

MAINE BUREAU OF PARKS AND LANDS

FISCAL YEAR 2020

ANNUAL REPORT

PUBLIC LANDS, PLANNING, & SUBMERGED LANDS

SUMMARY & HIGHLIGHTS



MAINE DEPARTMENT OF
**AGRICULTURE
CONSERVATION
& FORESTRY**

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2020: A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

Looking back over the past year, it's clear that Mainers find strength in connection with each other and with nature and realize the incredible value of our Public Lands.

The Bureau of Parks and Lands (the Bureau) is responsible for management of Public Reserved and Nonreserved Lands, State Parks and Historic Sites, the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, the Penobscot River Corridor, submerged lands, and state-held coastal islands. This summary report highlights key features of our work on **Public Reserved, Nonreserved and Submerged Lands, commonly referred to as "Public Lands."**

UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

More than ever, the past year brought out the best in the Bureau's creativity, flexibility, and dedication – characteristics that will serve us well long into the future.

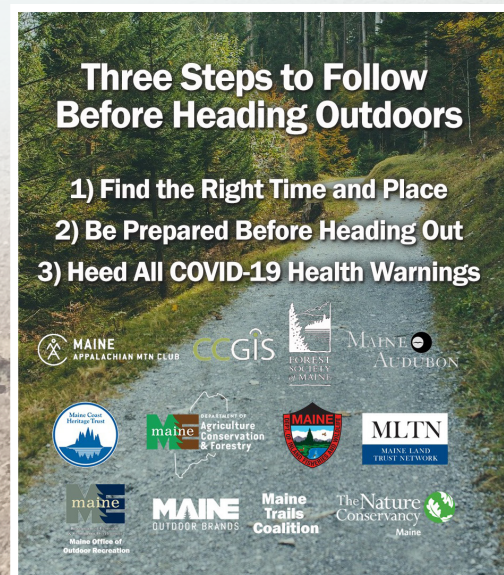
- New tools and technologies were employed, including text alerts for Public Lands and virtual meeting technology that allowed staff to meet internally and with the public, saving thousands of miles of driving while making meetings more accessible.
- Bureau functions that can't be done virtually, such as marking trees for harvest, inspecting trails and campsites, and monitoring easements, went on seamlessly.
- Despite challenging timber markets, the Bureau harvested more than 100,000 cords of wood, supporting Maine's economy and forest products industry.



MANAGING HIGH RECREATION USE

Like parks and open spaces across the country, Maine's public lands saw historic levels of use by the public last year.

- Hot spots of high use, like Tumbledown Mountain, the Bigelow Preserve, and the Cutler Coast, required special attention and planning regarding resource impacts, carrying capacity, and user experience.
- Messaging about how and where to recreate safely was coordinated with other agencies and non-profit partners and included special web pages with COVID guidelines and tips for avoiding crowded trails.



EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The Bureau has purchased a fleet of drones to help assess forest health, track safety conditions, monitor conservation easements, and capture photos and videos that show off Maine's impressive landscape.

- The project is a partnership with the Maine Forest Service and Maine Natural Areas Program.
- It was funded in part by a \$10,000 grant from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund.
- Bureau staff participated in training this winter in preparation for being certified by the FAA, a requirement of the Department's Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Policy.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Any conversation on the future of forestry, recreation or conservation in Maine inevitably turns to the topic of climate change. How will our woods and waters change, and what will the impacts be on people, wildlife, and our forest economy?

- From presenting to the Maine Climate Council's Natural and Working Lands Working Group, to identifying climate resilient lands for conservation, to managing Public Lands to enhance carbon sequestration, the Bureau plays a critical role in climate conversations.
- A recent study by the University of Maine indicates that the Bureau's Ecological Reserves capture ~35,000 additional metric tons of carbon per year, equivalent to the yearly emissions of 7,500 cars.
- Looking ahead, we'll continue to recognize this important role of our Public Lands in mitigating and adapting to climate change, in addition to providing the more traditionally recognized multiple uses of ecological protection and the recreation and forest management that supports rural communities.



