

2020-2024 MAINE STATE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN



***Strengthening Maine Communities
through Outdoor Recreation***



Executive Summary

Background

The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program (LWCF) provides matching funds to states for statewide outdoor recreation planning and for acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. From 1966 through 2019, just under \$45 million of LWCF money has been used for non-federal projects in Maine – with projects spread across communities in all of Maine’s counties. LWCF funding does not come from taxpayer revenue, but rather from a portion of federal off-shore oil drilling fees.

LWCF grants can provide up to 50% of the allowable costs for approved acquisition or development projects. Municipalities, schools, the State of Maine, and tribal governments are eligible to apply for local LWCF grants through the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry). State participation in LWCF requires preparation of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), and approval of the plan by the National Park Service. A plan must include analysis of the state’s supply of outdoor recreation resources, discussion of the demand for outdoor recreation activities, a wetlands component, and a program for implementing the plan. Any plan must also include public participation in the planning process. To meet standards for being considered “comprehensive”, a plan needs to identify recreation issues of statewide importance. Maine’s SCORP plan simultaneously meets state outdoor recreation planning mandates.

This version of the Maine SCORP was developed by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands with support from a diverse Steering Committee of state agency and non-governmental partners. It relies on a significant public survey component, various data sources detailing the supply of outdoor recreation sites and facilities, academic and other published reports, professional expertise from various sectors, and public input.

Plan Elements

Part I of the plan details planning context and process. Part II discusses outdoor recreation trends and resources. Part III explores five key themes (issues of statewide importance) and lists implementation strategies for each theme. These strategies are further broken down into LWCF funding priorities and broader recommended actions. The implementation strategies are also listed by theme here in the Executive Summary. Finally, the plan appendices include steering committee members and meeting notes, the online survey report and survey instrument, and the wetlands component.

Plan Highlights

Economic Activity

The main thrust of the plan is that outdoor recreation is a major engine **of economic activity** and an incredible asset as **communities** strive to be healthy, vibrant places where people are excited to live, work, and play. Here in Maine, it is estimated that outdoor recreation adds \$3 billion to Maine’s GDP and creates 41,000 jobs.¹

¹ Headwaters Economics. Retrieved from: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trends-performance/outdoor-recreation-economy-by-state/>

The outdoor lifestyle Maine provides creates a competitive advantage opportunity as businesses seek to recruit and retain talented workers. This is crucial to Maine, as our oldest-in-the-nation population leads to a projected shortage of over 100,000 workers over the next two decades².

Community Health and Wellness

Researchers have correlated positive community health and wellness measures to access to outdoor recreation opportunities. This is especially true for close-to-home opportunities. Survey data from the Maine SCORP survey shows that Mainers value and seek a range of outdoor experiences, settings, and facilities and that they desire experiences they can seek out near where they live. Older survey respondents appear to especially value outdoor recreation for exercise and health. There is opportunity to better target community health and wellness through improved/expanded outdoor recreation facilities and programs. An important aspect of this opportunity is improving the availability of recreation sites meeting the needs of those with disabilities – a sizable population in much of our state.

Tourism

Maine is an exception in the eastern United States for its expansive outdoor spaces and remote, wild settings. Likewise, its tradition of public access to private lands is a remarkable albeit vulnerable asset. This character, along with its iconic coastline, historic resources, and ample wildlife continue to make it a major destination for visitors. Tourism generated \$6.2 billion in direct expenditures and supported over 109,000 jobs in Maine. However, there is opportunity to grow and sustain tourism – especially in economically challenged areas looking to diversify their economy through strategic tourism planning. LWCF and other funds/programs/efforts can help strengthen and manage tourism destinations.

Public Access to Private Lands

Mentioned above, public access to private lands continue to be a major issue. While Maine is still a national leader in having public access to private lands, Mainers rely on this access and loss of access does happen – often in response to impacts from less considerate recreationists. Loss of access and impacts to landowners are both concerns statewide and are relevant to landowners of all sizes.

² Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. (2017). *Workforce and Business Attraction Research: Draft Report Findings from Phase I (Exploratory Consulting)*. Retrieved from: <https://motpartners.com/research/special-research-projects/>

Climate Change

Climate change is requiring planning and infrastructure adapt to an evolving environment. Projects, acquisitions, and ongoing management of outdoor recreation resources will require forethought, constant learning and communication, and adaptability. The plan promotes thinking and projects that support the conservation and management of resilient sites well-suited to handle evolving recreational interests and realities as well as vulnerable species and ecosystems.

Maintenance, Stewardship, and Staffing

Maintenance, stewardship, and staffing are real challenges acknowledged in the plan. National and state data reflects the unfortunate reality of the “do more with less” approach that has characterized outdoor recreation and conservation management. At the same time, there is growing appreciation for how vital outdoor recreation is to the economy and personal lives. Public assets such as parks, open space, and infrastructure have grown in acreage and – in most cases – use, yet staffing levels are flat or even diminished. Deferred maintenance continues to grow.

