

# Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update

## Pre-Process Informational Session



### RECREATION ISSUES AND TRENDS

#### Topics for Discussion:

- Economic trends in recreation in the Unorganized Territories (UT)
- Changes in visitor demand and preferences in the UT
- Regulatory issues with recreation activities (owner/operator perspectives)
- Implications from increased use of motorized trails and larger-sized ATV or UTVs
- Recreation access on private lands
- Boating data and trends
- Conversion of traditional recreational lodging facilities to other uses

#### Session Information:

- **When:** Wednesday, **February 11**, 2026 at 10:00 am
- **Where:** Jeff's Catering, 15 Event Center Way, Brewer
- **What:** This is the fourth 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:

- **Jason House**, Vice President, Maine Sporting Camps Association
- **Bill Greaves**, Executive Director, North Maine Woods
- **Steve Tatko**, Vice President of Land & Conservation, Appalachian Mountain Club
- **Nicole Lazure**, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands
- **Diano Circo**, Chief Planner, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

There will be no Roundtable Discussion at this Information Session.

## **Recreation Related Information and Issues – What We’ve Heard So Far**

### ***Excerpts from Initial Outreach Interviews – Comments from Interviewees***

Economy: Some recreation-based businesses are struggling under current regulations and requirements. Additionally, many costs have risen, making it hard to upgrade or expand a business. Some recreation business owners feel that forest products are the major focus of the Maine economy.

Environmental Impact: Increased trail use and newer, bigger motorized vehicles have caused damage to recreational trails.

Service Area Character: Public access to private land is a key characteristic of the Service Area, and people are hopeful that this access will continue. Traditional recreational activities such as hunting and fishing are seeing less engagement, and newer uses such as motorized trail use, mountain biking, and other day-use activities are seeing more engagement.

Land and Water Access: Maine visitors often don’t understand that private landowners grant permission to access their land for recreation, and increased conflict over the past few years has led to concerns about continued access. Funding to improve and update recreational resources is limited, which can affect access, and users with limited mobility can’t access all the resources the Service Area has to offer. Development can also restrict land access, especially on shorelines, and there has been a noted increase in posted land.

Climate Change: Projected changes to the climate will likely affect storm frequency and intensity, water quality, fire danger, and cause changes to the length of the shoulder seasons, which are all concerns for recreation activities and the recreation economy.

LUPC Process and Administration: Some permit requirements, such as wastewater disposal requirements, can be a barrier to development or business expansion. This is especially true for more remote areas where there are very few licensed contractors and inspectors.

### **Informational Session Summary**

*Presentation #1: Maine Sporting Camp Association Presentation – Jason House, Vice President, Maine Sporting Camp Association*

#### Who we represent

- The Maine Sporting Camp Association, MSCA, represents nearly four dozen small, family-run businesses across Maine, predominantly in the UT. Many of these camps have operated for generations. For example, Mr. House’s family has been involved in this industry for 65 years, and he has been the principal owner for over 20 years.

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- Operations of these sporting camps typically include: a main lodge with meal service, cabins or “out camps” support by a central operation (like housekeeping) and often provide services of a Registered Maine Guide.

Economic trends in recreation in the UT

- There was a significant increase in use during the COVID pandemic, and demand has remained above pre-COVID levels. People continue to come when they see what membership offers visitors and customers.
- Sporting camps face the same inflationary pressures as other small businesses, specifically with costs of fuel, food, maintenance, and insurance. Many of these costs cannot be fully passed on to the customer, as sporting camps have worked to keep their costs affordable. The results of high costs are shrinking operating margins. These camps are highly used by Maine residents who do not have their own camps or want to recreate in the UT, making them important to residents, as well as out-of-state visitors.

