



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

**DACF Commissioner's Briefing of the
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
January 13, 2022**

Introduction

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a briefing on some of the key areas of our work over the past several months. I am Amanda Beal, Commissioner of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), and I am joined here today by some key members of our staff who we can pull in a bit later, who along with me, will be happy to answer any questions you may have after this presentation or to obtain further information if there are questions we are unable to answer fully today.

As you know, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry stewards many of Maine's most treasured resources and the vibrant natural resource economy they foster. That includes things like preventing and fighting forest fires; mapping the ocean floor; stewarding our parks and public lands; planning wise land use; supporting our forestry and agricultural sectors; and ensuring the safety and abundance of the food we eat.

Perhaps like no other branch of government, DACF touches the lives of every Maine person every single day, in multiple ways. This is why we are committed to being a Department that works for all Maine people. As legislators and as citizens, when you interact with the Department, I hope you find what I do: bureaus and programs staffed at every level with dedicated, knowledgeable, professional, and creative public servants who are excited to support Maine's people and some of our most iconic industries and pastimes.

This morning, we sent you an updated version of a briefing book we shared at this time last year. It provides a good refresher on how DACF is structured and who some of our key staff are, so I won't cover that ground today, except to point out that after more than 30 years of public service to the State of Maine, most recently as the Director of the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning (BRILUP) and also as our State Geologist, Dr. Bob Marvinney retired over the summer. He is already greatly missed; however, we are very fortunate that

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

Judy East, who had been serving as the Executive Director of the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC), was up for the challenge of directing BRILUP and its critically important programs, including LUPC. Judy has been in her new role since November 1. I will highlight some other key DACF staffing transitions later, but wanted to point out this change that you will see in the briefing book.

I would now like to focus on the incredible work that our 4 bureaus, 110 programs, and approximately 700 staff members have accomplished most recently.

Reporting

Each year we submit approximately twenty standing reports on topics as diverse as the state of our forests, the activities of the Maine Harness Racing Commission, and LUPC's annual water certification. In addition, this year, we have provided, mainly at the request of the Legislature, fifteen additional reports, including reports from the passage of the following bills and executive orders on the topics noted here:

- LD 1407's report on municipal regulations of timber harvesting
- LD 1733's report on the Agriculture, Food and Forestry Investment Fund
- LD 937's soil carbon storage analysis
- LD 1591's report on offensive place names
- LD 33's compilation of stakeholder input on the State's hemp program
- LD 264's report on PFAS in pesticides
- LD 493's findings on meat processing
- LD 519's report on findings regarding herbicides on school grounds (which included a Medical Advisory Report)
- LD 524's report identifying workable methods for collecting sales and use records for pesticide applications
- LD 558's report on a study plan regarding PFAS and the agricultural sector
- LD 820's report on protecting Maine's agricultural lands when siting solar arrays
- LD 1159's strategic plan to end hunger by 2030
- EO 41's report on the aerial spraying of herbicides on forest lands

In addition, staff at DACF played central roles in various reports tied to the ongoing work of the Maine Climate Council, including:

- EO 24's Forest Carbon Program Task Force Report
- Maine Climate Science Update 2021: An Interim Communication of the Maine Climate Council's Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

Regular Reports include:

- Land for Maine's Future Biennial Report
- LUPC Annual Report on Funding Report
- LUPC Annual Water Certification Report
- LUPC Rulemaking Report

- LUPC Annual Performance Report
- Public Lands Budget Report
- Field Forester Biennial Report
- The Outcome Based Forestry Report
- Pesticides Program Fund Report
- Maine Harness Racing Commission Annual Report
- Animal Welfare Program Report
- Bureau of Parks and Lands Annual Report
- Allagash Wilderness Waterway Report
- Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund Report
- Dairy Improvement Fund Report
- Hemp Program Annual Report
- Integrated Pest Management Council Report

With literally thousands of people-hours exerted by staff in our numerous programs and the Commissioner's Office in doing research, listening to stakeholders, gathering and disseminating information, compiling and reviewing these reports, one might be surprised that we had time to manage the work and programs central to the Department's mission. But as you will see from the following summaries that again only shine a light on our staffs' accomplishments over the past several months, I assure you we did—and did so with the passion, dedication, and teamwork that we all know is at the heart of the work of DACF.

Emergent Issues

Let me start with some emergent issues DACF has been tackling: pandemic impacts; ARPA and CARES funding we have been investing in Maine; PFAS contamination; severe market disruption in the dairy sector; Maine's work to end hunger by 2030; our and department contributions to meeting our State climate action plan goals.

Pandemic Impacts

We are still primarily asking people to work from home if and when they can to minimize exposure. But fortunately, a lot of work in our Department does happen out of doors and in the field, and we have a great record of continuing that work uninterrupted and safely. We are sorry that we have had to forgo a number of in-person events for the second year in a row, and that's top of mind as this is the week of the [Agricultural Trades Show](#), which we are running on a virtual platform, so I hope you will look at the program and participate as fully as you can.

One other complication tied to the pandemic is that we have broken records on a lot of fronts, and that has increased the demand for our services across many areas of our work. We saw an all-time record-breaking 1,150 forest fires in 2020, and another high from our previously standing average of 450 fires per year with 652 wildland fires in 2021, involving 27 residences and 53 other structures, and we know this upward trend has implications for our fire-fighting capacity. We've also counted record numbers of visitors to our parks and public lands – in fact,

we have broken the 3 million visitor mark for parks in the last two years. We are also seeing evidence of high utilization in some of our most remote parks and public lands, and we really don't see that trend reversing. We've also been fielding disruptions in the food supply and processing, and helping consumers and producers alike to get their needs met while also dealing with a surge in food insecurity.

Through all of this, I have been so impressed with the level of collaboration amongst staff in all four of our Bureaus.