RECREATION

In 2020, people visited public lands in record numbers, many for the first time, underscoring the need for continued investment in outdoor recreation trails and infrastructure.

While meeting the demands of increased use and the challenges of COVID-19, the Bureau made upgrades to recreation facilities and improved access through **new trails, accessibility improvements**, and **rehabilitation of existing trails and bridges**.

In addition, Bureau staff continue to meet new challenges and opportunities that come with **changing levels of use, emerging adventure sports** (such as mountain biking and glade skiing), and **maintenance and management issues resulting from climate change impacts**.

- 2020 brought the largest number of visitors to the Deboullie Unit since record-keeping began in the 1970s, resulting in a **40% increase in daily use** from 2019.
- Vehicle counts obtained at heavily used trailheads on the Tumbledown Unit suggest **record levels in use of the trails**, which were already among the most popular in the state.

The Bureau expects this vibrant increase in outdoor recreation on Public Lands to continue in 2021 and beyond.

BY THE NUMBERS

225 Day Hike / Backpacking
MILES OF TRAILS

450 Trail, Water, & Drive-to
CAMPSITES

56 Trailer & Handcarry
BOAT LAUNCHES

99% Public Lands Open for
HUNTING ACCESS





MAINE CONSERVATION CORPS TRAIL ASSESSMENT

- Western Region Public Lands were part of a recent Maine Conservation Corps trail assessment that evaluated trails by looking at a wide range of features, including **trail tread, erosion, structures, signage, water crossings,** and **visitor experience.**
- Data collected can be used by the Bureau to **prioritize maintenance** and rehabilitation projects and to create standardized graphics for trail maps that will **help visitors to quickly assess the difficulty level** before heading out on a trail.

NEW TRAILS

➤ **The Great Circle Trail** Nahmakanta Public Land

Links existing trails with the Appalachian Trail to create a remote backpacking loop of over 30 miles. New campsites and trail sections offer a way to start and end multi-day adventures at the same trailhead – a surprisingly uncommon opportunity in Maine.

➤ **Mountain Link** Little Moose Public Land

The 1.5-mile Mountain Link trail on Big and Little Moose Mountains provides new day-hiking terrain and another access point for campsites at undeveloped, small ponds along the Little Moose Mountain Trail.

NEW FIRE TOWER CABS INSTALLED Allagash, Round Pond, and Deboullie Mountains

New fire tower cabs were installed on Allagash, Round Pond, and Deboullie mountains. The project, which has been in the works for many years, is the result of great teamwork and dedication by staff members in the Northern Region.

- Maine once had 144 mountains with fire lookout observers. By the 1960s, many of the towers were abandoned in favor of fire detection flights, and many were taken down as they became unsafe.
- Bureau staff and volunteers stabilized the steel tower structures and a helicopter was contracted to fly the new cabs onto the towers.
- Funds for the \$150,000 project came from the Public Lands Management Fund, which is primarily funded from timber sales on public lands, and a grant from the Recreational Trail Program.
- We hope the recreating public can enjoy the fire towers for many years to come as they are part of Maine's history and northern forest landscape.



FOREST MANAGEMENT

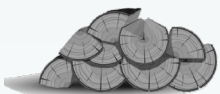
- The Bureau has a more than forty-year long history of exemplary forest management, yielding some of the best stocked timberland in the State of Maine.
- Management of Maine's Public Reserved Lands is entirely funded by revenues generated from these lands, primarily from timber harvesting.
- Recreational infrastructure (trails, campsites, and roads) as well as wildlife habitat and ecological protection activities, are paid for by revenue generated from the lands.
- Other public benefits include contributions to the economy through employment opportunities for contractors and materials for mills.



BY-THE-NUMBERS

In 2020, wood from harvests on Public Lands supplied more than 40 mills across the state.