Regulatory issues with recreation activities (Owner/operator perspectives)

- The primary regulatory burdens relate to facilities compliance, not recreational activities. Specifically, plumbing, septic, and fire-suppression systems are the most significant challenges. These issues are amplified during ownership transfer, including the death of a principal owner. Food and lodging licenses are not transferable to new ownership, which can also cause burdens.
- LD 1737 would have provided limited relief related to DHHS inspections. This bill was submitted by MSCA and would have created a new definition for “sporting camp.” It was voted Ought Not to Pass, though the committee chair issued a letter to MDIFW and DHHS to meet with MSCA to work on this. A report will be due in January 2027 to the legislature.

Impacts from increases in ATV size and usage

- MSCA’s position has been to align with the landowners on this issue and supports responsible landowner-driven access policies. Although this does not impact many of the MSCA members, as they are located within the North Maine Woods where ATVs are prohibited inside the gates.

Recreation access on private lands

- Almost all members rely on the generosity of public access to private lands. MSCA recognizes that access is a privilege and not a right. Many in MSCA are on leased land.

Boating data and trends

- The North Maine Woods provides the most reliable long-term recreation data for the area. Aerial angling surveys in the Allagash region show an up to 90% decline in angling days, or open water fishing, over a 40-year period. The caveat to that is the Allagash is remote and difficult to get to. Declines in usage have implications for camp viability, local economies, and long-term recreational access.

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Conversion of traditional recreational lodging facilities to other uses

- This is the biggest concern of the MSCA and one of the most disturbing trends in the industry. Regulatory pressures, mostly related to plumbing rules, are driving conversions away from commercial use. An example of this is a North Maine Woods camp that required a complete \$200,000 plumbing and septic upgrade prior to the sale of the camp. Another island camp owner was quoted \$500,000 for a new septic system because they do not have road access. These costs make sales no longer economically viable. The real estate assets are worth more than the business when this is required, which is especially costly when the existing systems are not failing, nor are they up to current standards.

Once lost, rarely replaced

- Maine camps have been sold as private campgrounds, permanently closed, and/or demolished. Three camps were recently lost: Bosebuck (now private), Bowlin (now private), and McNally Camps (removed). These changes represent irreversible loss of public recreation infrastructure.

Path forward

- MSCA is hopeful with DHHS and MDIFW being directed to work with MSCA to develop relief strategies, after LD 1737 was voted Ought Not to Pass. The timeline for recommendations has a report due to the legislature in January 2027.

**Commissioner Questions for Panelist** *[Note: Questions and answers are paraphrased for this summary. The full session audio can be accessed at: [https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/about/calendar/calendar\\_archive.shtml](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/about/calendar/calendar_archive.shtml)]:*

**Q:** Are sporting camps required to meet the Maine building and energy codes?

**A:** Yes, sporting camps fall under the health inspection program for the state. The difference is that new buildings are required to follow all the standards, but older buildings are not required to update to the codes until the ownership of the property changes hands. This has become a burden for sporting camp owners, many of whom are operating historic buildings not designed with modern building requirements. The cost to upgrade or add new features, specifically septic, plumbing and fire suppression systems, often in remote and difficult to access areas has become onerous to owners.

**Q:** Are sporting camps extending their operating seasons with non-traditional sporting camp activities?

**A:** Yes, while some sporting camps have traditionally operated year-round, some sporting camps have been adding or marketing activities that are not considered traditional to sporting camps, like forest bathing and cross-country skiing. The low cost of marketing on social media and

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opportunities for other revenue streams to make operations viable have contributed to these changes.

**Q:** Have efforts made by the Commission to address the needs of recreational lodging been effective?

**A:** The main issues that sporting camp owners are struggling with are not coming from the LUPC, but from Health and Human Services (DHHS). The North Maine Woods has a single plumbing inspector, and camp operators in other places are not held to the same standards. An example of an issue is the distance of the toilet to the bathroom door to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Moving toilets is not easy in a 120-year-old camp. There is not much of an appeals process. Provisional licenses can be issued, but the changes need to be made within 12 months, and this is not always possible due to the financial costs of these changes. This has led to lost sales and camp conversions. The loss of camping facilities in the North Maine Woods has caused issues with pop-up camps that are not enforced by DHHS. Mr. House would be interested in building more camps, but the cost of a two-bedroom camp is at least \$90,000 with the required fire suppression system, water tank, generator, etc.