Investing CARES and ARPA Funds

Last session, the Legislature approved Governor Mills' American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) proposal to allocate \$50 million for state parks to improve aging and inadequate infrastructure and nearly \$20 million to support agricultural infrastructure development.

Commissioner's Office and Bureau of Parks and Lands staff are collaborating with the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan Review Team and DAFS to ensure that any projects we plan to undertake with ARPA funding meet Treasury guidance, and that we are in line with procurement procedures for the State, in inviting bids and establishing contracts for these projects. This funding will support urgent infrastructure improvements at state parks to accommodate the significantly increased use seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also help bolster recreational and tourism opportunities.

Even before the passage of ARPA, DACF was working in concert with the Departments of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and Marine Resources (DMR) to survey Maine's agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors to determine specific investment priorities within our heritage industries. The data we collected in that process helped to make the case for the overall \$50 million allocated to these heritage industries sectors: \$20 million for agriculture, \$20 million for forestry (Maine Technology Institute administered), and \$10 million for fisheries (DMR administered). Furthermore, we engaged the University of Maine's School of Economics to study the potential economic impact of investments in four priority areas: dairy processing; meat processing; grain storage and drying; and fruit and vegetable co-packing and processing. We have also gathered input from many of our stakeholders through one-on-one discussions, interviews, and webinars. Together, these feedback channels shaped the development of the recently launched Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP), and also gives us confidence that the investments we will make through this program will meet well-documented needs and are positioned to have a significant impact.

The AIIP, which will provide over \$19 million directly to Maine farmers and food processors to improve critical infrastructure, was formally launched on December 23, 2021. DACF is partnering with Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) to administer AIIP. Program materials are available online now, and applications are being accepted from January 14 to February 25. This month, DACF is co-hosting a series of informational webinars about AIIP.

DACF was intentional in its selection of Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) as the third-party administrator for this grant program, noting in particular CEI's ability to offer hands-on technical support and interpretative services for prospective applicants – including those for whom English is not their primary language. You may also recall that DACF collaborated with CEI to rapidly distribute more than \$17 million of CARES Act funding to farmers and food pantries last year, in the form of reimbursement grants to assist with increased expenses incurred by addressing the challenges of the pandemic. DACF has also coordinated with volunteer grant writing support services, including SCORE mentors that have direct experience surrounding agriculture funding, to support applicants of both the CARES and ARPA-funded grant programs.

Our distribution of CARES funding created other big impacts earlier in 2021. Over 400 farm businesses were able to leverage those dollars to respond to the pandemic and how it had reshaped consumer demand and the workforce. One farm invested in buying the sorting and bagging equipment they needed to pivot from selling to food-service accounts to direct-to-consumer sales. Another installed greenhouse infrastructure as part of a direct-to-consumer expansion that includes pick-your-own vegetables. And yet another farm invested in a new grain tank and auger system that allowed the farm to establish on-site capacity and avoid delays associated with outsourced processing. There are literally hundreds more examples I could cite, all of which are testaments to the creativity and resilience of Maine farmers.

PFAS

The Department's work contending with PFAS contamination is among the most challenging issues currently before us—and that is not likely to change any time soon. Maine has found itself nationally at the forefront of PFAS response and in steering the federal government to meaningfully engage on this issue. Our urgency has been necessary to safeguard the viability of our farms and the health of our people.

Since engaging on the Governor's PFAS Taskforce in 2019, DACF has closely collaborated with Maine Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and more recently worked alongside the Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife (DIFW) regarding the State's PFAS response, with DACF's particular focus being assisting PFAS-impacted farms. In 2021, we worked intensively with one farm to significantly reduce PFAS contamination in milk through ongoing soil, feed, and milk testing and modifications to input sourcing and resource management. We worked with another farmer to voluntarily reduce livestock and indemnify the producer for the value of those animals. The Bureau hired one new staff member to work with producers, and additional hiring efforts continue for a PFAS Coordinator position.

We are also worked closely with our colleagues at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Maine Farmland Trust, and beyond to share information, resources, and collaborate on strategies to support farmers seeking PFAS guidance and support. We also continue to explore potential avenues for critical PFAS research to provide valuable information to farmers regarding PFAS impacts, transit, and

uptake in crops to allow them to make management decisions and adjustments. And we consistently update the Maine delegation regarding our activities, so they can champion along with us for further federal action regarding PFAS, including the need for national standards and greater federal support for impacted citizens and farmers.

Much more PFAS work is on the immediate horizon. Last session, the Legislature directed Maine DEP to test the soil and water of every location in the state by 2025 that accepted sludges or biosolids. That is anticipated to be over 700 sites, and our Department will be working closely with DEP each step of the way to assist any farms that are found through that process. We continue to learn more about PFAS in various crops and livestock and will follow a data-driven process with individual farms to assess the source(s) of contamination and attempt to help eliminate or mitigate it so the farms can hopefully remain viable. The circumstances of each farm are unique, and our approach will be calibrated to the needs of these farms. Because of the funding approved in the last budget, DACF is poised to underwrite comprehensive testing at farms and provide water filtrations systems where necessary. The Department is also continuing to assess how and where it can offer indemnification to producers. Given the resource-intensive activities that our PFAS response requires, as well as the costs associated with assisting more farms, we anticipate that ongoing state budgetary support for PFAS response work will be required.

Dairy

When Danone/Horizon announced that, by August 2023, it would end its contracts with 14 Maine organic dairy farms (89 altogether in New England and New York), DACF moved quickly to try to protect and assist these farms. We were among the first to push back and insist that Danone do more for our farmers—advocacy that eventually resulted in Danone's announcement that they would extend contracts for an additional 6 months and offer transition payments to impacted farmers. We supported the Governor in her public appeals, both to Horizon to change course, and to the USDA to provide meaningful relief to our farmers as well as to finalize the origin of livestock rule to level the playing field for all certified organic farms across the country – on the latter, we were pleased to hear just recently that the USDA has finally submitted the rule to [OMB for review](#).