Investment

Respondents in the Maine SCORP survey indicated a widespread opinion that Maine has not invested enough in outdoor recreation. Of the 2,500+ respondents, 46% stated that Maine had not enough investment, 21% stated “about the right amount”, and less than 1% felt too much investment had been made (32% did not know). Only 5% of respondents rated **acquiring public recreational lands** as low priority or not a priority for the State of Maine; 37% rated it as essential, 34% rated it as high priority, and 24% rated it as medium priority.

Information

Information about where and how to recreate continues to be of high interest. Outreach and data indicate the quality of outdoor recreation information (ranging from site signage to online content) has room for improvement and can be a barrier to participation. Poor or non-existent information about recreation resources is especially problematic for people with disabilities who need to know the character of sites before they go.

Note: Strategies or portions of **strategies listed in bold** represent strategies either directly or indirectly eligible for LWCF grant funds, which are limited to acquisition and/or development of outdoor recreation facilities by governmental entities.

Theme 1: Support Active, Engaged Communities

Implementation Strategies

1. Building off this SCORP plan, engage state agencies and other partners to define roles, priorities, and action steps towards addressing conservation and recreation gaps and challenges. ³
2. Ensure LWCF and the Land for Maine’s Future Program (LMF) work together enabling funding of community projects.
3. Work with the LMF and other appropriate acquisition funding sources to ensure the importance of close-to-home destinations supporting health and wellness is considered in acquisition priorities.
4. Continue to strengthen and expand partnerships, coalitions, and collaborations between public and private sectors; between agencies; between state, federal, and local entities; and across sectors including but not limited to health, economic development, community development, education, and outdoor recreation. As part of collaborations, coordinate messaging, outreach, planning, and funding strategies to reach outcome-based goals.
5. Encourage and support regional planning involving recreation, conservation, economic development, and other elements of community vitality.
6. Explore, expand, and support opportunities for outdoor recreation to address social issues (e.g., the opioid crisis, mental health, obesity, etc.).
7. Continue to engage in listening and research to understand target audiences. Tailor communication strategies and programming to meet specific participation and/or outcome goals. Promote cross-sector collaboration and sharing (e.g., parks and health professionals, etc.).
- 8. Prioritize and reward proposed projects supported by trend and community data indicating a likelihood of the project meeting realistic health, wellness, and economic development goals.**
9. Develop a statewide outdoor recreation strategic communications and marketing plan and ensure messaging includes the promotion of how to get active and engaged in the outdoors right outside your door. Recognize messaging needs to account for time constraints and busy lives.
10. Recognize outdoor recreation’s significant role in lifestyles and plan for/promote to unique audiences. Examples include but are not limited to locavores (hunting, fishing, foraging, food tourism mixed with recreation activities), wellness programming and marketing (e.g., paddle board yoga, walking/running groups), etc.
- 11. Prioritize projects that make it easier for Mainers to fit outdoor recreation into their busy daily lives. This applies to both development and acquisition projects.**
- 12. Increase the availability and quality of outdoor recreation resources meeting accessibility standards, and the availability and quality of public information about those resources, thereby better serving persons with disabilities.**

³ Aligns with Action Item 1.A. of the final report of the Land Conservation Task Force (2019).

13. **Fund and develop projects that are well-designed for older Mainers looking to gain health and wellness benefits from outdoor recreation.**
14. **Strive to provide a range of close-to-home opportunities for multiple interests and capabilities. Work to identify park and other open space amenities that match the surrounding neighborhoods/community interests. Sports fields, playgrounds, community gardens, trails and boat launches, primitive backcountry areas, and more should be available as appropriate and possible.**
15. **Be responsive to the changing demographics of Maine. Create opportunities for “new Mainers” recently immigrated to our state to get outside. Ensure that acquisition and development projects reflect input from and considerations of the increasingly varied cultural perspectives becoming more prevalent in many Maine communities.**
16. **Support the acquisition and/or development of facilities with the capacity to host trail races, community events, outdoor festivals, and other special events that grow community engagement and economic activity.**
17. Develop and sustain a vibrant Maine State Trails Plan. Ensure the plan addresses standards, supply, demand, trends, and opportunities. While a plan would serve community values broader than tourism alone, specific attention should be paid to guidance related to developing, managing, and promoting trail assets integral to tourism and economic development. Any plan should include the full suite of trail types.
18. **Develop web-based software enabling municipal, nonprofit, state, and any other planners to easily measure and document both demographic data and outdoor recreation supply data by entering project coordinates. Require grant-seekers for LWCF funds, Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and potentially other state grant funds linked with outdoor recreation to include this demographic and supply data in project narratives. Seek evidence of meeting unmet needs for populations lacking opportunity.**
19. Increase the coordinated presence of Maine outdoor recreation online content. Enhance the quality and ease of access to online information about not just where to find outdoor opportunities but how to participate safely and responsibly and what the benefits are (why participate?).
20. Identify resource development opportunities and promote outdoor recreation at public schools – especially resources that serve a broad range of users in the community throughout the year. Encourage the use of funding sources that do not have long-term issues with the ever-evolving facility needs at schools. Note: as an acknowledgement that schools have unique challenges in committing to maintaining LWCF projects in perpetuity and have run into costly and difficult conversions (finding adequate replacements for nonfunctional and/or converted uses), the ME SCORP does not recommend schools as sites for new LWCF projects.