**Q:** Is there a definition of “sporting camps” in statute?

**A:** Yes, but it is too broad. It refers to having four or more bedrooms or cabins.<sup>1</sup> The Maine Sporting Camps Association is working with Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to possibly create a new bill to narrow the description to provide relief to sporting camp owners.

**Q:** Is the character of recreation changing in the UT?

**A:** There is a potential for major changes in the next 15 to 20 years, as sporting camp owners age out and sell their businesses. There are several operations that know they will have to transfer ownership of their sporting camps to private individuals, clubs, or a family compound, as it will not make financial sense to continue operating under current regulations.

**Q:** Would these changes in ownership impact on the primitive experience that the UT provides for recreation?

**A:** Yes, loss of sporting camps has a huge impact on people who do not want to camp or tent camp, as sporting camps sold to private individuals, clubs or family compounds are closed to the public. Mr. House’s sporting camp hosts about 3,300 guest nights a year. A similar camp, Bosebuck, recently closed and had a similar number of guest nights. Those are 3,000 night stays a year that cannot be replaced.

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<sup>1</sup> 22 MRS §2491(11). Maine Revised Statutes: definition of [“recreational camp or sporting camp.”](#)

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**Q:** What are the safety nets that sporting camps provide to the UT?

**A:** There is an importance of sporting camps as locations to support people in need, like when visitors get flat tires or injuries in the North Maine Woods. Sporting camps and their owners play an important role in supporting those in the UT.

**Q:** Have any sporting camp owners investigated historic preservation to protect their camps?

**A:** While this may help some owners, not all have buildings or property that would qualify under historic preservation.

**Q:** Are there any funds that could help sporting camp owners upgrade their facilities?

**A:** Mr. House was unfamiliar with any camp owners looking into funds or grants. Often the upgrading costs come into play during the sale of a camp, and a grants process would not align with that time frame.

*Presentation #2: North Maine Woods Recreation Issues and Trends – Bill Greaves, Executive Director, North Maine Woods*

North Maine Woods, Inc.

- North Maine Woods (NMW) is 3.5 million acres of private land with some public entities. NMW is also contracted to manage the KI Jo-Mary forests. NMW was formed by landowners in the early 1970s. It became a not-for-profit corporation in the 1980s. It is run by a board of directors made up of landowners.

Economic trends in recreation in the Unorganized Territories

- As a commercial business, revenue can be adjusted through user fees, but expenses are often mandated by others. Examples of these expenses are the cost of energy, food, goods, or the increase of minimum wage (NMW has over 70 employees), and mileage reimbursement. The NMW has over 350 campsites, which need outhouses, picnic tables, and other amenities. Regulations are difficult and can be costly. For example, the cost of hiring a soil professional and completing a soil test required to install an outhouse is \$1000. There are places where best management practices would eliminate some regulatory costs.

Visitor Usage Data

- NMW collects visitor usage data at their checkpoints. There are 16 purposes that visitors can register for including: camping, canoeing, fiddleheading, fishing, multiple kinds of hunting, and more. 2025: The total number of visitors was 70,278, and the total number of visitor days was 231,774. Bird hunting and visiting leases had the highest number of visitor usage, both with over 10,000 visitors.

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- Following the 16-year trend (2010-2025), visitor usage data for the following activities were reviewed: deer, bear, grouse, and moose hunting, camping, canoeing, fishing, visiting leases, and total annual visitor days and total number of visitors. Of note, all uses have increasing trends over the period, except for deer hunting, bear hunting and fishing. The total number of visitors has a nearly flat trendline.

Regulatory issues with recreation activities (Owner/operator perspectives)

- NMW has a positive relationship with the Land Use Planning Commission, Department of Labor, (DOL), Maine Warden Service, and Maine Forest Service. The current regulations regarding NMW users are not overbearing and benefit the landowners who allow public access and leases.
- Suggestions from NMW include moving some regulatory business, like building codes, plumping inspections, DOL requirements for the UT to the LUPC. Also allowing for soil tests for outhouse installation to be done under a best management practice, BMP, structure.