40
mills



The Bureau harvested 101,700 cords on Public Lands in 2020 and prepared harvest plans for future harvests on an additional 17,000 acres.

101k
cords

BPL works with logging and forest road construction companies that provide jobs statewide.

26
companies



Annual growth of 0.5-0.6 cords per acre is balanced with sustainable harvesting levels to provide valuable forest products and maintain average stocking levels of

24
cords/acre

The Bureau's managed forest lands sequester enough carbon annually to offset emissions from 6,800 cars/year

28k
tons of carbon



Since 2002, the Bureau's forest management activities have been certified as sustainable under two independent systems.



The mark of
responsible forestry



SUSTAINABLE
FORESTRY
INITIATIVE

SFI-00034

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES

Through the management planning process, two unique forest areas adjacent to the Allagash Wilderness Waterway were recently added to the Chamberlain Lake Ecological Reserve. Neither peninsula has been harvested since the 1920s, when the Great Depression temporarily slowed timber harvesting. Recent harvesting by neighboring forest owners made access possible and led the Bureau to evaluate them for harvest or protection. These areas are:

The 'Pump Handle' ~ 284 acres

- **Exemplary Spruce- northern Hardwoods Forest**
- **Older trees of ~180 years**
- **Large diameter dead wood provides unique micro-habitats and soil carbon sequestration**

The 'Boot' ~ 180 acres

- **Exemplary Spruce- fir Wet Flat**
- **Relatively few examples of this forest remain that have not been intensively managed**
- **Heath shrubs including lowbush blueberry, sheep-laurel, and sphagnum mosses carpet the understory**

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Public Lands foresters play a critical role in maintaining the integrity of the water resources within timber harvests and road systems in Maine's forests.
- With 270 miles of public access roads and many more secondary roads, constant attention is required to protect soil and water quality while maintaining important access for forest management and public recreation.
- In FY 20 the Bureau advanced its focus on BMPs with a combination of online trainings and field sessions for forestry and recreation staff, and by instituting a new team approach to planning and peer review.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Coordinating land management with fisheries and wildlife habitat enhancement is a key component of the Bureau's work. In 2020, surveys for **waterfowl, grassland birds, deer, songbirds, bats** and **lynx** were completed on Public Lands across the state. Other habitat work included:

- **Care of waterfowl nesting boxes**
- **Invasive plant surveys**
- **Mowing to benefit grassland birds**
- **Bridge/culvert improvements for fish passage**

DEER WINTERING AREAS

The Bureau monitors 35,000 acres of Deer Wintering Areas (DWAs) on Public Lands. A recent harvest at Scraggly Lake represents years of work by Bureau foresters and Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife biologists to develop harvest plans with DWA habitat guidelines. The three objectives of the harvest were to **establish softwood regeneration**, to **release existing advanced regeneration**, and to **promote stands of softwood** to shelter wintering deer. Harvesting to promote vigorous growth and crown closure will improve shelter for deer over time. In addition, more than 70 other species prefer at least one of the stand types in a managed deer wintering area at some point during their life cycle.

Perhaps the best-kept secret of managing deer wintering areas for shelter is that we're managing them for much more than just the deer.



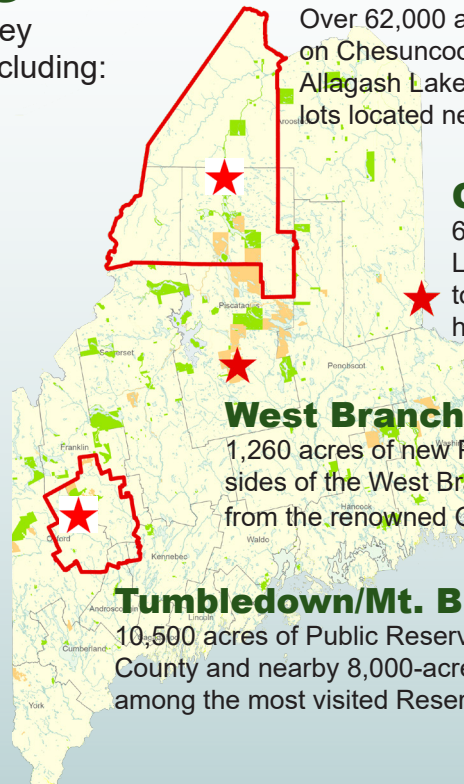
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