Recognizing that no one could compel Danone to stay in the Northeast, we organized a working group of service providers to meet farmer needs by, among other things, identifying sources of financial support, connecting farms with alternative trucking and marketing options, and supporting the retirement and succession planning of those farmers deciding to leave the industry. These meetings continue to happen biweekly.

Alongside Commissioners and Secretaries of Agriculture from other impacted states, I have met multiple times with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. He assures us that the USDA will support efforts to address the challenges our displaced dairy farms are facing. With regional partners, the Department has also engaged in the Northeast Dairy Task Force, a group of 27 organizations including state departments of agriculture, cooperative extension, organic

processors, organic associations, farm technical assistance providers, and subject matter experts, who worked to provide USDA with actionable recommendations to respond to and support the Northeast region's dairy sector in response Danone/Horizon's actions. Some of these proposals include advocating for state and regional processing and marketing opportunities through a variety of outlets, including state block grant funding, the local food promotion program, and community funded projects, which could help organic and conventional farmers alike. We have reason to believe those appeals are finding a receptive audience in Washington D.C. and are appreciative that Secretary Vilsack has been personally engaged in these conversations.

We understand that all dairy farms are struggling to remain viable, and we recognize that both conventional and organic dairies hold an important role in our agriculture community, which is why we also testified in support of LD 1805 - *Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission* earlier this week. Various staff within the Department will continue to engage in conversations regarding in-state and regional processing, marketing, and consumer education.

Ending Hunger

This year the Department completed "Everyone at the Table: Maine's Plan to End Hunger by 2030." The Plan was requested and authorized through the 129th Legislature's LD 1159 - *Resolve to End Hunger in Maine by 2030*. Those of you serving on this committee in the 129th will recall that on February 10, 2020, the Department delivered—and on March 3, 2020, I presented to you—an interim report, "Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030." This committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations of that report. However, the Legislature's emergency adjournment two weeks later meant that a supplemental appropriation to fund plan-making was never authorized. Nevertheless, we at the Department believed the work was so critical that we secured outside funding to move forward. We're grateful to four funders—the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, the John T. Gorman Foundation, and Hannaford Supermarkets—for enabling work to continue.

Our planning process began with evidence-based strategies and success stories from work in other communities and around the globe. We then leveraged expertise from across State government. Contributing Departments included Education; Economic and Community Development; Health and Human Service; Transportation; Labor; the Office of the State Economist; and The Governor's Office on Policy, Innovation, and the Future (GOPIF). Finally, in a series of 42 virtual convenings last summer, this cohort was joined by a broad swath of legislators, nonprofit and business leaders, educators, policy experts, and concerned Maine people, engaging approximately 200 contributors in the process through several Core Teams and Support Teams. Notably, contributors included Mainers with lived and living experience of hunger. We have a high degree of confidence that the recommendations in the plan draw on essential lessons from elsewhere while reflecting the unique nature of the problem in Maine and the priorities of Maine people, and we look forward to talking more about next steps when

you take up LD 174 - *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group* later this session.

The plan provides a roadmap for simultaneously meeting the food needs of Maine people today while addressing economic and social conditions so that the problem does not continue to occur going forward. After all, the State resolved to end hunger, not treat it.

Even before the plan was completed, we stood up a new AmeriCorps VISTA program to add capacity to State agencies and community partners who are moving us toward a hunger-free Maine. Currently, we have 16 VISTA members and two VISTA leaders serving twelve organizations ranging from the Aroostook County Action Program to Good Shepherd Food Bank to the Somali Bantu Community Association as well as the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Economic and Community Development, and here at DACF. Next year we expect to have 25 members in service, something that will bring over \$613,000 in federal resources into the State.

It has been an honor for DACF to steward this work up to this point. The work going forward will require a great deal of interdisciplinary collaboration and coordination, and as that is the foundation this plan was built upon, we are confident that we are well poised to benefit from strong collaboration.

Support for Local Foods

Every day we're working to create more markets opportunities for Maine food. Through our grant and loan programs, we fund programs that support local foods, and we offer technical and marketing support so Maine producers can increase their market share. One example: last summer we learned that Maine's \$200 million summer camp industry was struggling to source food amidst pandemic supply chain disruptions. Our Agriculture Resource Development team created resources connecting camps with local distribution and sourcing alternatives, which they later buttressed with the Real Maine Wholesale Directory, a resource that will permanently allow for institutional and wholesale buyers to easily find local producers. Our Economic Development and ARD staff have worked tirelessly in uncovering and developing solutions to our infrastructure and processing needs, and we're on track to fill our farm-to-institution/wholesale market development position this spring.

In addition to the distribution of approximately \$37 million in combined CARES and ARPA funds noted previously, we have done an immense amount of work that synergizes our commitment to bolstering food security with our dedication to expanding markets for Maine producers. A few highlights:

- We're readying the RFP for LD 691- *An Act To Support Farms and Address Food Insecurity*, with an aim to disburse the first \$25,000 this May.
- We piloted a farm-to-food bank program to provide gleaned blueberries to food pantries in Washington and Hancock counties, and will expand that program this year.

- Through the Farm Food Access Program, we continue to partner with DHHS to provide EBT equipment to farmers' markets to increase access to local food for people who use federal nutrition benefits.
- We've just completed the first two-year contract on LD 786 - *An Act To Reduce Hunger and Promote Maine Agriculture* (129th Legislature), which channeled \$2 million to Good Shepherd Food Bank's Mainers Feeding Mainers program. The second RFP just closed, and a new award will be made late this winter or early spring.
- We're expanding the geographic and demographic reach of Maine Senior FarmShare.
- And we are working on a proposal—through the USDA's new Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA)—that would channel \$780,000 per year of federal dollars to local farmers to benefit them and low-income Maine families.

