

An assessment of accomplishments and gaps in Maine Land Conservation

Kristen Puryear
Maine Natural Areas Program
January 2024



**Final Report and Recommendations
of the
Land Acquisition Priorities
Advisory Committee**

Submitted
to

Governor Angus S. King, Jr.
November, 1997



An assessment of accomplishments and gaps in Maine Land Conservation



LAPAC 1997 OBJECTIVES

1. Identify **types of land** or values for lands that should be **prioritized** for acquisition (public or private);
2. Review public land ownership to assess **geographic distribution** of conservation and recreation values;
3. Establish Statewide and regional **goals for future acquisition**

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Prepared by
Maine State Planning Office
184 State Street
Augusta, Maine 04333

Themes of LAPAC Recommendations

- **Goal: to double conservation by 2020**

Increased Public Access to Lands and Water

- Water
- Trails
- Municipal/urban open space
- Regional parks
- Additions and access to public lands

Protection of Biodiversity and Habitat Values

- Southern Maine
- Northern Maine
- Ecological Reserves
- Rivers/Cold Water Fisheries
- Mountains
- Islands
- Coast

Protection of Cultural and Economic Natural Resources

- Farmland
- Mineral Collecting Sites
- Drinking Water

LAPAC Analysis Approach:

Accomplishments: Where has Maine succeeded in protecting the identified value or natural resource?

Current conservation status: How well is the resource (or value) protected?

Gaps: What are the gaps? Where do efforts lag? Relative to geography? Population centers? Etc.

Climate Change:

- undeveloped blocks, biodiversity, corridors and landscape connectivity
- sea-level rise and marsh migration

Expert review and input: at multiple phases!

A Maine conservation planning tool



Review and Input: State and External Partners

Dept. Marine Resources

Dept. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Dept. Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry: Bureau of Agriculture, Maine Geological Survey, Land Use Planning Commission, Bureau of Parks and Lands, LMFB

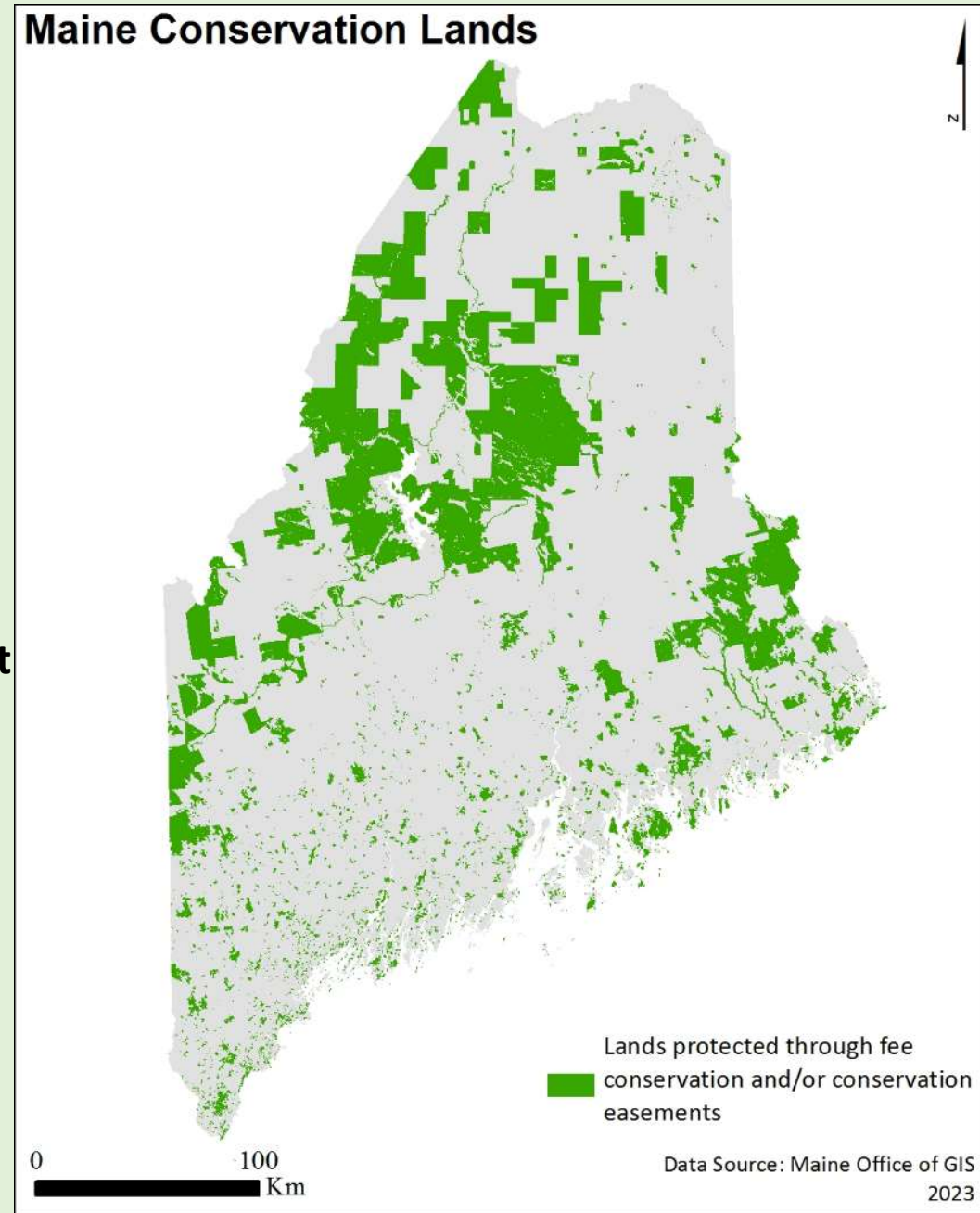
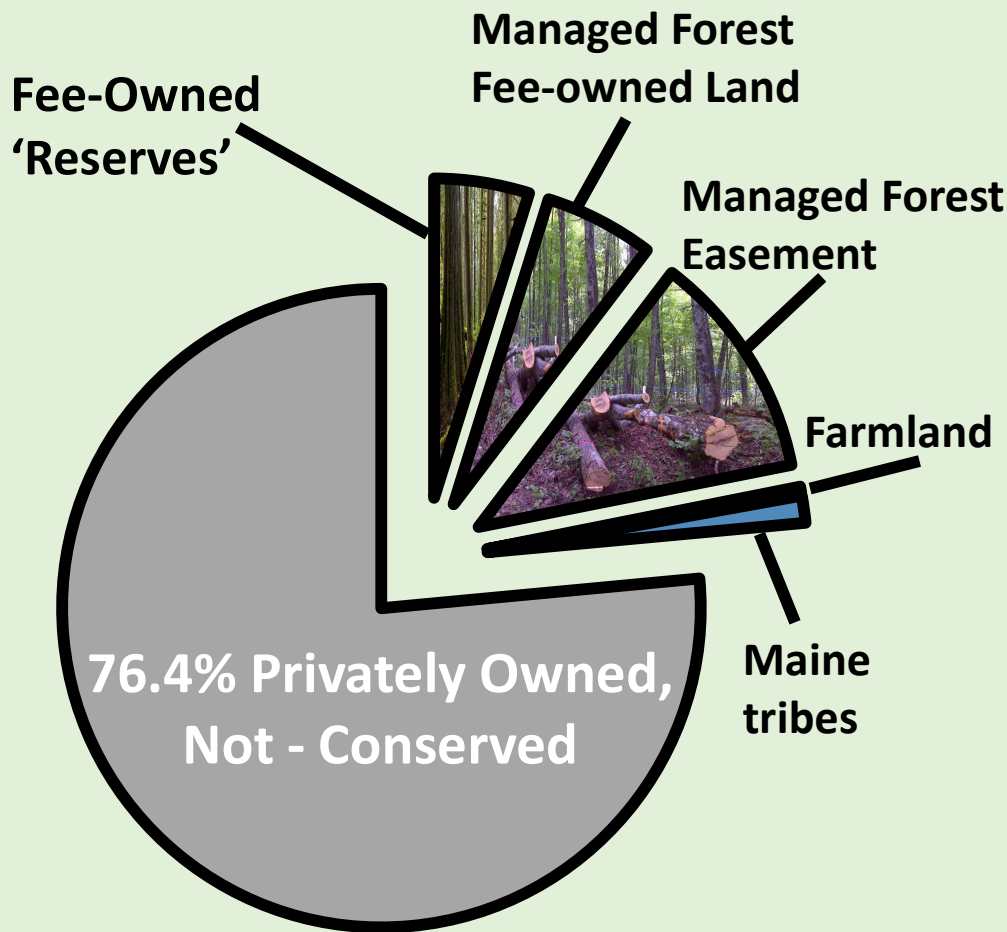
Dept. Environmental Protection