Theme 2: Address Workforce Attraction and Retention through Outdoor Recreation

Implementation Strategies

1. Building off this SCORP plan, engage state agencies and other partners to define roles, priorities, and action steps towards addressing conservation and recreation gaps and challenges. ⁴

⁴ Aligns with Action Item 1.A. of the final report of the Land Conservation Task Force (2019).

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2. Develop a statewide outdoor recreation strategic communications and marketing plan and ensure messaging includes the promotion of how the outdoor recreation lifestyle can attract new Maine workers.
3. **Prioritize and support projects that demonstrate integrated thinking/planning related to attracting workers. Additionally, support projects that have proximity and design characteristics making it easier for workers to recreate before or after work and/or during breaks.**
4. Expand and encourage initiatives at scales from local to state in which employers and outdoor recreation resource managers collaborate. Strive to improve employee opportunities to learn outdoor skills and gain awareness of outdoor opportunities. Seek opportunities to weave in health & wellness components as well as volunteerism.
5. Reflecting the very significant role public access to private land plays in Maine, support landowner relations initiatives and relationships to protect traditions Maine relies on. Support efforts to educate recreationists about the values and responsibilities associated with using private land.
6. Bring together regional employers, economic development professionals, and outdoor recreation professionals & interests to collaboratively plan regional outdoor recreation efforts.
7. Develop and promote content telling the story of outdoor lifestyle opportunities in Maine communities.
8. Foster/support local groups/clubs centered around outdoor recreation.
9. Given the significance of outdoor recreation to Maine's economy, and given the need for future stewardship leaders, encourage educational curricula, including but not limited to career and technical education, that inspires and prepares students to work in Maine's outdoor recreation sector.

Theme 3: Sustain and Grow Tourism

1. Building off this SCORP plan, engage state agencies and other partners to define roles, priorities, and action steps towards addressing conservation and recreation gaps and challenges. ⁵
2. Develop a statewide outdoor recreation strategic communications and marketing plan and ensure messaging includes themes and content incorporating tourism expertise and messaging.
3. **Fund and prioritize projects that plan for specific, unique experiences capable of attracting a volume of use appropriate to the site.**
4. **Develop or repurpose sites that fill experiential gaps for which there is documented tourism demand. Draw on region's unique assets to create or enhance experiences worthy of travel.**
5. Develop and sustain a vibrant Maine State Trails Plan. Ensure the plan addresses standards, supply, demand, trends, and opportunities. While a plan would serve community values broader than tourism alone, specific attention should be paid to guidance related to developing, managing, and promoting trail assets integral to tourism and economic development. Any plan should include the full suite of trail types.
6. Continue and strengthen destination development initiatives led by the Maine Office of Tourism.

⁵ Aligns with Action Item 1.A. of the final report of the Land Conservation Task Force (2019).

7. Increase/support partnerships between resources managers, local commercial entities, and regional tourism agencies. Pursue collaborative planning, mapping, information sharing, and public information efforts.
8. Collaborate to tell the story of Maine’s outdoors. Strategic, high-quality content should be developed to inspire visitation, help direct visitors to appropriate destinations, and to inform/inspire low-impact recreational behaviors supporting landowner/manager goals.
9. Encourage events and programs (e.g., festivals, celebrations, skills events, etc.) that introduce travelers and potential travelers to Maine’s outdoors, its traditions, and its opportunities.
10. **Support facilities well-suited to hosting outdoor recreation events and programs.**