Impacts from increases in ATV size and usage

- ATVs are not allowed within the boundaries of the NMW. Individuals who do not follow this rule will be banned.

Recreation access on private lands

- Recreation access to the NMW is managed by a gate system of eight staffed checkpoints and seven automated checkpoints. Policy violators are issued trespass notices and are not allowed to return.

Outfitter Outpost Program

- In recent years, NMW has experienced a shortage of capacity for camping in the fall months. NMW is developing an “Outfitter Outpost” program that will allow Registered Maine Guides to establish tent camps outside current campsites.

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**Q:** Is there visitor usage data for the Allagash Wilderness Waterway? Have there been changes in usage over time?

**A:** There are some data for the Allagash Wilderness Waterway because the North Maine Woods (NMW) documents visitors and their activities at checkpoints. NMW collects money for the usage of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway on behalf of the state of Maine, and therefore there are usage numbers and financial records through NMW. Mr. Greaves believes there has been an increase in canoeing and camping on the Allagash Wilderness Waterway and the St. John River (see slide 7).

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**Q:** Do you think people are staying in the region longer because there is more to do recreationally, or because people are traveling a long distance to reach the NMW and want to maximize their time?

**A:** (Mr. Greaves) My friends and I used to go bird hunting for the day and go home. People today like to spend their week vacation in NMW. Some activities, like bear hunting, are typically a weeklong anyway. There are groups of people who like to come and stay and enjoy everything.

**Q:** Is there data on age of visitors?

**A:** NMW collects data on visitors under 18-years of age, but that was not included in the presentation. The LUPC is welcome to request that data from NMW. There has been an increase in usage by those 18 and under.

**Q:** What is internet coverage and availability like in NMW and is there a potential for people to work remotely?

**A:** Satellite internet is something people use in the NMW.

**Q:** How have fees for visitors increased over the years?

**A:** The NMW did increase their day fee from \$11 to \$13 a day within the last few years and tries to mimic the state hourly minimum wage for the day-use fee and camping fees.

**Q:** What kind of emergency services are used in the NMW?

**A:** The NMW is fortunate to be able to rely on the Maine Warden Service and the Maine Forest Service for assistance, as well as ambulance services from Greenville and Ashland. Depending on the need, NMW may be able to call neighboring sporting camp owners to help people. For instance, someone's vehicle needed to be pulled from a ditch and Mr. Greaves was able to call Mr. House to get someone from his sporting camp to come help.

**Q:** How long is the privilege of public access going to last in the NMW when landowners are incurring costs and damages for the use of their land?

**A:** The NMW Board of Directors meets with landowners, and the feedback has been positive to continue the access. However, that is only going to last for so long.

**Q:** Who covers road maintenance in the NMW?

**A:** The NMW is responsible for the recreation piece of the operation and landowners are responsible for road maintenance, like plowing, resurfacing, putting down shale, etc. This is like the usage of the Golden Road, which was maintained by the mill companies and is now in

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disrepair. Recreationists using these privately owned roads do not put in any money to maintain the roads, which had traditionally been paid for by the timber industry and landowners. [LD 1308](#), which examines issues with public access on privately owned lands.

**Q:** Could guide services provide their own port-a-potties for base camp operations?

**A:** NMW is working with Maine guide services to provide bathrooms to their base camp operations. The better solution would be for the regulation to allow for best management practices in the installation of an outhouse. The current regulation is a burden to landowners, the NMW and guide services.

*Presentation #3: Appalachian Mountain Club's Maine Woods Initiative: Outdoor Recreation – Steve Tatko, Vice President of Land and Conservation, Appalachian Mountain Club*

Appalachian Mountain Club's 100-Mile Wilderness, 2025

- The Appalachian Mountain Club, AMC, was started in 1876 as America's oldest conservation organization. AMC has been a landowner since 1882, running outdoor recreation facilities since 1884, owning land in Maine since 1924, and land within the UT since 2003. The AMC exists in the UT as a landowner, a professional trail-building entity, and sporting camp owner.
- AMC owns six properties in the 100-Mile Wilderness. The total area as of September 2025 was 127, 710 acres, with an additional 29,400 acres managed (Whitecap Highlands Forest). These properties include Katahdin Iron Works, acquired in 2003 (37,143 acres) and Roach Ponds, acquired in 2009 (28,346 acres).

