for the 2026 model are expected to be collected by late December.

#### Commissioner Questions for Panelist

**Q:** What are the consequences of doing nothing for an outbreak?

**A:** The estimated economic impact of doing nothing could be well over eight hundred million dollars, and a treatment plan for a higher outbreak year is approximately 10 to 15 million dollars. Outbreaks can have additional consequences, such as increased fire risk, so early intervention helps keep forests healthy and pays off in the long run.

**Q:** How are residential areas treated when spraying occurs?

**A:** Bureau of Pesticides requirements are followed, such as 1,000-foot untreated buffers around residential areas and notification to residents.

**Q:** How do development patterns impact management decisions, such as the use of large equipment or spraying for outbreaks?

**A:** Forest management occurs throughout the land, and managers are concerned with maximizing growth and yield. Land managers consider the best use of the land, which could be development, timber management, recreation, or other uses. Planned development is also cost-prohibitive, and land division for development is currently most cost-effective through the two-in-five rules. For example, a planned development in the Rangeley Region was supposed to make it easier and more cost-effective to develop but did not because the road cost four or five hundred thousand dollars, and the camps would sell for about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Cost-wise, planned development doesn't make sense to do, which may be why the Commission has not seen planned development on a larger scale.

**Q:** Does the economic impact of the spruce budworm outbreak include losses to industries outside of timber, such as spruce tips for wreaths?

**A:** Estimated economic loss does include all industries, but current numbers are outdated, and the real economic impact is likely higher.

**Q:** Black spruce was thought to be less attractive to spruce budworm and was planted in large quantities during the last outbreak. Did this help with the current outbreak?

**A:** Black spruce buds out later than other spruce species, which could help with outbreaks, but not all landowners decided to manage through planting black spruce because it is costly.

**Q:** Do smaller landowners have a say in where spraying occurs for outbreaks?

**A:** Spraying occurs where the outbreak is happening, but the coalition has members across the state.

*Presentation #4: Maine Forest Products Council - Krysta West, Executive Director*

#### Responses to Comments in the Initial Outreach Report

- **Service Area Character:** In response to concerns about shifting away from forest-based industries in the UT:
  - There are examples of large conservation easements and lands in fee since 2010, as well as ecological reserves.

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- Examples of alternative revenue streams by forestland owners were provided.
- Maine is leading the nation in the number of acres certified by a third-party for sustainability, like SFI and FSC.
- *Forest Economy:* There have been changes since 2010 CLUP, and the industry is experiencing challenges. Krysta presented the highlights of two reports that focused on the statewide economic contributions to Maine's Forest Product sector (from 2019 to 2024), and the Maine Forest Service Harvesting Report from 2023.
- *Location of Development:* There are concerns regarding land being sold for development and development taking place away from organized towns. Krysta provided an overview of the UT development trends from LUPC data, as well as population trends for the service area. Highlighted also was the Lakes Reclassification Effort (LD 1529), which is the legislation that could affect 52 remote lakes and ponds, snowmobile and ATV trails and countless private roads.<sup>1</sup>
- *Land and Water Access:* Regarding recreational access on land from large private landowners, it is misunderstood by users and there are concerns about this access being discontinued. Overview of the 2025 MFPC Landowner Survey Results.

Presentation Highlights

- The UT has many kinds of forestland owners with many kinds of management goals.
- New dwelling permits on the interior have remained basically 0 since at least 2010.
  - From 2010 forward, new dwelling permits were relatively flat until a surge during the pandemic. This is no surprise, as there was an uptick in this kind of activity across the nation. It's important to note that development peaked in 2021 and 2022 and has fallen since.
- According to MFPC analysis:
  - The rate of new dwelling permits in the interior (defined as more than a mile from a public road) between 2010 and 2024 was 0.06/township/year. That's 0.6 per decade and 6 per century.
  - 135 of the 205 interior towns (66%) saw no new dwelling permits during the data period.
  - New dwelling permits in the fringe (within 1 mile of a public road) averaged: 0.75/town/year, or 7.5 per decade.
  - Most permitting activity can be directly linked to Franklin County.
  - Not all permits necessarily represent construction. We don't have data on how many permits are actually used.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission staff clarification (not stated at the meeting): If a trail exists prior to a zone change, it would become a legally existing nonconforming use and can be continued, provided the use is not discontinued or abandoned for a period exceeding two years [See Chapter 10, Sections 10.11(A) and 10.11(D)].

- Since the last CLUP in 2010, easements primarily in UT have restricted 1.2 million acres of development, as well as areas where forestry is restricted, partly due to an increase in Forever Wild and changes in Statewide Standards buffer zones.
- There has been a loss of paper manufacturing, which has hurt the forest industry, but critical investments are being made.
- UT and fringe areas are critical to Maine's rural economy.
- Caution to LUPC regarding "wholesale changes" to the lake classification system.