Dept. of Economic and Community Development: Office of Outdoor Recreation

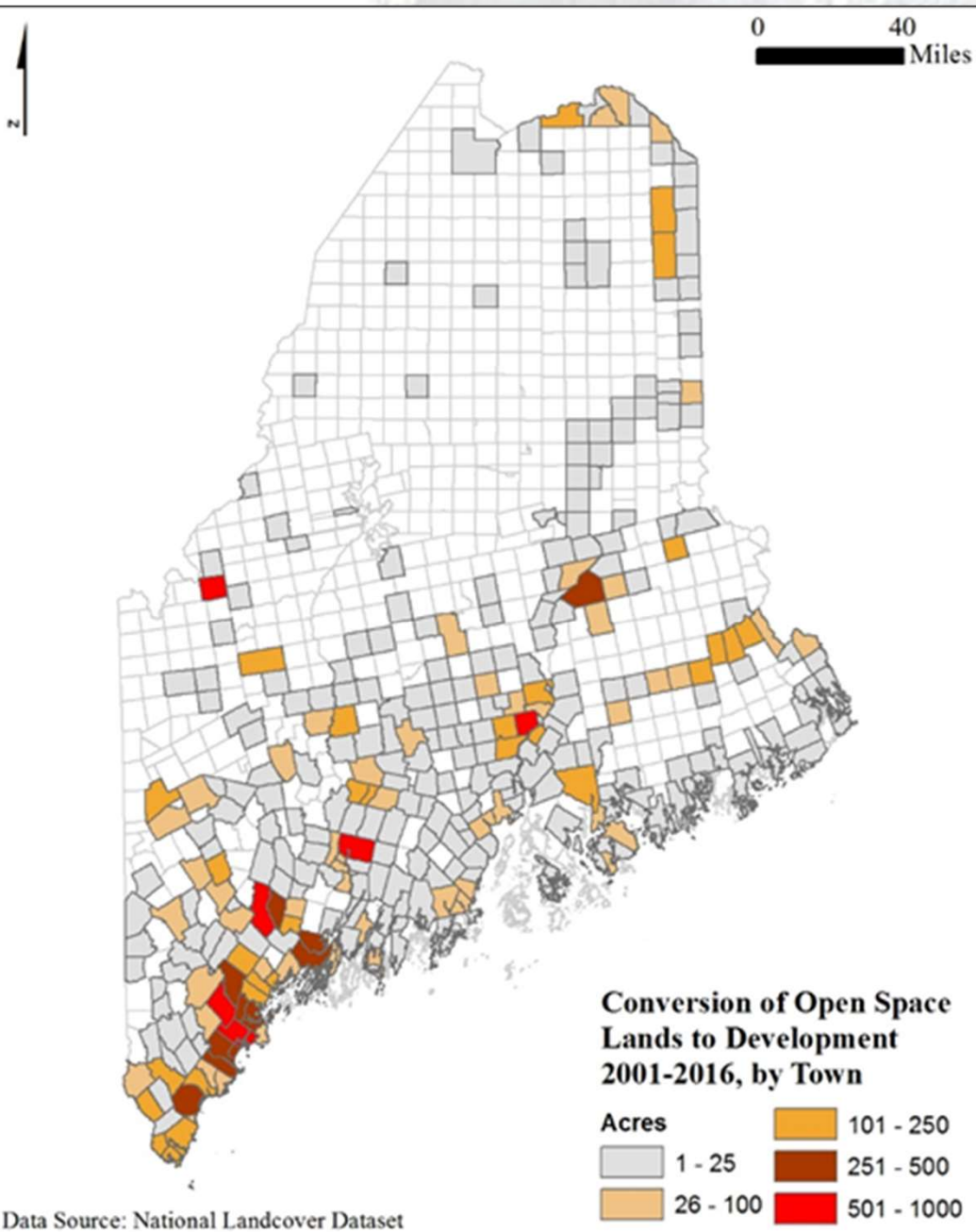
The Nature Conservancy, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Trust for Public Land, Western Foothills Land Trust, Forest Society of Maine, Maine Audubon, Appalachian Mountain Club, Maine Mountain Collaborative, Open Space Institute, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sebago Clean Waters Initiative, Coastal Mountains Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, Maine Trails Coalition, Royal River Conservation Trust, Maine Snowmobile Association, ATV Maine, The Conservation Fund, City of Portland, Maine Island Trails Association, City of Orono, Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust, Midcoast Conservancy, Maine Dairy Industry, Maine Farmland Trust, Maine Farm Bureau, MOFGA, American Farmland Trust, Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust

How much is conserved?

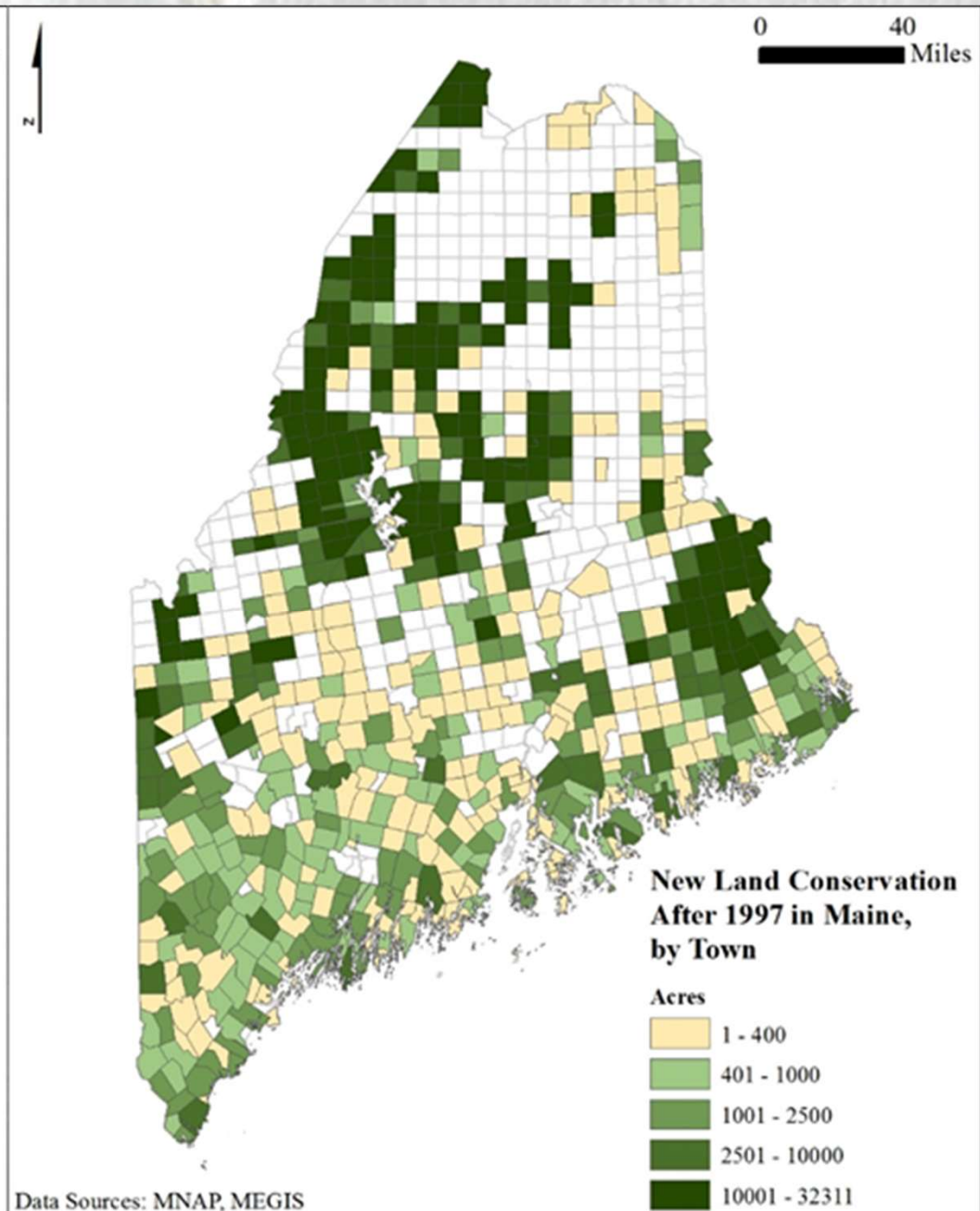
- 4,416,922 ac Fee/Easement Conservation (22.2%)
- 270,300 ac owned by Maine tribes (1.4%)