AMC's conservation strategy

- Maine Woods Initiative Project Concept is a new outdoor recreation destination with public access to land, as well as landscape-scale conservation with responsible forestry, economic development, community partnerships, and local environmental education.
- The business model takes an inclusive approach to conservation finance for acquisition from state, federal, and private sources, with tax incentives, carbon credits, and easement funds. Creative conservation finance for operations includes land held for timber harvesting, as well as lodging revenue, carbon credits, state, federal, private philanthropy, and endowment support.

Maine woods recreation

- Outdoor recreation is 3.9% of Maine's economy, which is about \$3.3 billion. This is double the national average and makes Maine 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation. Maine is a top destination for eco-tourists and nature lovers seeking refuge from busier locations. Notably, the UT is about five hours north of Boston.

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Recreational Infrastructure

- Since 2003, AMC has built 130 miles of trails in the UT and 92 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails. This is the largest network of cross-country trails free to public use in New England. Trail types include hiking, single track and cross-country biking, snowshoeing, ski trails, portage and canoe trails. There are 16 remote paddle-to-campsites, and 24 drive-to-campsites. There are over 300 miles over gravel biking trails, 110 miles of snowmobile trails and 25 miles of ATV trails. One third of the AMC land is within KI Jo-Mary gate system.
- AMC lodges: Little Lyford Lodge and Cabins, one of the oldest continually operated sporting camps in Maine since 1872 with AMC acquisition in 2003, Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins has operated on and off since 1910 with AMC acquisition in 2010, and Medawisla Lodge and Cabins originally opened in the 1950s, acquired by AMC in 2009, and it was rebuilt in 2017 as a brand new sporting camp facility under newer LUPC guidelines.
  - The newer LUPC guidelines have allowed AMC to add new price points to their recreation facility offerings at Medawisla.

First Dark Sky Park in Maine

- AMC has worked with the local communities to brand the region, including creating the first International Dark Sky Park in Maine. This is a layer of external recognition and draw for tourists to come to see the lack of light pollution and experience the night sky in the UT. This has been assisted by state and UT-specific legislation to protect the night sky.

Community Partnerships

- AMC recognizes the importance of cementing community relationships to the land and takes part in several community partnership initiatives including partnering with Brownville to improve trail access (motorized and non-motorized) to Katahdin Iron Works, and a hand-carry boat launch, as the town currently has no access to the river. This project, the Pleasant River multi-use trail, includes a parking area, attachment to the Maine Trails Program and additional investment in bridges and culverts.
- AMC has heard from UT-bordering towns that they need permanent outdoor recreation infrastructure to plan economic activity around. This is an important note to the LUPC for the future CLUP.

Outdoor recreation survey in Maine

- AMC completed an Outdoor Recreation Survey about the Maine Woods Initiative and the Moosehead Lake Region as part of a CORA grant in Maine. This is an initiative funded by the US Economic Administration and administered by the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation providing grants of \$50,000-\$200,000 for projects enhancing sustainable,

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equitable and resilient outdoor recreation, aiming for economic recovery from the pandemic.

- Visitor use was analyzed through two regional user surveys, one for summer (153 responses) and one for winter (135 responses). The AMC lodge post-stay survey was developed by CRO and had 163 responses. An analysis of Maine Woods Initiative and AMC guests showed that most guests come from Maine and Massachusetts, and they come to ski, snowshoe, hike and paddle. The most popular winter activity was cross-country skiing, and the top summer activity was hiking.