MANAGEMENT PLANNING

When Public Lands are well-managed, they support a wide range of public benefits including:

- **Wildlife habitat**
- **Ecosystem functions**
- **Outdoor recreation**
- **Natural resource based economies**

The Bureau's planning process allocates acres for primary and, where compatible, secondary uses, including: **Special Protection** (natural/historic), **Wildlife, Recreation**, and **Timber**. Plans are prepared regionally for 42 major units and cover a period of 15 years. Recently completed and in-progress plans are highlighted on the map.



St. John Uplands (North)

Over 62,000 acres of Public Reserved Land on Chesuncook, Chamberlain, Big Eagle, and Allagash Lakes, the Allagash River, and 6 smaller lots located near the Town of Allagash.

Orient (East)

6,000 acres of new Public Reserved Lands in Aroostook County, adjacent to East Grand Lake near the headwaters of the St. Croix River.

West Branch Pleasant River (East)

1,260 acres of new Public Reserved Lands on both sides of the West Branch, immediately downstream from the renowned Gulf Hagas Gorge.

Tumbledown/Mt. Blue (West)

10,500 acres of Public Reserved Land in southern Franklin County and nearby 8,000-acre Mount Blue State Park - both are among the most visited Reserved Lands and Parks in the state.

Maine State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2020-2024

A vision for outdoor recreation priorities in Maine.

Recreation opportunities on Public Lands support the themes and strategies found in the Bureau's recently completed SCORP.

SCORP THEMES

- **Support Active, Engaged Communities**
- **Address Workforce Attraction and Retention through Outdoor Recreation**
- **Sustain and Grow Tourism**
- **Promote Ecological & Environmental Resilience**
- **Invest in Maintenance and Stewardship**



Maine Climate Action Plan



Maine's new Climate Action Plan includes critical strategies for acquiring and managing Public Lands in the future, including:

- Increasing by 2030 the total acreage of conserved lands in the state to 30% through voluntary, focused purchases of land and working forest or farm conservation easements.
- Supporting the ability of Maine's natural-resource economies to adapt to climate change impacts.
- Revising scoring criteria for state conservation funding to incorporate climate mitigation and resiliency goals.