Maine Climate Action Plan

DACF staff across the Department have been very involved in the implementation of various goals embedded in the State's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait* (MWW). I serve on the climate council and continue to co-chair the Natural and Working Lands work group, and a number of our staff also chair, serve on, or staff working groups. Notably, in the past year, we have moved forward on MWW recommendations and an Executive Order from the Governor to form and seek recommendations from a Forest Carbon Program Task Force, whose report was completed and presented to the Governor last month.

We are also underway with work on a soil carbon study with the University of Maine and IFW, and all four of our Bureaus are engaged in that work. This work was initiated by LD 937 - *Resolve, To Facilitate the Provision of Incentives for Soil Carbon Storage*, and the work on this study has been bolstered by a recent grant award by the U.S. Climate Alliance that we applied for with assistance from GOPIF.

In addition, over the past year, various DACF program staff have been working with other State natural resource-based agencies to look at opportunities to collaborate on meeting cross-cutting goals, as well as looking at the practices and policies within their own programs for ways to enhance our overall response to climate impacts and mitigation opportunities.

Bureau Updates

In a moment, I will turn to the critical work of our four bureaus that is at the heart of DACF's mission, but before I do, I want to acknowledge what a tremendous job our Department staff have done in navigating through the many challenges brought to our work by the pandemic. I also want to share my deep appreciation for the leadership of our Bureau Directors and key staff in the Commissioner's Office, as well as the leadership I see in action coming from every corner of our Department each and every day.

I appreciate this opportunity to present to you directly, but I encourage you to fully read through the following pages. There is so much work happening within our bureaus to be acknowledged.

Bureau of Forestry

I'll start with the Bureau of Forestry and its three Divisions: Forest Health and Monitoring, Forest Protection, and Forest Policy and Management.

Forest Health and Monitoring

Staff in the Forest Health and Monitoring Division measure 3,500 forest plots statewide on a rotating basis. The data they collect inform statewide forest policy. The Division also has entomologists and pathologists who provide outreach and assistance to Maine residents concerning forest pests and pathogens. Of late, the biggest battle they fight is against invasive species such as Browntail moth, Emerald Ash Borer, and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, as well as native Spruce Budworm to name a few.

Our Forest Entomologists have been extremely busy. The browntail moth (BTM) populations continue to grow, and we expect this trend to continue. We logged over 2,000 calls for assistance on the state CDC 211 line due to BTM. We sent 230 e-mails to towns with concerning BTM populations offering advice and contact information for the entomologists. Meanwhile, the emerald ash borer range continues to expand in southern and western Maine. And an unwelcome newcomer to Southern Maine is the southern pine beetle which, as its name suggests, infects hard pines. Spruce budworm populations are increasing to the point that the Spruce Budworm Task Force, a collaboration between Maine Forest Service (MFS), the University of Maine, and other stakeholders, has re-convened after years of inactivity.

The MFS Inventory and Analysis (FIA) crews have been collecting wood utilization data with help from logging crews in the southern half of the state. Utilization studies provide the information needed to link the trees standing in the forest with the wood products produced. The data ultimately helps the FIA program to relate timber removals with wood production, resulting in a more efficient—and, we hope, more profitable—wood products industry. Maine's Forest Inventory Crews have finished their part of the annual forest inventory in Maine: all plots on the 2021 panel and two panels of Urban plots (2020 and 2021) are complete. This work is completed through the diligence of our crews, partnership with the USDA Forest Service, and, critically, support from the landowners who allow access for plot measurement. Once our federal partners receive all of the 2021 panel's data, it will be processed and available from The USFS FIA [tools and data website](#).

The USFS recently recognized two states for having the highest caliber of information in the country on their forest health websites: Maine and Alaska earned that honor.

Forest Protection

The Forest Protection Division is our law enforcement arm comprised of rangers, pilots, and support staff.

- Forest Protection completed 39,517 inspections and enforcement cases this year and 14,906 educational and outreach events statewide, all during another high fire year.

- We counted an all-time record-breaking 1,150 forest fires in 2020, and another high from our previously standing average of 450 fires per year with 652 wildland fires in 2021, involving 27 residences and 53 other structures, and we know this upward trend has implications for our fire-fighting capacity.
- Our fleet of aircraft has been busy keeping those fires small and responding to 24 requests for hiker rescues.
- LD 268 allowed us to eliminate fees for online burn permits, and we have seen a 67% increase in the system's use compared to the last typical use year. Response from citizens and town fire wardens has been very positive. On October 18, the Maine Forest Service also reduced the length of online burn permits from 48 to 24 hours. This forces citizens to get new permits after 24 hours and therefore check the daily fire danger rating. The result is more informed citizens, and fewer escaped debris burns. By waiving the fee, we now have a safer and more commonly used online burn permit system across broader swaths of the state.
- The last budget cycle was kind to our aviation branch, with approval to purchase newer aircraft. The search is ongoing as the 407 Bell helicopter market is quite competitive. There are two prospective aircraft we're currently exploring.
- Two Type VI Maine Forest Service engines were mobilized to assist western states for over 120 days each this past summer. We were very pleased to be able to assist other states during another tragic western wildfire season.
- The Division was fortunate to hire nine new Forest Ranger II's. Several new hires were already "Blue Pinned," meaning they have been through the Maine Criminal Justice Academy (MCJA). Two others recently completed the MCJA Basic Law Enforcement class; one was the valedictorian in a class of 57, the other, the first female Forest Ranger to go through this class, ranked third in a class of 67.
- Earlier this month, Bill Hamilton retired as Chief Ranger after 42 years of service to the State and people of Maine. Robby Gross, previously a District Ranger, has been named his successor.