Considerations

- An increase in posted land is forcing local users to turn to interior lands for traditional activities like hunting and fishing. The increase in hunting leases, as well as an increase in road costs, are pushing closures.
- Communities want permanent trail networks and prefer well maintained trails in dependable locations.
- The dark sky protection has widespread support.
- The average visitor stay is down to two days.
- There are issues with service center housing and not enough places for workers to stay.

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**Q:** How does AMC think about fee costs for their camping opportunities, especially where some of the locations could be considered “upscale”?

**A:** The AMC reviews data and fees of similar camping facilities and works to have their prices in the median of the overall range for affordability. About two-thirds of the AMC-affiliated campsites in Maine are first-come, first-serve for up to two weeks and are free. AMC purposefully tries to provide a variety of opportunities for people to experience the landscape at different price points.

**Q:** How do LUPC regulations impact AMC lands in the UT?

**A:** Stream crossings are an example where there is a tighter definition for trail corridors for public access under the Maine Forest Service’s rules. It would be interesting to compare the regulatory environment of permanent trail infrastructure for public access versus forest management activities. AMC participates in processes for both forest management and trail corridors, and there may be a way to find synergy in these processes.

**Q:** Does AMC have multi-use trails in its trail system?

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**A:** Yes, there is a trail corridor that starts in Brownville and goes into the UT. ATVs are excluded, but the trail infrastructure is open to snowmobiling. Trails within AMC land may be limited to single use, but that is by design. For example, cross-country skiing has been moved off snowmobile trails, which has reduced user conflicts, but there are still areas where those uses overlap.

*Presentation #4: Shaping the Future of Outdoor Recreation: Maine SCORP – Nicole Lazure, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Bureau of Parks and Lands*

#### Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

- Supports close-to-home recreation opportunities and provides community access to the outdoors. Since its inception in 1965, LWCF has helped fund over 46,000 projects in communities and neighborhoods across the country. An overview of locations and projects in Maine can be found [here](#). The LWCF uses zero tax dollars, as the LWCF invests earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to help strengthen communities, preserve our history, and protect our national endowment of lands and waters. The only eligible applicants are the State of Maine, counties, school districts, and Tribal Nations.

#### What is SCORP?

- SCORP is the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, which identifies the statewide demand for and supply of outdoor recreation areas. It sets planning priorities for towns, agencies, Tribal Nations, and organizations. The SCORP is used by LWCF grant applications and grant administrators to determine eligibility, and the federal government requires the Bureau of Parks and Lands, BPL, to analyze outdoor recreation supply and demand. States are required to have SCORPs to receive LWCF funds. The State also requires BPL to have a comprehensive plan, which the SCORP fulfills.

#### SCORP Planning Timeline

- SCORPs are required to be updated every 5 to 10 years. In December 2024, a steering committee was formed. Throughout 2025, planning, stakeholder engagement, public input, and document drafting took place. In 2026, public comment on the draft, finalizing the document, submitting for approval, and publishing the SCORP will take place.

#### SCORP Team

- SCORP is under the management of Maine BPL with a steering committee of 15 members from across the state representing strategic and diverse sectors of outdoor recreation professionals. Public input is also part of the process.
- The 2025-2026 SCORP Steering Committee includes representatives from Appalachian Mountain Club, Outdoor Access Solutions, Maine Association of Recreation and Parks, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, and more.

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- Public input is data-driven through outdoor recreation providers (the supply survey), recreation users (the demand survey), focus groups, and interviews.

SCORP Outcomes

- The process of publishing a SCORP creates the following outcomes: state outdoor recreation themes, priorities, and goals for the future, strategies and objectives, a comprehensive plan, survey reports, and statewide trails plan, which is a new outcome.

How does SCORP relate to other statewide recreation plans?

- The Maine Outdoor Roadmap is like the SCORP and occurs every 10 years. It is a strategic plan led by the Maine Outdoor Brands Association and Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation that focuses on the benefits of the outdoor recreation economy. Other plans include state and local recreation plans, statewide trails planning, and additional reports.

Priority themes

- The Maine SCORP has outlined the following themes: health and wellness, Maine's outdoor economy, stewardship, accessibility, public awareness, and sustainability. Most state SCORPs have three to seven themes.