Theme 4: Promote Ecological and Environmental Resilience

Implementation Strategies

1. Building off this SCORP plan, engage state agencies and other partners to define roles, priorities, and action steps towards addressing conservation and recreation gaps and challenges. ⁶
2. **Working with other state agencies and conservation partners, prioritize projects that thoughtfully address implications of climate change and that show likelihood of being resilient and adaptable to change, including but not limited to assisting wildlife and natural ecosystems adapt and migrate.**
3. **Identify outdoor recreation infrastructure development projects and acquisitions that meet recreation interests while also protecting ecological resilience and habitat connectivity. Examples include but are not limited to simultaneously enabling long distance trails and corridor protections; acquiring lands with enough topography to allow plant migrations while affording trail vistas; adding conserved land to coastal recreation sites at risk to sea level change; etc. Ensure planning protects ecological integrity while facilitating outdoor recreation.**
4. **Invest in recreation infrastructure that is becoming more and more essential due to a changing climate (e.g., snow-making for ski trails, larger culverts to address higher volume storms and to allow fish passage, better engineered and more durable trails, splash pads and shade elements at local parks, etc.).**
5. Support collaborative planning, training, and data-sharing via public-private partnerships to address best practices for managing outdoor recreation in a changing environment. ⁷
6. Continue to ensure that outdoor recreation – an enormously significant economic and lifestyle component of Maine life – is considered as plans and communities grapple with addressing the impacts of climate change.
7. Support native fisheries – notably the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife’s efforts to protect Maine’s native brook trout fishery. Recognize climate change will require focused attention and collaboration. **Also recognize that protecting native fish habitat and recreational access to the lands supporting those fisheries is an important acquisition opportunity..**

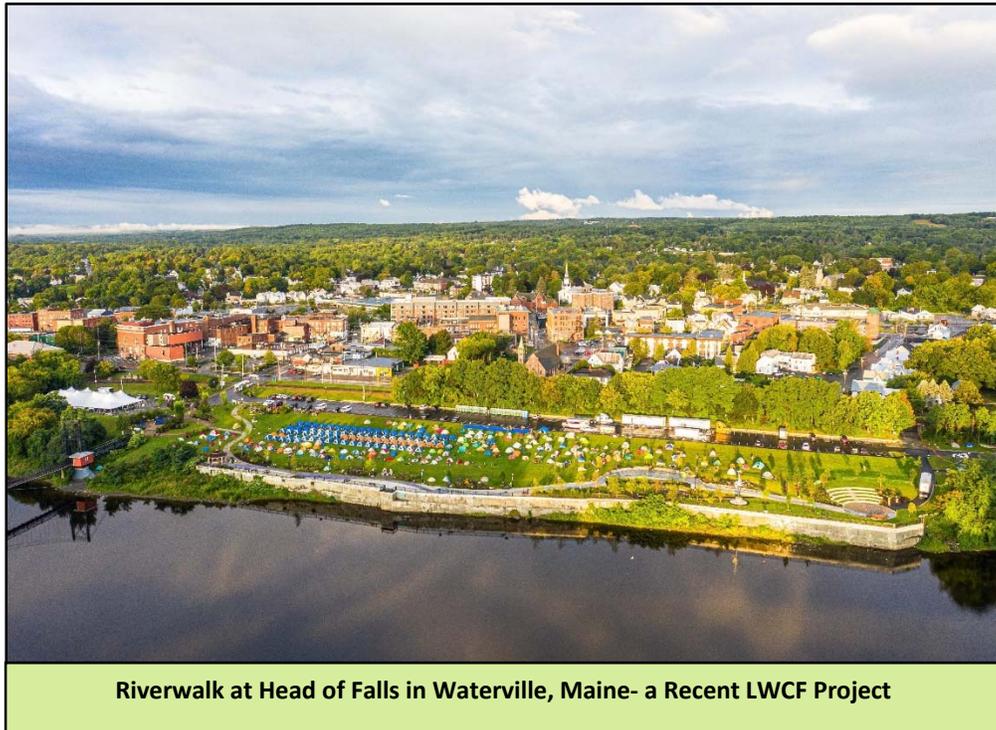
⁶ Aligns with Action Item 1.A. of the final report of the Land Conservation Task Force (2019).

⁷ Aligns with Action Item 5.B. of the final report of the Land Conservation Task Force (2019).

Theme 5: Invest in Maintenance and Stewardship

Implementation Strategies

1. Building off this SCORP plan, engage state agencies and other partners to define roles, priorities, and action steps towards addressing conservation and recreation gaps and challenges.⁸
2. **Prioritize rehab, upgrades, and revisions to existing sites to meet current and future outdoor recreation needs.**
3. **Invest in infrastructure improvements that make ongoing maintenance more sustainable.**
4. **Ensure trails and other infrastructure are well-designed to minimize future rehabilitation.**
5. Recognize the need for increased outdoor recreation management staff capacity (at various levels and within various agencies). Support increases in staffing to more appropriately steward outdoor recreation resources and visitor experiences, with acknowledgement that outdoor recreation has significant influence on economic development as well as health and wellness.
6. Support adding educational and law enforcement capacity to better manage recreationists' behaviors to better protect private and public resources as well as recreation experiences.
7. Support partnerships and capacity for recruiting and managing volunteers engaged in stewardship.



⁸ Aligns with Action Item 1.A. of the final report of the Land Conservation Task Force (2019).