Forest Policy and Management

The Forest Policy and Management (FPM) Division is currently staffed with 12 District Foresters and Enforcement Coordinators who provide outreach to an average of 15,000 small woodlot owners each year while also handling an upswing in harvest permits and variances. This Division also offers urban tree assistance to municipalities, handles forest operations notifications, and promotes informed decisions for forest stakeholders.

- The online Forest Operations Notification system went online in October 2021. To date, over 2,100 notifications have been filed. This system allows for simpler landowner notification and reduced state costs thanks to online landowner report filing.
- We sent 4,000 landowner reports to landowners who harvested in 2021 as required by statute.

- Maine is part of the New England and New York *Securing Northeast Forest Carbon Program* (SNFCP). Funded by the USDA Forest Service, SNFCP is helping our seven-state partnership get the latest information to private landowners so they can make carbon-smart decisions about their management practices. We've started the process of getting all appropriate forestry staff trained in the program.
- In 2021, MFS District Foresters engaged with small landowners representing just under 300,000 acres. FPM staff also participated in or hosted 181 outreach and education events for loggers, landowners, and foresters.

Bureau of Resource, Information, and Land Use Planning

Next is the Bureau of Resource, Information, and Land Use Planning. Both our Bureau Director and our State Geologist serve respectively as co-chairs of the Maine Climate Council's Community Resilience Planning, Emergency Management and Public Health Working Group, and its Science and Technical Committee. The Bureau includes the Maine Geological Survey, the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP), the Municipal Planning Assistance Program (MPAP), the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF), the Floodplain Management Program (FMP), and the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC). There is lots of great work happening at BRILUP. Unifying many of the highlights is their connection to strategies in *Maine Won't Wait* and the fact that the people and programs of BRILUP are among the State's most important tools for creating resilience in the face of a changing climate, as well as for making data-informed decisions in communities and throughout State Government.

Maine Geological Survey

As you may recall, in the last biennial budget, our request to split the hybrid Bureau Director/State Geologist Director position into two separate full-time positions. We greatly thank you for your support in meeting that request. As mentioned previously, Judy East has succeeded Bob Marvinney as BRILUP Bureau Director, and I am pleased to note that long-time MGS Marine Geologist Steve Dickson has most deservedly taken on the role of State Geologist and MGS Director.

MGS manages many critical programs:

- The [Sea-level rise ticker](#) and dashboard provide monthly information on tides and sea-level rise trends at six locations from Kittery to Eastport. The information is not available in a timely manner from the federal government, so it's important we continue to collect it. Not surprisingly, trends and implications for coastal communities are not good, and once we get December data, 2021 will likely break new high water level records.
- The Living Shorelines projects to test the use of natural materials to address coastal erosion are being monitored at several locations in Casco Bay with DMR and the Town of Brunswick.
- And MGS houses multiple projects documenting water resource quantity and availability; monitoring drought conditions and aquifer responses to changing

precipitation; characterizing Maine's endowment of 39 minerals deemed critical to modern society; creating detailed geologic maps of surficial and bedrock materials throughout Maine to address land-use, water resources, aggregate, dimension stone, mineral resources, and natural hazards.

In 2022, MGS will:

- Continue work to further understand local landslide hazards.
- Continue a cooperative program with the Maine CDC to develop methods to join databases of physical water well characteristics with well water quality to support inquiries into potential impacts on human health.
- Collaborate with the USGS Earth Mapping Resources Initiative to better inventory the occurrence of 39 geological commodities (minerals and elements) critical to society.

Maine Natural Areas Program

In 2021, the Maine Natural Areas Program completed the following:

- Several initiatives in support of *Maine Won't Wait*, including impacts to endangered species due to changes in river ice behavior; assessment of climate-resilient wetland sites; statewide inventory of rare floodplain forest wetlands; and assessment to identify areas of statewide importance for biodiversity (Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance).
- Revised and updated Maine's Official List of Endangered and Threatened Plants with approximately six years of new information.
- Technical review and field-based ecological assessment of 31 projects proposed to the Maine Natural Resources Conservation Program, 720 development projects (200 of which were solar), 44 Farm Bill projects, 9 Comprehensive Plans, and 626 Forest Management Plans, ~87,000 acres of public land.
- Invasive plant outreach efforts reached 1,896 people in 24 events, including workshops, webinars, field days, classes, and online trainings.

Here are some of the things on MNAP's docket for 2022:

- Continued implementation of *Maine Won't Wait* strategies, including employing new efficient remote sensing methods to find locations of rare, small-scale wetland types in southern Maine; undertaking the first full assessment of the state's native flora to provide a baseline for change in species distributions and abundances as the climate warms; producing an update to marsh migration modeling given updated sea level rise projections; and offering free pre-acquisition review of proposed conservation projects with mapped natural resource information and climate resiliency modeling data.
- Building on strong partnership with Maine's private landowners and launching new initiatives providing management recommendations for significant botanical records to land managers enrolled in third party certifications including Outcome-based Forestry, Forest Stewardship Council, and Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

Floodplain Management Program

- This year Maine's Floodplain Management Program ranked 15th nationwide and 2nd among the New England states with proficiency scoring in FEMA's first-ever Tiered State Framework, a comprehensive evaluation of state floodplain management programs. States were required to submit evidence in 4 major categories: capacity, capability, performance, and planning and coordination.
- Updated flood maps for York and Cumberland Counties will be issued in 2023.