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**Q:** Regarding the federal Land and Wildlife Conservation Fund, LWCF, are there specific topics that SCORP is looking to fund? Are there targeted topics for grant applications?

**A:** The Bureau of Parks and Lands, BPL, is open to any eligible projects. Applications are evaluated based on how closely the proposed project is tied to SCORP priorities, like increased accessibility and close-to-home community wellness projects. The LWCF grants open in June or July. BPL is encouraging projects that tie into the Maine Trails Program, as funding from both sources can be used as matching funds.

**Q:** Are there any successful projects that the Commission could identify with?

**A:** There are no projects that Ms. Lazure could think of, but the LWCF mapping application on the BPL's [website](#) provides more information.

**Q:** Does the SCORP document identify recreation needs for specific locations or regions in Maine?

**A:** The SCORP does not get into this level of detail for specific locations.

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*Presentation #5: MDIFW Water Access Program: The Gateway to Maine's Blue Parks – Diano Circo, Chief Planner, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*

MDIFW Water Access Program: The Gateway to Maine's Blue Parks

- The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, MDIFW, Water Access Program has some suggestions for the LUPC Commission on the process of creating water access opportunities that may be helpful while the LUPC is thinking about the CLUP and zoning.
- The mission of the water access program is “to provide fair, equitable, sage and permanent access to Maine’s public waters.” The program has been around since 1986 and manages over 180 sites. The Bureau of Public Lands, BPL, also has a boating facilities program with about the same number of sites counting state parks.

Maine's Blue Parks

- Of Maine's 2,309 Great Ponds, only about 323 (14%) have State-owned public boating access. In Maine, any body of water that is over 10 acres in size is considered a Great Pond, along with impoundments of 30 acres or greater. Great Ponds are held in trust for the people of Maine by the State, including the water, the submerged lands, and the fish and wildlife. Private landowners with shorefront only own up to the average highwater mark.
- These large bodies of water can be considered Maine's blue state parks and provide recreation and opportunities for the public to take part in different activities. There are large lakes in Maine with no public boat launch. Providing access to these waters is the purpose of this program.

Distribution of Water Access Program sites in Maine

- While there are sites across the state, there are fewer in the UT. One of the challenges when acquiring new sites is road access. To use public funds, the site must be accessible by a public road. In the UT, this is difficult as many roads are privately owned. This restricts the ability to purchase sites in the UT, accounting for the lack of sites. In the last 10 years, only one site has been acquired in the UT, and required a 15-mile easement to guarantee access to a public road. Since then, a bridge on the 15-mile easement has been closed. It would be very expensive to replace this bridge, so access to this site is not available at this time.

Loss of Traditional Access Sites

- A major concern of the program is the loss of traditional sites, as it is difficult to acquire access once it is lost. There are fewer and fewer properties that qualify and are accessible to the public that the program can purchase.

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Challenges

- One challenge is the availability of sites to meet the requirements of the program. The best public access sites in Maine were developed in 1880. Now, it is much harder to find sites. It is a challenge to expand public access or bring it back once it is lost. The appraisal process is a challenge, as this can take a long time for the State, and other buyers can proceed faster and offer more money. Due to the checks and balances of using public funds, purchasing sites is a slow process and landowners must be willing to work with us. Another challenge is abutter resistance, or when private landowners do not want to share the water with the public. Owning shorefront property in Maine is tremendous privilege but is not one that is shared equally. The job of the program is to try to make it available to everybody.

Boat registration trends

- Total registered vessels (bar chart in slides): There has been an upward trend in boat registration trends since 2015 with a major drop in 2020 due to the pandemic. Only motorized boats are registered in Maine, so there is no way to track the number of canoes and kayaks.
- The most common boat type registered is the open motorboat (over 81,000 registrations). The second highest type was the pontoon boat (over 10,000 registrations). The lowest was airboats with 13 registrations, which are mostly owned by MDIWF.
- Most boats are between 16 feet to 26 feet (over 61,000), with 43,000 boats are under 16 feet. Anecdotally, pontoon boats seem to be getting larger since the pandemic. Kayaks and stand-up paddleboards usage is up too, but these are not registered. It is important to monitor boating size so MDIFW can make sure water access sites can accommodate the types of boats people are registering.