Graphics courtesy of Justin Schlawin, DIFW
January 2024

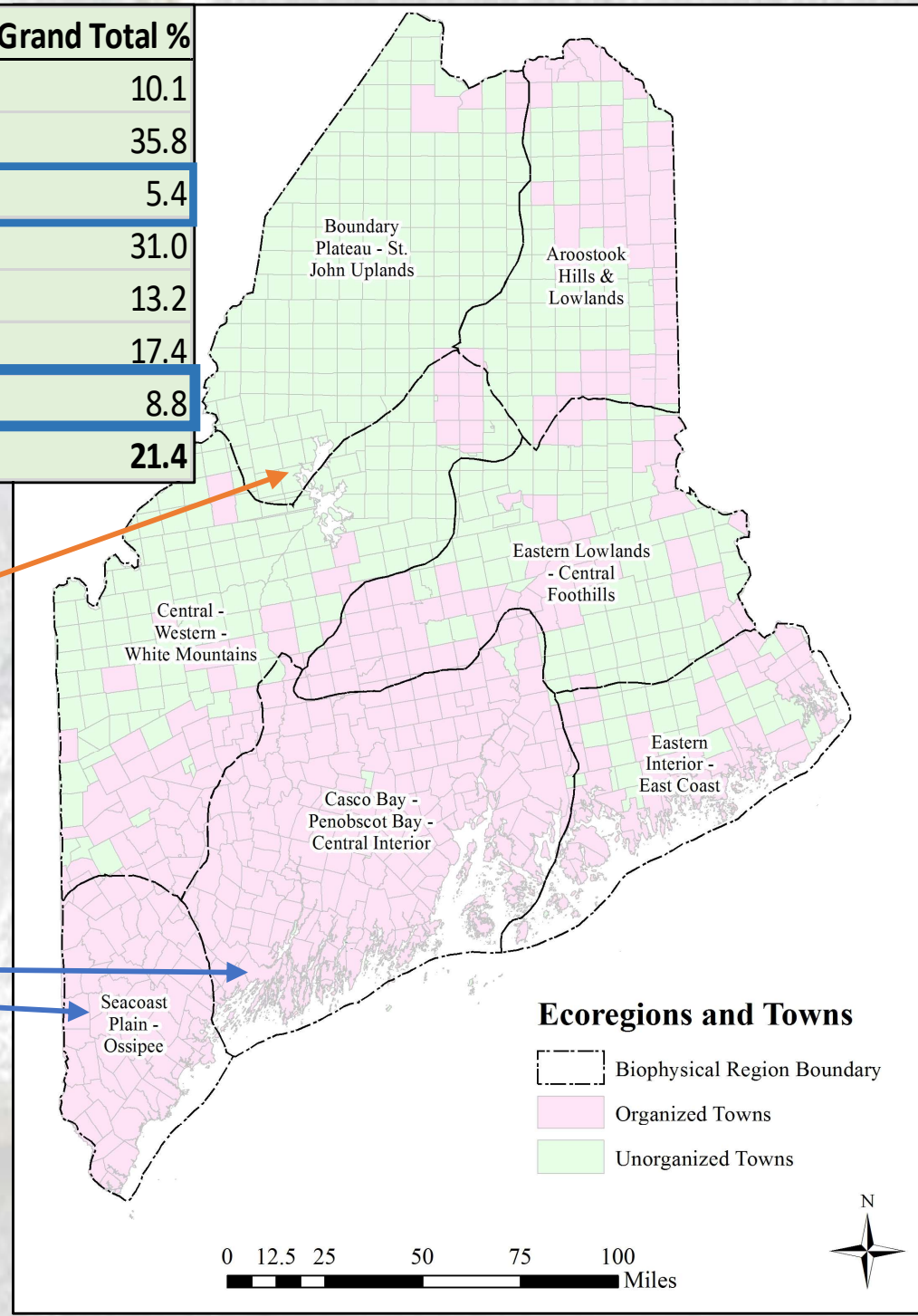
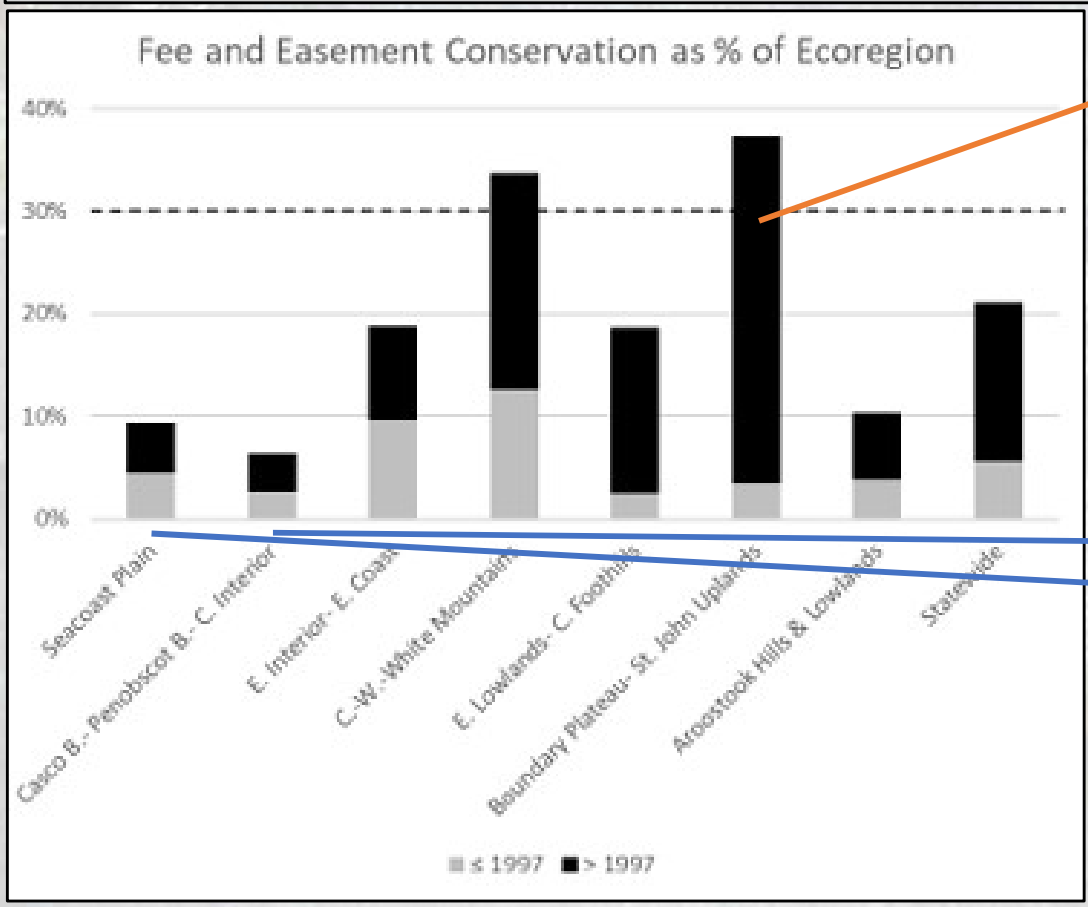


