

Recommendation 1: Priorities

Focus land protection efforts in areas with high biodiversity value, high carbon storage and sequestration, cultural and economic importance, and/or which offer opportunities to improve public access equitably.

***Metric:** Through voluntary, focused purchases of land and conservation easements, increase the area of conserved lands in Maine by at least 1.4 million acres by December 2030 with the following targets in mind:*

- Conserve land within Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance; add new state-owned Ecological Reserves; and increase fee and easement conservation for important terrestrial and aquatic areas that ensure landscape-level connectivity as identified through a new Landscape Conservation Design (referenced as an action item in the recommendation on increasing capacity).
- Conserve lands that fill gaps in equity for land use and access, including properties that support the goals of and will return land to Maine's Wabanaki tribes; establish open space opportunities for Maine residents located within a 10-minute walk of where they live; and construct ADA-accessible trails and boat access within 10 miles of Maine population centers.
- Sustain ecosystem services and lands needed for carbon-sequestration and natural resource-based industries by securing significant and well-distributed working forest conservation, including productive lands for sequestration and durable wood product production; and complete fee and easement conservation of source drinking water watersheds (including for Portland and Lewiston-Auburn) to ensure water quality without additional water treatment measures.

Recommendation 2: Funding

Significantly expand the funding and funding eligibility for fee and easement acquisition through existing and new land conservation programs, including the Land for Maine's Future Program.

***Metric:** By December 2025, Maine has established permanent conservation funding that generates \$XXX per year).*

- Establish permanent and ongoing funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program; consider a variety of mechanisms, including mitigation funding, real estate transfer tax, re-allocation of sporting goods or rooms and meals tax, enhancing dedicated funds for deer yards (as an umbrella habitat for many species), and others (in part) to create a match for federal funds.
- Advocate for increased and sustained federal conservation funding that supports state, tribal, and non-governmental efforts (e.g., a new Forest Conservation Easement Program). Examples of critical funding include the Forest Legacy Program, Pittman-Robinson Funds, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and others.
- Streamline state processes for conservation funding and grant review, approval, and administration.

Recommendation 3: Capacity

Expand public and private capacity to support all conservation acquisition and stewardship elements, including participatory planning efforts, acquisition and due diligence, ongoing land management and monitoring, and program evaluation and accountability.

***Metric:** By 2030 (and using 2023 as a baseline), increase the staff of land management agencies in proportion to the acreage of land owned, under easement, and other legal stewardship responsibilities.*

- Ensure agency staffing keeps pace with acquisition and stewardship responsibilities, including land acquisition, grant, database administration, and land management and monitoring.
- Create incentives to expand the network of land acquisition contractors, including appraisers, surveyors, and legal services, and recruit conservation workers (land stewards, park rangers, foresters, ecologists) that reflect the diversity of current and future generations.
- Landscape conservation design: Over the next three years, the Beginning with Habitat Program within the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and The Maine Natural Areas Program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry will work with a coalition of partners to develop a statewide Landscape Conservation Design that sets targets to and beyond 2030 for biodiversity conservation and management, identifies corridors for species movement resulting from climate change, and identifies lands and waters necessary for maintaining vital natural resource-based economies.

Recommendation 4: Farmland

Safeguard the state’s agricultural resources by doubling the permanently protected farmland in Maine by 2030 through a comprehensive and collaborative strategy that brings increased state funding, capacity, and new strategies to this work.

***Metric:** By December 2030, Maine has invested 100M toward permanent conservation of at least 7% of its presently undeveloped farmland and has an established strategy to carry this work forward, with a goal of no net loss of farmland.*

- Ensure there is a well-funded, sufficiently staffed, stand-alone state program or mechanism (in addition to Land for Maine’s Future) to prioritize the expeditious and efficient flow of farmland conservation resources in collaboration with non-profit and federal partners, which includes both traditional easement acquisition as well as seamless support for alternative methods of protecting farmland outside of the process (Buy/Protect/Support/Sell, community land trust/non-profit acquisitions, etc.).
- Commission a Maine Farmland Action Plan to articulate goals and strategies regarding Maine’s farmland resource and agricultural economy beyond 2030, identifying the highest priority lands to secure against nonagricultural development along with affordable and achievable pathways to farmland access and development of practical tools and programs for supporting Maine’s agricultural economy.
- Expand funding for state programming and infrastructure (such as grant, loan, and assistance programs) that have a tangible, positive impact on farm viability in Maine.