

Combined NWL Work Group Recommendations for 4.10.24 NWL Work Group Meeting

30% Land Subgroup

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 1.5 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 and private-owned ecological reserves; and increase fee and easement conservation for important terrestrial and aquatic areas that ensure landscape-level connectivity as identified through efforts such as 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 secure land to the Wabanaki tribes of Maine; 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 at least \$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 conservation acquisition and stewardship staff of land management agencies in proportion to the acreage of land owned, under easement, and other legal stewardship responsibilities, and develop a plan for long-term land uses for the state of Maine.*

- Ensure agency staffing keeps pace with acquisition and stewardship responsibilities, including land acquisition, grant, database administration, 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.
- Over the next three years, state agencies will work with a coalition of partners, as well as Wabanaki tribes in government-to-government relationships, 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, respects individual management objectives of private landowners 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 will invest 100M toward permanent conservation of at least 7% of its presently undeveloped farmland. It has an established strategy to carry this work forward, with a goal of no net loss of farmland.

- Establish a well-funded, sufficiently staffed, stand-alone state program or mechanism (in addition to Land for Maine’s Future) to prioritize the 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.

30% Maine Food Subgroup

1. Create a Maine Food Plan
 - a. Identify funding for the state food planning process and identify key goals for the plan.
 - b. Align food plan recommendations with those of existing Maine strategic plans.
 - c. Create a local food definition that can be adopted and used statewide.
2. Strengthen the viability of Maine farms, fisheries, and other food producers through expanded and ongoing access to funding, technical assistance, and processing and distribution infrastructure.
 - a. Maintain and expand access to farmland, working waterfront, and other key pieces of the food supply chain infrastructure.
 - b. Establish permanent funding for the state to help producers navigate the technical assistance and funding opportunities available throughout the state.
 - c. Create an inventory of the current food processing, storage, and aggregation capacities and evaluate the infrastructure gaps and needs.
 - d. Establish permanent funding for infrastructure development that aligns with the scale, geography, and food type needs and increase the capacity of the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund.
 - e. Target funding to support producers in adopting climate change mitigation and resilience strategies including the Maine Healthy Soils Program.
3. Create more Maine markets for Maine producers and increase access to Maine food.
 - a. Develop a marketing plan to increase the consumption of Maine food. The plan will align Real Maine and the Seafood Directory to the goals of 30% Maine food by 2030. The marketing plan will enable state departments, agencies, and interested groups to communicate a unified message to identify Maine food and its value to the economy, nutrition, and the climate. Part of the plan will educate consumers and food service directors about local food preparation.
 - b. Support producers to diversify market channels and identify and connect with profitable Maine markets for their products.
 - c. Increase funding for food equity programs such as local school food programs, nutrition incentive programs, and Maine Senior Farm Share. Create additional programs to reach underserved populations, including seniors.

Forest Carbon Subgroup

1. Improve forest carbon data, monitoring, and verification to support forest policy-making and outreach program development.

- a. With further funding, the Maine Forest Service's (MFS) Forest Resource Assessment program should work with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the University of Maine to develop a climate-focused forest data and monitoring program that continuously produces the best available information on Maine's forest composition, management and harvest activity, and forest carbon sequestration and storage, and identifies climate-driven forest health and resilience metrics, to better inform climate-friendly forest management practices and public policy decision-making.

2. Increase the availability of technical assistance, training and education for forest landowners, foresters, and loggers to increase the application of climate-friendly forest practices.

- a. MFS, in collaboration with others, should develop and maintain up-to-date materials and provide training on extreme weather BMPs, forest carbon offset programs, other revenue-generating forest carbon programs, current use taxation programs, and other strategies, targeting outreach to specific audiences - such as landowners of over 40 acres, new woodland owners, farmers, foresters, and loggers - to expand the implementation of climate-friendly forest management practices, resulting in increased forest carbon sequestration and storage.
- b. MFS should work with partner entities to increase and diversify forest sector-related natural resource professional capacity to apply climate-friendly forest management practices.

3. Provide incentives to forest landowners, foresters, and loggers to increase the implementation of climate-friendly practices

- a. The Maine Forest Service and other entities should identify additional technical and financial resources to increase the implementation of climate/carbon-friendly forest management and timber harvesting practices; provide cost-share assistance to loggers to purchase low-impact harvesting equipment and implement carbon-enhancing forest management practices; and support the voluntary use of professionals and service providers who follow protocols to validate the implementation of climate-smart practices.
- b. Given the rapidly evolving availability, content, and geographic focus of carbon-offset and practice-based forest carbon programs for forest landowners, Maine should explore potential opportunities to increase the suitability and availability of incentive programs

for Maine's forest landowners that increase forest carbon sequestration and storage while maintaining a robust forest economy.

- c. With further funding, MFS should expand the WoodsWISE incentives program and include climate-friendly management strategies in forest management plans.
- d. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's Bureau of Parks and Lands should explore the potential benefits of engaging in forest carbon pilot projects that increase carbon sequestration and/or storage, maintain forest sector jobs, provide new revenue streams for the management of the self-funded Public Reserve Lands System, and contribute practical knowledge on climate-friendly forest management practices.
- e. Coordinate with existing forest sector development initiatives to help improve markets for low-grade wood that help make implementation of climate-smart forest management practices financially viable.
- f. Maine's open space current use taxation program should be reviewed to identify how best to incorporate incentives for forest owners to adopt climate-friendly land management practices.*

* Placeholder if LD 1648 doesn't pass, to encourage reintroduction of bill in the 132nd legislature.