Who knows what is next?

- Mr. Circo has seen someone using an electric waterboard in Maine. They must be registered, as they are motorized.

Regulatory considerations

- The Water Access Program's mission is free and equitable access. This should be thought about in zoning considerations, with LUPC permit applicants and applications, subdivision planning, in road association planning and in conservation planning – wherever decisions can be made that create barriers to water access or tie up shoreline.

**Commissioner Questions for Panelist** *[Note: Questions and answers are paraphrased for this summary. The full session audio can be accessed at: [https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/about/calendar/calendar\\_archive.shtml](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/about/calendar/calendar_archive.shtml)]:*

**Q:** Is there any kind of provision that allows MDIFW to purchase land that may be non-conforming, or does MDIFW have to purchase land like everyone else?

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**A:** MDIFW is typically competing with everyone else. It does help MDIFW that boat launches are allowed use in most zones because they are water dependent. Some municipalities have worked with MDIFW by waiving setbacks for boat launch parking lots, but generally, MDIFW gets permits like everyone else.

**Q:** Does MDIFW have the right to “adverse possession”?

**A:** While MDIFW does have the right to take property, the agency has not done this in the traditional way. In the past, MDIFW purchased land at fair market value and then condemned the property after the fact to clear the title. However, that is no longer done due to current title policies.

**Q:** Could MDIFW recommend that the LUPC require public access if a proposed development project involved a body of water that did not have public access?

**A:** MDIFW suggests that the LUPC Commission consider the public’s need to access water, and whether ownership of an access site, by the state, county, or other public entity is required to ensure public access forever. A recent concept plan referenced private access abutting public access to a waterbody in a subdivision. This is problematic because there is no way to ensure that parking at the public facility would be used by the public and not spillover from rentals or resorts in a subdivision using private access. MDIFW prefers standalone public facilities.

**Q:** Is it a benefit of a waterbody having public access that the ponds are stocked with fish by MDIFW?

**A:** Yes, MDIFW only stocks ponds or bodies of water with public access.

**Q:** Does MDIFW have any cooperative agreements with landowners for public access to Maine lakes?

**A:** There are some easements with municipalities where MDIFW has been given property to build and manage facilities, but MDIFW does not put public dollars into facilities unless there is an ownership interest in the property. MDIFW does not do license agreements with landowners, as those can term out.

**Q:** Would permanent easements on private land give MDIFW the opportunity to work with a landowner without spending tax dollars?

**A:** MDIFW has approached landowners with this option in the past. The infrastructure required for public access to water essentially removes the landowners’ ability to use the area, and landowners would generally rather sell the land than create an easement.

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**Q:** Can you speak to hand-carry boating access to publicly accessible waterbodies?

**A:** MDIFW has facilities and opportunities of all kinds, including hand-carry, and facilities that have Americans with Disability Act, ADA, hand-carry boat launches.

**Q:** Does MDIFW have a backlog of sites that are not accessible due to funding or regulations, and the expense associated with this backlog?

**A:** Yes, the MDIFW does keep a backlog in terms of maintenance and upkeep. The agency has 184 water access sites across the state. The department acquires two to three sites a year, and funding only covers building two or three facilities a year, depending on how large they are. The water access program gets about \$1 million a year in funding, which comes from both federal and state dollars.

**Q:** What percentage of sites are not currently accessible to the public?

**A:** The state has 22 sites that are undeveloped, 91 sites are trailerable and functioning, but need work. There are 60 sites that are hand-carry.

**Q:** Is there an issue of not only acquiring property with pond access, but funding to create [the infrastructure] of a site?

**A:** That can be an issue. The program has saved money for the future to purchase expensive sites, which will need to be built. Coastal sites get very expensive and have strong challenges from abutters. Staffing is another challenge. This program is run by three staff for the entire state.