Conversion of open space lands to development (NLCD data)



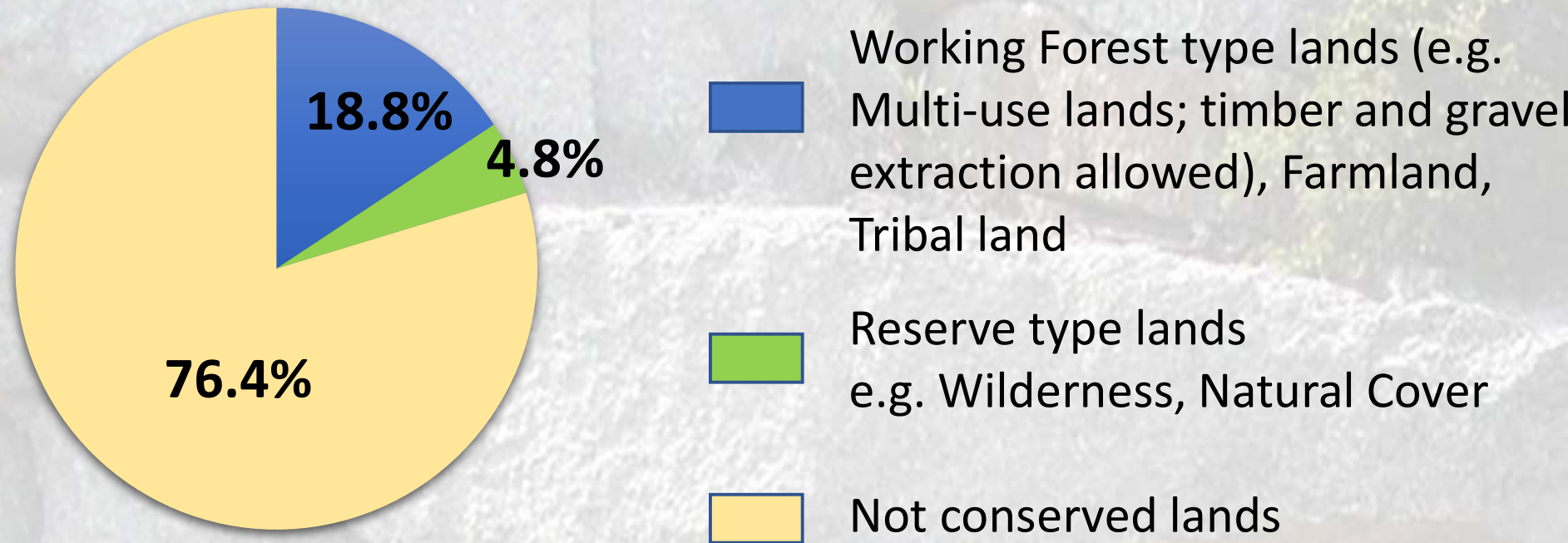
**Goal: Double conservation land by 2020
Result: 2.8 Million acres added, >triple the acres**

Ecoregion	Easement (%)	Fee (%)	Grand Total %
Aroostook Hills & Lowlands	4.8	5.3	10.1
Boundary Plateau - St. John Uplands	26.8	8.9	35.8
Casco Bay - Penobscot Bay - Central Interior	1.4	4.0	5.4
Central - Western - White Mountains	13.3	17.7	31.0
Eastern Interior - East Coast	4.4	8.8	13.2
Eastern Lowlands - Central Foothills	11.8	5.6	17.4
Seacoast Plain - Ossipee	2.4	6.4	8.8
Statewide	11.6	9.7	21.4