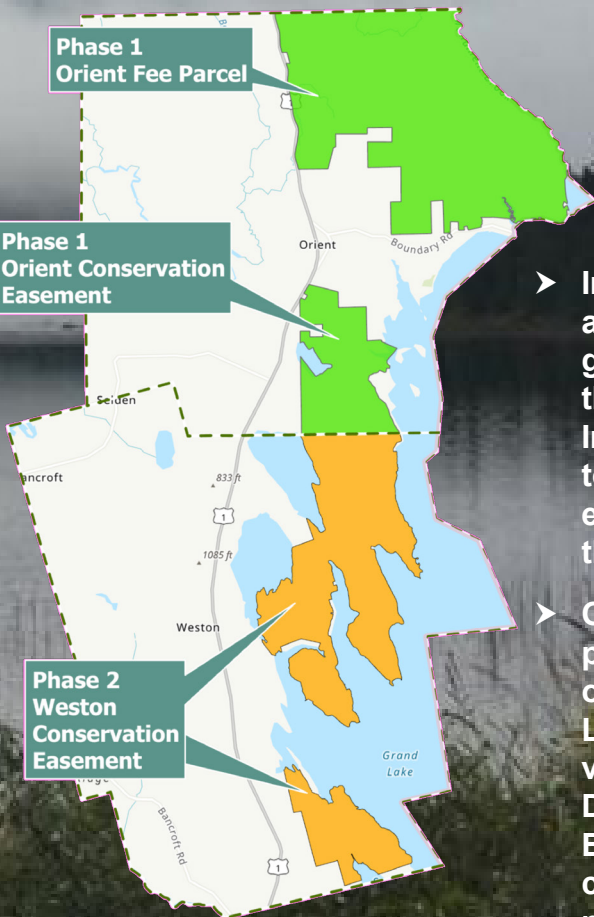
LAND ACQUISITION

The Bureau's acquisition program seeks to assemble a portfolio of public lands that provides **outstanding recreation** experiences, protects unique **ecological and cultural resources**, and provides **economic benefits** for present and future generations. Funding for acquisitions comes from a variety of sources including:

- **Land for Maine's Future Fund**
- **Land & Water Conservation Fund**
- **Forest Legacy Program**
- **Private philanthropy**

FY 20 ACQUISITIONS

- **KENNEBEC GORGE**
(Somerset) A donation of 1,483 acres along the Kennebec River Gorge between Harris Dam and The Forks (part of a 2010 CMP-DEP mitigation agreement)
- **TOPSHAM** (Sagadahoc)
A 0.24-acre donation to the Public Lot
- **CATHANCE TWP LOT**
(Washington) A 2.75-acre donation to provide management access to the existing public lot



EXPANDING THE LEGACY OF MAINE'S FORESTS

- In FY 21 Maine was awarded a \$4.95M Forest Legacy grant for the final phase of the East Grand Watershed Initiative. Funds will be used to purchase a working forest easement on 4,300 acres in the Town of Weston.
- Once completed, the project will protect miles of shoreline on East Grand Lake, encompassing the viewshed of the Million Dollar View National Scenic Byway, habitat for lynx and cold-water fisheries, and 28 miles of trails.
- The project is a partnership with The Conservation Fund, who worked closely with the community to ensure the project struck a balance in conserving views, ensuring public access for traditional uses, and allowing for limited potential growth.
- FY 22 Forest Legacy funding totaling \$16M is being sought for 2 working forest projects:
 - 10,000-acre Chadbourne Tree Farm (Bethel area)
 - 13,500-acre Quill Hill to Perham Stream (High Peaks Region)

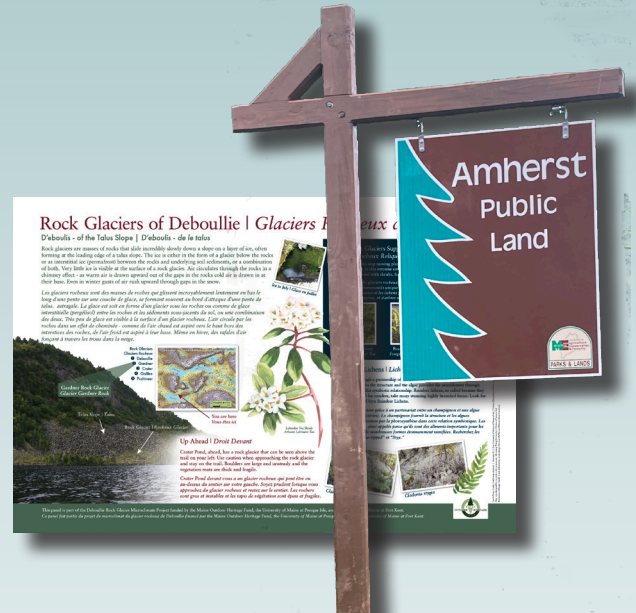
Maine has received more than \$76 million in Forest Legacy funds and leads the nation by having conserved over 741,000 acres of forestland through the program.

CONNECTING WITH THE PUBLIC

Making sure visitors have a safe and rewarding visit begins with how we connect visitors to Public Lands through our messaging.