Land for Maine's Future

I want to thank this committee and the Legislature once again for including a \$40 million allocation for the LMF program in the most recent budget. As you know, LMF is our most important vehicle for conserving land for its natural and recreational value. LMF has helped protect landscapes that are both cherished by Maine people and that draw visitors from around the globe. The inclusion of working lands and working waterfronts in program priorities also means that LMF is essential to the natural resource industries that hold the key to Maine's prosperity. LMF made several critical acquisitions this year:

- A 2,014-acre acquisition on two Downeast lakes that secured public access and protected extensive undeveloped shoreline
- A 32-mile multi-use rail trail running from Oakland to Embden
- A 50-acre coastal island added to Maine's State Parks system
- Two working waterfront properties
- A 128-acre recreational corridor linking more than 250 acres of unfragmented habitat providing water quality protection and deer wintering areas close to Maine's largest population center
- A 32-acre parcel of special and iconic scenic beauty with public access to Walker Pond, forestland, and blueberry fields

In addition, LMF:

- Authorized two new temporary staff positions: a third Senior Planner and a Paralegal Assistant to support their ability to efficiently award \$40 million allocation in the 2021 budget.
- Issued two calls for proposals connected with our Conservation and Recreation funds. The first RFP, which closed December 30, attracted five proposal for just over \$3 million to protect about 8,500 acres. The LMF board will meet later this month to decide on those. The second RFP, which closes April 1, produced 37 letters of inquiry; those projects will be decided on in July.
- Completed review of LMF policies and practices with Board members and representatives of the applicant community. Board subcommittees in 2022 will consider these recommendations and advise the full Board on changes to implement.
- Engaged a vendor to implement a Grants Management Software, to improve efficiency of application processing and improve user experience for the applicant community.

- Anticipates issuing a Working Farmland Access and Protection Program with a Request for Proposals in early 2022.
- Will complete, in partnership with MNAP, an evaluation of land acquisition priorities identified by the Land Acquisition Priorities Advisory Committee in 1997 and re-assess future conservation priorities.

Municipal Planning Assistance Program

- Made five Coastal Community Grants for projects including climate resilience planning, septic vulnerability analysis, the development of model ordinances, and other tools for resilient development master planning.
- Developed and managed grants to Maine's Regional Planning Organizations to provide technical planning assistance to municipalities.
- Provided resource packages to 45 municipalities working on their local Comprehensive Plans.

Land Use Planning Commission

With Judy East moving into the BRILUP Director position, we were fortunate to have a very qualified candidate from within LUPC to step into new leadership. Stacie Beyer has been with LUPC for seven years and became Acting Executive Director of the Commission on November 1. Recent initiatives completed or near completion at the LUPC include:

- A workplan to monitor the impacts of new LUPC rules on location of development (adjacency) and subdivision standards.
- Replacement zoning for the expiring First Roach Pond Concept Plan and renewal of the St. John River Resource Plan.
- Revisions to the Planned Development subdistrict at Saddleback Mountain to allow solar installations on residential units at the mountain, a mid-mountain warming facility, and a grid-scale solar facility to support snowmaking and electricity needs on the mountain.
- Review of a zoning petition for a new Planned Development subdistrict for Hammond Ridge, a multi-use development proposal adjacent to Millinocket Lake.
- Review of Phase 1 and a series of pre-application meetings for the next phases of redevelopment at the Big Moose Resort in Big Moose Twp.
- The Moosehead Regional Planning Project on ~27,000 acres in the Moosehead Lake Region.

Watch for our Annual Performance Report to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry due in the next few days. Important initiatives beginning and ongoing in 2022 include:

- Policy development to address the recommendations of *Maine Won't Wait*.
- Policy development and implementation to address housing issues in the UT, including short-term rentals and accessory dwelling units.
- Development of conceptual standards and possible rule changes to address small and mid-size solar energy generation facilities.

- Completion of the [Moosehead Regional Planning Project](#) on ~27,000 acres in the Moosehead Lake Region.
- Completion of a 5-year and 20-year review of the Rangeley Lakes Prospective Zoning Plan.
- Work with landowners along the St. John River to renew the expiring St. John River Resource Plan, and along the Lower West Branch of the Penobscot River to renew or implement replacement zoning for the expiring Penobscot River Resource Plan.
- Creation of resources to assist landowners and applicants, improve completeness of permit applications, and improve compliance with Commission rules and standards more efficiently. Update the LUPC website to make these resources directly accessible to applicants.
- Update LUPC application forms to simplify and make more user friendly.

The Bureau of Parks and Lands

BPL protects and manages some of Maine's most unique and precious natural and cultural resources and provides a diverse array of recreational and educational opportunities that deliver environmental and economic benefits for current and future generations.

The Bureau manages 48 State Parks and Historic Sites, including 12 State Park Campgrounds, contributing more than \$100 million to Maine's economy in direct and indirect benefits. In addition, the Bureau manages more than 600,000 acres of Public Lands for recreation, cultural and historic preservation, wildlife and biodiversity, water quality, and timber production. Conservation easements, leases, and management agreements bring the total land area with BPL legal involvement to over 2 million acres.

The Bureau also manages a Boating Program, Off-Road Recreational Vehicle (ATV and snowmobile) Program, Submerged Lands Program, Community Grants (Land and Water Conservation Fund, Recreational Trails Program), and the Maine Conservation Corps. The Bureau collaborates with state and federal agencies, Maine municipalities, and other groups to provide safe and high-quality recreational experiences for Mainers and our visitors through these programs.

Recent Initiatives

- After a record-setting 2020 season, Maine State Parks welcomed even more visitors in 2021. State Park campgrounds hosted more than 315,000 visitor nights, and overall day use in State Parks topped 3.2 million – fully a million more visitors than in 2005. Crowd control and COVID safety continued to be substantial challenges in 2021 and were exacerbated by challenges in hiring entry-level seasonal staff.
- After more than six years of negotiations, the Bureau acquired the 32-mile Madison Branch Rail Trail from Pan Am railways. The rail trail will connect several communities extending from Oakland to Embden. The Bureau's Off-Road Vehicle Division program funds augmented the primary funding secured from the LMF program and Northern

Border Regional Commission. The Bureau's efforts now turn to funding and work needed to convert the railbed into a multi-use trail that will support both motorized and non-motorized recreation.