Conservation and Management

Conservation Status Statewide



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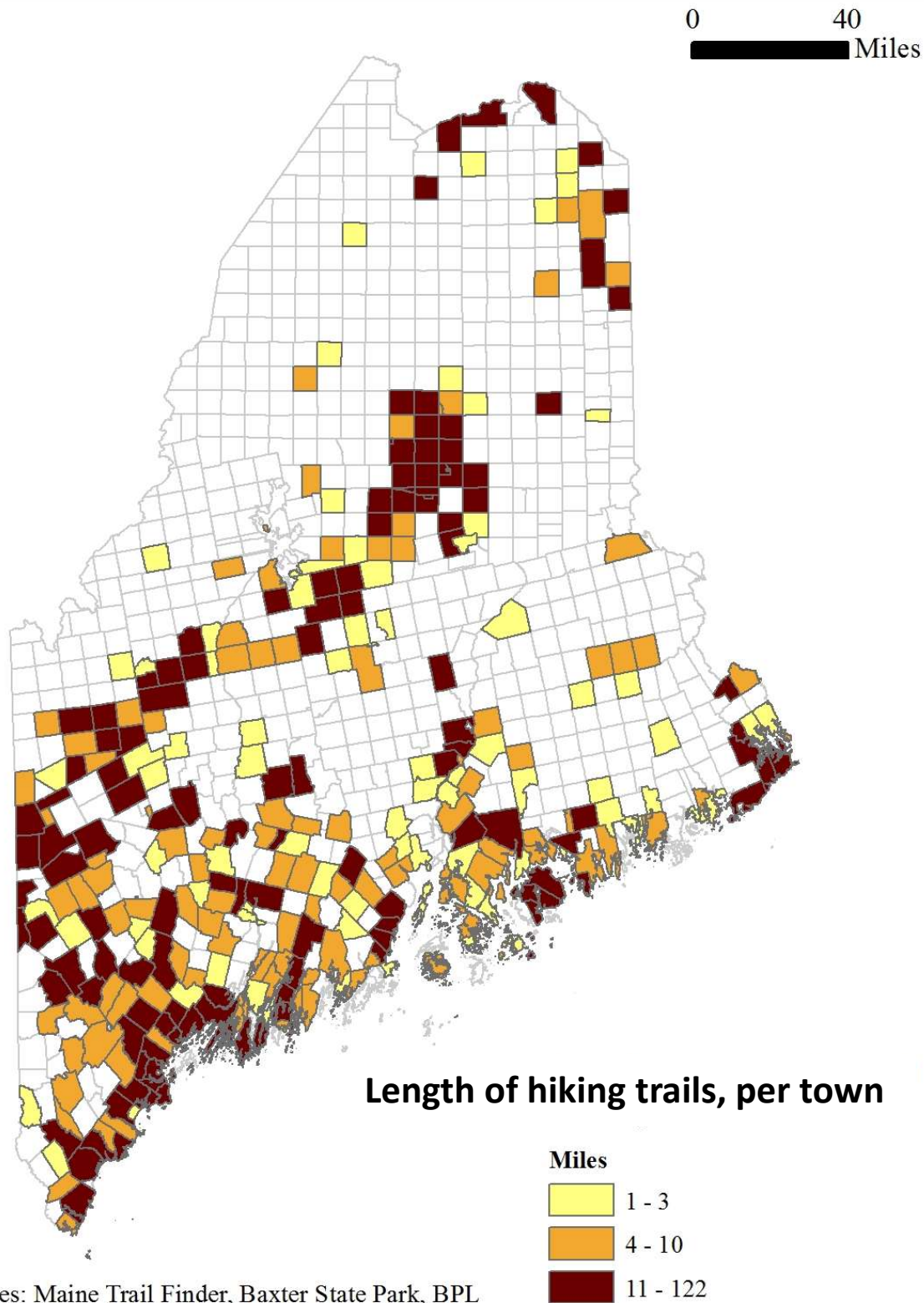
Protection of Biodiversity and Habitat Values

- ▶ Southern Maine
- ▶ Northern Maine
- ▶ Ecological Reserves
- ▶ Rivers/Cold Water Fisheries
- ▶ Mountains
- ▶ Islands
- ▶ Coast

Protection of Cultural and Economic Natural Resources

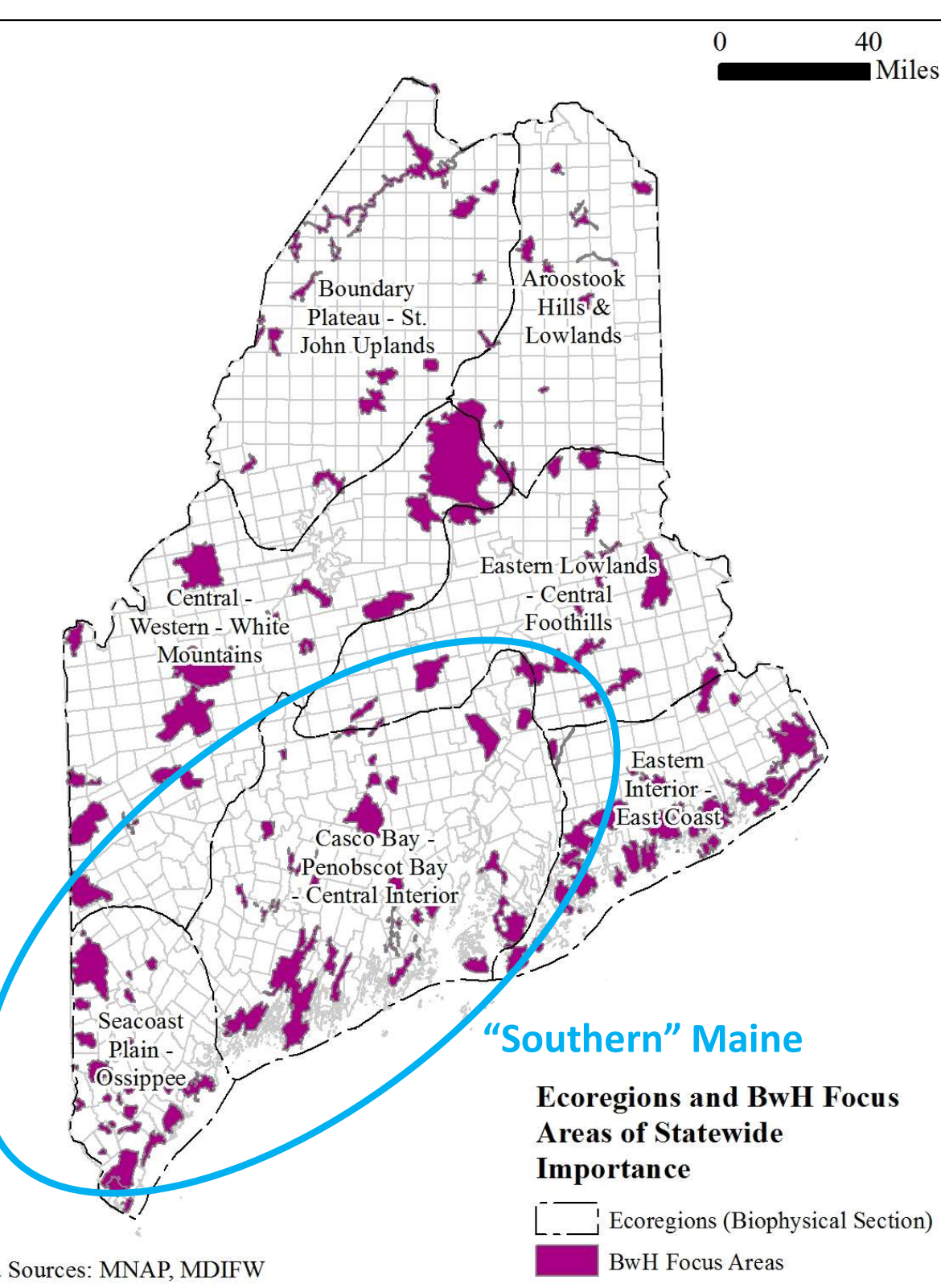
- ▶ Farmland
- ▶ Mineral Collecting Sites
- ▶ Archaeological Sites
- ▶ Drinking Water