➤ NEW SIGNS AND KIOSKS

New yard-arm signs were installed at Donnell Pond and Amherst Mountain. New signs are part of a larger effort to upgrade materials, standardize messaging, and provide space for safety alerts related to timber harvesting and other management activities.



➤ NATURAL CONNECTIONS

Interpretive panels remind visitors to pause, look around, and connect with the land. Panels help visitors learn the stories of a place while aiming to inspire a deeper, lasting connection to and appreciation for Public Lands.

PARTNERSHIPS

Acquisition and management of Public Lands is achieved through collaboration with members of the public as well as a variety of stakeholders, conservation partners, and industries. The Bureau values partners that help facilitate all aspects of complicated projects and those who help navigate the changing world of recreation - from increased use to emerging new sports that require forward-thinking. A few partners from 2020 included:

- **Maine Island Trail Association** - Monitors use, marshals volunteers, and maintains the Bureau's wilderness campsites along the 375-mile island trail.
- **Maine Conservation Corps** - An AmeriCorps partnership that provides crews to build and rehabilitate trails on Public Lands.
- **Land Trusts** - Provide assistance in pursuing additional land acquisition opportunities, and with the maintenance of trails, kiosks, and other facilities.

PUBLIC LANDS ALERTS

A new subscription service was set up so visitors can receive region and location specific updates from the Public Lands.

Text the Keyword below to 468311:

- | REGION | KEYWORD |
|---------|--------------|
| ➤ EAST | DACF E-LANDS |
| ➤ WEST | DACF W-LANDS |
| ➤ NORTH | DACF N-LANDS |



SUBMERGED LANDS

It is hard to imagine our state without the traditional activities of commercial fishing, shellfish harvesting, recreational boating, and hunting on our coastal waters and Great Ponds. The Submerged Lands Program helps maintain a balance among competing uses of submerged lands and resolving conflicts between public trust rights and the demand for private and commercial uses of these lands.

FY 20 WORK

- Applications for 201 new Coastal Development Projects
- 12 new leases and easements for non-compliant structures
- 71 requests for conveyance renewals, amendments & transfers
- Application review for a land-based aquaculture project
- 1 new application to recover sunken logs

SHORE & HARBOR MANAGEMENT FUND

One of the many responsibilities of the Submerged Lands Program is to award Harbor Management Access Grants. FY 20 was the fourth year of the grant program and funds were awarded to six municipalities including: Hallowell, Kennebunkport, Marshfield, Sedgwick, Sullivan, and Woolwich. All of the projects funded construction activities at new and existing water access facilities located on Great Ponds and coastal waters.

SULLIVAN

BOAT RAMP RECONSTRUCTION

\$15,000

Funding will be used to enhance the existing launch and bolster the shoreline. The boat launch area that is in place mainly services local fishermen, many of whom have moorings in the bay. The launch area was only adequate for smaller vessels and couldn't support launching a 30-40 foot lobster boat.

HALLOWELL

RIVERSIDE BULKHEAD REPAIRS

\$15,000

Funding will be used to replace the decking on the bulkhead that abuts the Kennebec River. The bulkhead provides access to a gangway and docks on the river where boaters tie up and from which people fish. The bulkhead is a hub where people gather to watch waterfowl and other waterfront activity.

MARSHFIELD

BOAT RAMP RECONSTRUCTION

\$4,875

Funding will be used to reconstruct an existing boat ramp for public access on Six-Mile Lake. The public boat launch has a small picnic area and is used by locals and visitors to the area for fishing and launching watercraft. Damaged planks on the boat ramp created a precarious launching situation.

While the Bureau is charged with stewardship of Maine's Public Lands, these are treasured places for all Mainers – as evidenced by their popularity this past year as places to unplug and unwind. As we look ahead to the coming year, and the challenges we know it will bring, we hope that new users return, long-time outdoor enthusiasts find new places to explore, and that all Mainers enjoy those special places that form the natural fabric of our home state.



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