#### Commissioner Questions for Panelist

**Q:** Why does MFPC believe that trails would be severed if certain lakes were reclassified through a lakes reclassification project?

**A:** More restrictive lake classifications do not allow development within a quarter or half-mile buffer around a lake for vehicular access and that management decisions should be made with a full view of what exists on the ground (see footnote 1 on previous page).

#### *Presentation #5: Maine Woodland Owners – Tom Doak, Executive Director*

#### Profile of Maine's Family Woodland Owners

- Small woodlot owners have been extensively surveyed to collect information on what they view as issues and concerns.
- 86k family owners with over 10 or more acres in Maine, with 60% owned by landowners 65 years and older and only 4% owned by those 45 years and younger.
- Majority purchased the land, including from relatives. Average ownership of 62.5 acres, and one-third owning more than 2 parcels.
- From the survey, the top 11 reasons for owning land by Family Woodland Owners (total of "Very important" and "Important"): wildlife habitat (84%), beauty and scenery (82%), nature protection (74%), were the first three; and the lowest overall importance was timber products (9%).
- Family Owners Concerns (total % of "Great Concern" and "Concern"): property tax costs (75%), keeping land intact costs (73%), dumping/vandalism (72%) were the top three; and the lowest of the eight topics was climate change risks (42%).
- Important point: Public access to private land is an important tradition in Maine; however, the following sentiment is increasingly felt by some landowners: "allowing public use is rarely, if ever, a benefit to a private woodland landowner."
- Good news: 75% of Family Woodland Owners allow public recreation on their lands.
- Bad news: increase of landowners from 2015 to 2025 who are considering or outright restricting/prohibiting some type of recreation of their land in the future.

#### Types of Maine Family Woodland Owners

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- Woodland Retreat Owners (48%), Working the Land Owners (19%), Supplemental Income Owners (14%), and Uninvolved Owners (19%).
- Key indicator: Those owning over 50 acres are more likely to be interested in managing their land, regardless of the type of owner they are, vs those who own less than 50 acres. Finding ways to engage these owners will have societal benefits.

Key Takeaways

- Aging population equates to land ownership turnover. The next generation will see land ownership differently.
- The cost of owning/holding land is a major issue for both the current and next generation of owners. Therefore, a greater interest in other sources of income will be important.
- There is concern from landowners regarding public access and misuse of private land by the public, leading landowners to ask, “why should I allow access?”

Commissioner Comment

- Commissioner Hilton commented that, as a small woodlot owner, she agreed with much of the information presented.

**Q:** How are biomass markets doing?

**A:** Markets don't reach far from a facility, and there is more material than can currently be processed. Wood left in the forest could create more tinder for wildfires.

*Roundtable Discussion with Commissioner Comments*

Participants:

- Steve Tatko (Vice President of Land and Conservation, Appalachian Mountain Club)
- Matt Jacobs (Regional Manager, American Forest Management)
- Eugene Mahar (Forest Resources Manager, LandVest)

- The participants gave an overview of their respective companies, issues, and concerns.
  - **Mr. Tatko** highlighted the conservation of working forests as a possible resilience strategy; concern for the posting of land surrounding AMC land, which puts more pressure on AMC's land; and the reality of expenses that come with conservation (taxes, maintenance, etc.).
  - **Mr. Jacobs** mentioned the findings of the small woodlot owners survey and how that is similar to issues large landowners have; the interfacing with ATV/snowmobile users on trails and roads; and that the forest is outproducing the marketplace – a potential wildfire hazard.
  - **Mr. Mahar** referred to increasing requests for posted signs on private land and restrictions; and seeing more absentee landowners.

Commissioner Questions for Participants

**Q:** Are ATV clubs responsive to issues from ATV users on private land and bad actors?

**Mr. Jacobs:** Clubs are doing their best, but the volume of use is high and difficult to deal with.

**Q:** What are the future outlooks for woodlots?

**Mr. Mahar:** Tom's presentation did a good job explaining future outlooks for woodlots, such as an increase in absentee landowners and more restricted access.

**Mr. Jacobs:** Survey results from Tom's presentation were also on track with the experiences of American Forest Management, and that incremental changes, such as landownership changes, are likely to occur.

**Mr. Tatko:** Conservation and the land trust community may play an important role in the future of forests. Restricted access on properties neighboring Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) land can push a higher number of users onto AMC land, which can significantly increase maintenance costs.

**Q:** Are conservation easements cost-prohibitive?

**Mr. Tatko:** Costs are a consideration for conservation organizations in taking on new management and maintenance responsibilities and are something to consider for keeping traditional uses intact.

**Q:** Issues with land access are concerning. Is anything being done to mitigate impacts to private land from recreational users?

**Mr. Tatko:** The Maine Trails Bond, passed in 2024, has helped mitigate some infrastructure and maintenance needs for landowners.