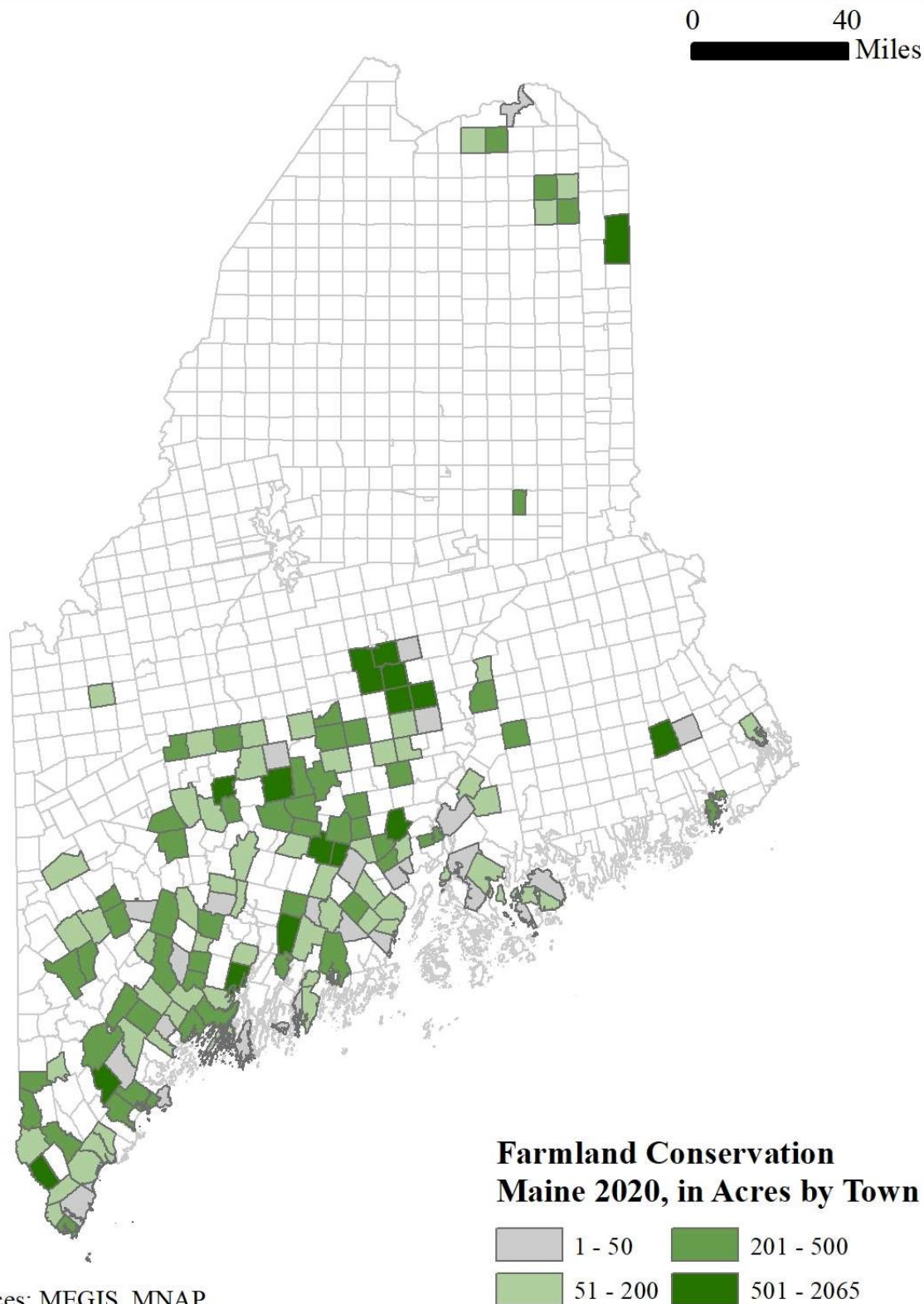
Increased Public Access to Lands and Waters

- + Most of Maine's population centers have high levels of access to trails, and access to Maine's waters (bank/boat)
- Regional and local gaps exist in public access for boating, for bank access, for trails access, and ADA accessible sites
- Parking capacity is a major limiting factor for public access in some areas, especially coastal sites.
- Motorized trails are <20% permanently secured, but provide significant public access.
- Public access to parks variable
 - ** Brunswick, Falmouth, S. Portland



Protection of Biodiversity and Habitat Values

- + New conservation in S. Maine has built on existing conserved lands and is highly concentrated in Focus Areas of Statewide Significance
 - BUT highly fragmented
- + 26% of Northern Maine region in conservation, coincides well with biodiversity values
- + The State’s network of Ecological Reserves and similarly managed lands capture examples of each of Maine’s common habitat types in nearly every ecoregion.
 - A number of common or rare habitats are **under-represented** in all conserved lands and in ecological reserves or similarly managed lands in each ecoregion (e.g. low elevation forest in S. Maine)
- + Conservation playing important role in protecting **terrestrial, aquatic, and coastal** habitats with higher estimated resilience to climate change.



Protection of Cultural and Economic Natural Resources

- + A majority of new conservation land after 1997 is working forest easements
- + 96% of farmland conservation in the state was conserved after 1997 (~40,000 acres).
- Majority of farmland loss since 1997 was due to reversion to shrub or forest cover.
- + Conservation plays an important role in securing public drinking water supplies.

SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAND CONSERVATION IN MAINE

Final Report from the Land Conservation Task Force
2019

“Our work follows that of two previous panels, one in 1986 and the other in 1997, which together gave rise to a generation of remarkable land conservation resulting in the four-fold expansion of permanently protected lands in Maine...”

– Task Force Report

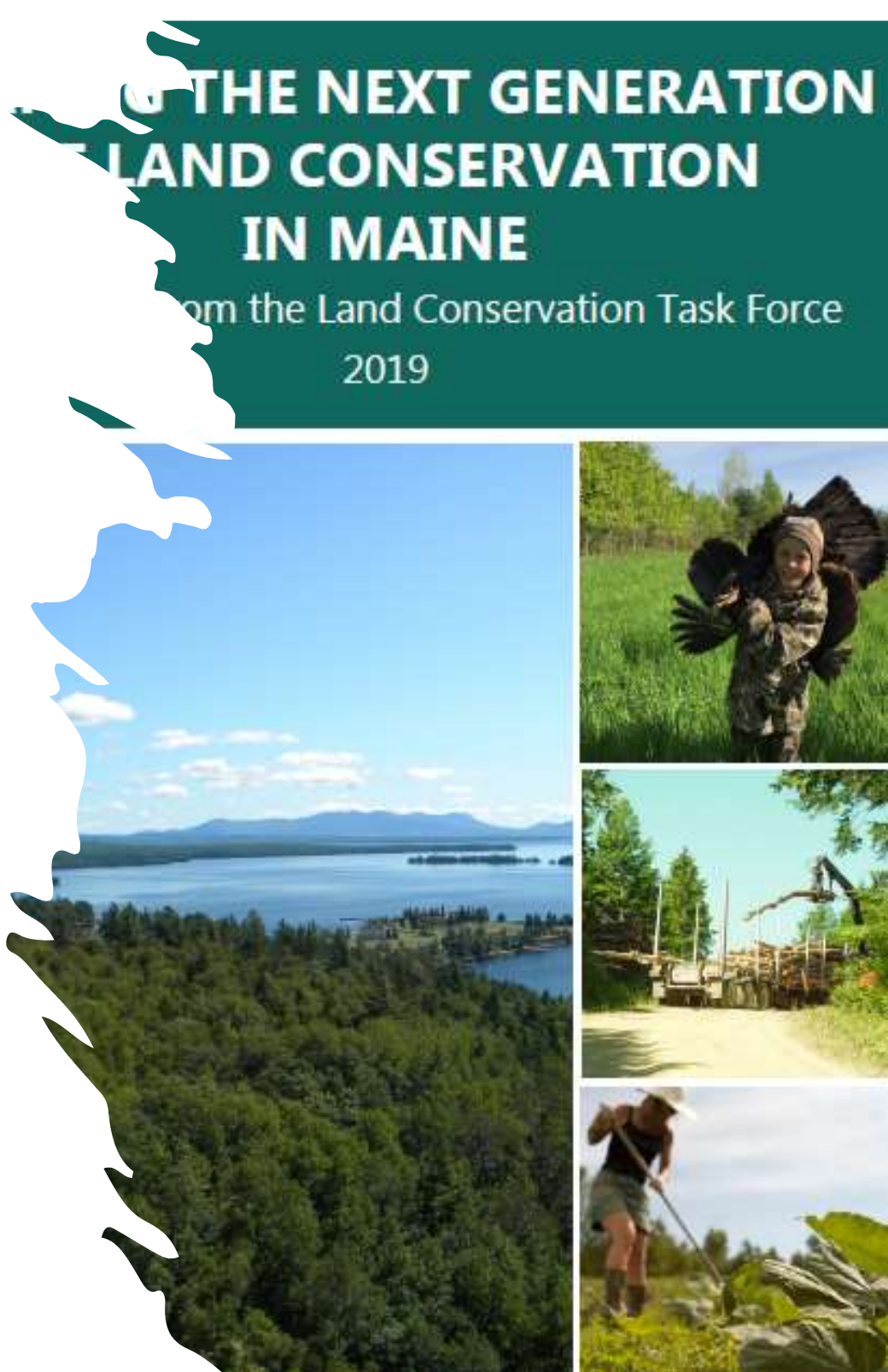


Recommendation #5: Target land conservation efforts to effectively protect critical natural resources and help Maine combat and adapt to a changing climate.

- Action Item 5.A: As part of a broader development of state climate policy...**promote resiliency and connectivity** and will help Maine's natural ecosystems, wildlife and natural resource-based economies adapt to a changing climate.
- Action Item 5.C: Place priority on utilizing available wildlife, aquatic and ecological **assessment data** to help increase conservation of land and water resources in **areas of high biodiversity, seeking representation** of all habitat types in each biophysical region of the state.

FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAND CONSERVATION IN MAINE

from the Land Conservation Task Force
2019



DEEPER DIVE: Protection of Biodiversity and Habitat Values

Task Force (2018)

development of state climate policy...promote resiliency and connectivity and will help Maine's natural ecosystems, wildlife and

increase conservation of land and water resources in areas of high biodiversity, seeking representation of all habitat types in each biophysical

LAPAC Review (2023)

- ✓ Southern Maine ecoregions have the lowest average estimated resilience to the impacts of climate change (more developed and with poorer habitat connectivity). However, compared to the rest of the broader Northern Appalachian Region, southern Maine has an average overall estimated resilience to the impacts of climate change.
- ✓ 58% of the land area within Focus Areas in northern Maine is conserved.
- ✓ Many high elevation summits support multiple biodiversity values in addition to recreational values. But connectivity between high elevation areas will be critical for species to be able to respond to climate change and other stressors.
- ✓ Conservation easement lands play an important role in permanently securing connections between Focus Areas and other significant areas for biodiversity.

Thank you

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With special thanks to:



Photo: K. Puryear