- Working with Maine Coast Heritage Trust and with the support of the Town of Roque Bluffs, the Bureau added the 51-acre Pond Cove Island to Roque Bluffs State Park.
- After several years in construction, the Bureau opened the Great Circle Trail, a 35+ mile backpacking trail in the Nahmakanta Public Lands in the 100 Mile Wilderness region of Maine. With heightened outdoor use across the state, the Great Circle Trail offers a new multi-day hiking destination in a region of spectacular scenery.
- The Bureau replaced the cabs on three Public Land fire towers in northern Maine: Deboullie Mountain, Allagash Mountain, and Round Pond Mountain. These newly replaced facilities offer hikers spectacular views and provide new travel destinations in Maine's remote North Woods.
- The Bureau worked with Pulse Marketing to create a 16 -minute video (and several social media' shorts') that publicize the many values of Maine State Parks.
- After observing resource damage to fragile resources on Tumbledown Mountain, the Bureau collaborated with MFS to step up enforcement and monitoring of a camping prohibition. Together with outreach by Bureau staff and the Maine Conservation Corps, we were able to effectively communicate our policy to hikers.
- Using a grant from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, the Bureau's Grants and Outdoor Recreation Program was able to map and characterize the status of more than 650 community recreation sites across the state.

Looking Ahead

- Challenges in entry-level seasonal employment hampered management of Maine State Parks in 2021. The Bureau is optimistic that the newly implemented \$15/hour wage will enable State Parks to be sufficiently staffed.
- The Bureau has several other prominent projects in the land acquisition pipeline, including landscape-scale projects using Forest Legacy funding: East Grand Lake in the Weston area, Quill Hill/Perham Stream near Rangeley, and Chadbourne Tree Farm in the Bethel area. The Bureau also hopes to use LMF funds to acquire a key 800-acre parcel at Kennebec Highlands, and the Bureau is sponsoring more than 15 LMF proposals for local conservation projects.

Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources

I'll end with our largest bureau: The Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources (BAFRR). The Bureau supports Maine's food system and agriculture infrastructure through functions spanning technical assistance and business support, marketing and promotion, on-farm and consumer quality assurance, targeted loan and grant programs, and animal and plant health oversight, including animal welfare. The Bureau plays a critical role in ensuring that the foods consumers seek are available and safe and manages several federally funded, statewide food

assistance programs. The Maine Milk Commission, the Maine Harness Racing Commission, and the Board of Pesticides Control are also housed within the Bureau. I covered several components of the Bureau's current work earlier when I addressed emergent issues, including our deployment of CARES and ARPA funds, our response to the dairy and PFAS crises, and a suite of efforts around building markets for Maine food. Here I will touch on a few more:

Recent Initiatives

The Bureau accomplished a lot in 2021 to benefit Maine producers and consumers. This is a sampling of 2021 accomplishments:

- Under The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Bureau's Agricultural Resource Division (ARD) received USDA Foods donations in bonus offerings valued at over \$5.5 million for food-insecure Mainers in 2021. In fall 2021, we hired a new TEFAP acting director, Jimmy Durda.
- We piloted with Healthy Acadia a Farm to Food Bank TEFAP project to harvest and process blueberries that otherwise would have gone to waste, directing them into the emergency food system instead.
- ARD distributed an average of 7,500 Commodity Supplemental Food Program boxes each month to low-income seniors in Maine.
- With the help of our AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, ARD began a new monthly newsletter to service providers providing food access, working with federal food benefits, or working with senior citizens. It also launched a new periodic newsletter that ARD sends directly to senior citizens. ARD is working to increase communication in general, including surveying participating food pantries and initiating more communication directly with the pantries.
- We served 16,900 seniors through the Maine Senior Farm Share program, which provides eligible low-income seniors the opportunity to receive first-quality, fresh, local produce at no cost directly from local Maine farmers during the growing season. Ninety-eight local farms participated this year. In its second full season of implementation, the digital data management system, Maine Online Senior Share Access (MOSSA), enabled program administration to be almost entirely paperless. The Program Manager completed 15 farm visits to monitor compliance with program regulations and provide needed technical assistance to farmers.
- The Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection program underwent a rigorous tri-annual USDA audit in June and performed admirably. In addition, MMPI has increased the number of state-inspected plants from five in 2019 to eight in 2021.
- Also, pursuant to LD 493, we're working to identify and address bottlenecks in the meat supply chain.
- The Maine Hemp Program undertook a robust stakeholder engagement effort to solicit feedback on potential hemp regulation. It further conducted a 50-state survey to understand how other states regulated hemp – either with their own USDA-approved state licensing programs or by having producers directly license with USDA. We

submitted the Hemp Program's report to the Legislature on December 15. The Hemp Program also submitted a State Plan to USDA for approval under the USDA Final Rule, contingent on specific legislative changes to bring the State into compliance.

- The Board of Pesticides Control staff successfully secured a contract to offer online pesticide applicator licensing exams in February 2022. With over 3000 licensed pesticide applicators in Maine, this option will be more convenient for the applicants and save BPC staff resources.
- The Animal Welfare Program has taken tangible steps to assess and improve its Companion Animal Sterilization Fund, otherwise known as the Help Fix ME (HFM) program. The State established the program to encourage qualified pet owners to sterilize their cats and dogs and subsidize those sterilizations. Recent improvements include raising by 50% the reimbursement rates to participating veterinarians. Feral cat co-pays will also be waived, and the program continues to make improvements to invoice processing time frames.
- The ARD group continued to build out the [Real Maine](#) branding and marketing program connecting consumers to Maine agricultural producers, including creating radio, TV, and holiday-specific ads and building out a trip-planning itinerary tool on the website. They also encouraged people to get to know Maine's businesses via the new Real Maine "Harvesting Maine" podcast. ARD further hosted and/or coordinated several events connecting people with Maine farm products and the best of Maine, including helping launch the Maine Fiber Trail, hosting the virtual Maine Agricultural Trades Show in 2021, coordinating the 2021 Open Farm Day, and operating the Maine Building at the Eastern States Exhibition (the "Big E"), which was in person this year.
- The ARD program also planned and hosted producers at the New England Produce Council trade show in Boston in September. This was the first show we had attended since 2019 due to COVID cancellations.
- Twenty-four agricultural fairs took place after a year of cancellations. Fairs worked hard to navigate COVID protocols and follow CDC recommendations, and to host record crowds as safely as possible.
- The Division of Quality Assurance and Regulation (QAR) successfully closed out a five-year grant with the FDA to implement the Produce Safety Rule (PSR) of the Food Safety Modernization Act. In addition, QAR secured the first year of funding for a second five-year Cooperative Agreement to implement the PSR. In September, we hired a full-time program supervisor and have successfully submitted the first mid-year report.
- QAR resumed full FDA contract activities in 2021 and performed the following audits and inspections: 15 USDA Country of Origin Labeling audits at retail establishments; 10 FDA GMP Manufactured Food inspections at food manufacturing facilities, and 15 FDA Seafood HACCP Manufactured Food inspections at seafood manufacturing facilities.
- After 70 storied years, racing at Scarborough Downs came to an end in 2020. The Maine harness racing industry—with the support and assistance from the Maine State Harness

Racing Commission—successfully transitioned Southern Maine racing with a new commercial track licensee: First Track Investments.

- A typical Farms for the Future RFA solicits 3-7 applications; this year we received 19. The RFA stated we would make five awards, but ARD is exploring whether we can accept up to ten farms in this cohort.
- Staff have been actively drafting and implementing the Working Farmland Access and Protection Program to streamline and expand LMF's farmland protection work.
- Staff worked with the Agricultural Water Management Board to identify short-term and long-term priority actions that address agricultural water planning needs and support sustainable water source identification and development.
- The Certified Seed Rules (Chapter 252) were amended this year to provide flexibility with mandatory post-harvest testing of seed potatoes.

Looking Ahead

These are some of the things on the 2022 docket:

- Complete the assessment work relating to the new Agriculture, Food, and Forest Products Investments Fund and Board per LD 1733 and work to build out the Board in a transparent and efficient fashion.
- Review findings of the report to the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations To Study the Impact of Policies Regarding Agriculture, Access to Land, Access to Grants and Access to Financing on African American and Indigenous Farmers in the State and identify ways to improve DACF's engagement with these communities, improve access to existing state support, and support the potential design of new programs as a result of the report.
- Build out the Maine Healthy Soils Program with partner organizations and the new State Soil Scientist (hiring process underway).
- Pursue meat and poultry processing training and development opportunities through ongoing discussions with DOL, DOC, and UMCE. Continue to support the meat and poultry processing industry through state inspection services, ideally boosted by additional staff through the supplemental budget process.
- Expand the Real Maine program, including robust producer engagement with the website, enhanced regional advertising, and, if safe, resume DACF's full in-person Agricultural Trades Show to support Maine producers' effort to build new markets.
- Improve upon Maine Senior Farm Share's 95% redemption rate, strategically recruiting farmers to serve geographic regions without a participating farmer currently, and recruiting and retaining minority farmers (e.g., farmers of color, LGBTQ farmers) to participate in the program. In 2022 we also plan to maintain existing partnerships and develop new ones, including AARP's Age-Friendly Communities and Libraries.
- Continue improving DACF's emergency food program's communications with program partners, including hosting periodic listening sessions with partner agencies, sharing

more information with them via e-mail, and collecting feedback more frequently via surveys and other methods.

- Review and pursue new USDA funding opportunities to increase the amount of local food in our emergency food network and to serve previously underserved communities.
- Continue to refine the new Working Farmland Access and Protection Program and work with applicants throughout the process to see the first project(s) approved and funded.
- Introduce an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) education campaign aimed at the public. This will provide an opportunity to introduce the Board of Pesticides Control and how it works to promote an understanding of IPM.

Transitions

Dedicated public servants retire every year. But perhaps because of the pandemic and our limited ability to gather and properly celebrate, this year's departures seem particularly poignant. In no order (because all these people had remarkable careers), these are some of the people we said goodbye to:

- BRILUP Director and State Geologist Bob Marvinney after more than 30 years of service
- Matt Laroche from the Allagash Waterway after more than 40 years of service
- Charlene Daniels from Parks Reservations after more than 40 years of service
- Tom Charles who was the Public Lands Chief Forester for over 30 years
- Chief Ranger Bill Hamilton after 42 years of service, ten as Chief Ranger
- Kathy Murray, an Integrated Pest Management Entomologist with more than 20 years of service
- Peter Voisine, a Certified Seed Inspector for over 40 years
- Ronda Stone, a Consumer Protection Inspector with over 17 years
- Jeff Gagnon, Inspection Process Analyst Coordinator with over 32 years

Thankfully, as I've noted previously, dedicated people are stepping in to fill these roles.

Closing

At the outset of my remarks, I said that we are committed to being a Department that works for all Maine people—and we do mean *all* Maine people. From recruitment for Boards and Commission to outreach for stakeholder engagement to how we craft and disseminate our RFPs, we are increasingly paying attention to who we haven't reached in the past and are developing strategies to make sure everyone feels welcome at the DACF table.

And it must be said that we accomplished all of this work against the backdrop of a grinding global pandemic. I cannot praise enough the creativity, professionalism, and resilience of DACF staff who reinvented and reinvented again ways to get this work done.

Thank you so much for your time this morning. I'm looking forward to seeing you soon for budget discussions and to a healthy and productive legislative session. Our staff and I are happy to answer any questions you may have—now or at any time in future.