



Maine Land Conservation Task Force

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To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to share Maine Audubon's resounding support for the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF) and land conservation (both public and private) generally in Maine. Maine Audubon supports LMF for a number of reasons, including its conservation of working farms, forests, and waterfronts, the outdoor recreation opportunities the program affords, as well as its economic benefits (see Question 5 for more information). However, as a wildlife conservation organization, Maine Audubon particularly values LMF because habitat conservation has been a consistent driver and result of the program. Our answers to the questions posed by the Task Force reflect our wildlife focus.

- 1. Maine, through a strong combination of public and private initiatives has achieved great success in conserving lands across the state over the past generation. Would you like to see these efforts continue? Or have we already conserved enough land?**

Yes, Maine Audubon strongly supports continued public and private initiatives to conserve land in Maine. Please refer to our answer to Question 2 for more information.

- 2. What are your priorities and vision for future land conservation efforts?**

Future land conservation efforts must prioritize diverse habitat types and landscape scale areas protected in perpetuity. Our climate is changing. As it changes, animal and plant species will move northward. Maine is uniquely positioned in that path. We must conserve diverse, landscape scale habitat to support species in a warming climate.

In addition to traditional uses of LMF funds, Maine Audubon recommends LMF put additional effort into securing lands and waters that include the following specific conservation priorities, primarily to support native fish and wildlife:

- Forestlands with existing or potential mature, structurally complex multi-aged, multi-storied stands.
- Riparian habitat along high value streams, wetlands, ponds, and lakes, especially where it intersects with other valuable habitat such as high value Brook Trout and Salmon habitat; large unfragmented, undeveloped forest blocks; and Significant Wildlife Habitat.
- Remote ponds and streams that harbor native Brook Trout and Arctic Char populations.
- Additions to the Ecological Reserve System, i.e. representative examples of each different ecosystem in each biophysical region.
- Significant Wildlife Habitats such as shorebird feeding and resting areas, significant vernal pools, deer wintering areas, and wading bird and waterfowl habitat.
- Habitat for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (see Maine's Wildlife Action Plan) and rare, threatened, or endangered plants and animals.
- Land and water within Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance.
- Community forests near population centers that can be used for recreation, selected forestry activity, and wildlife habitat.

3. What are your experiences utilizing public and private conservation lands? Do they meet your needs? Are they being well managed? What barriers are preventing you or others in your community from accessing them?

Public and private conservation lands each have their virtues. Public conservation lands, particularly Maine's Public Reserved Lands, have traditionally (and as guided by law) been managed for multiple uses, including recreation, forestry, and habitat. More work can be done to increase public awareness of and access to Maine's Public Reserved Lands. Infrastructure improvements (parking lots, trailheads, signage, and trail maintenance) could increase recreational use and stewardship of public lands. Interpretive signage at State Parks and Public Lands that highlights the ecological attributes and significance of the area would be helpful additions. However, the State and the public at large must not expect that all public and conserved lands will support all multiple uses. We must strive for balance within the "multiple use triad" (recreation, forestry, habitat) across public land holdings, not within each parcel. Furthermore, Best Management Practices and Exemplary Forestry standards must be applied wherever harvesting occurs on public lands.

4. Few other states demonstrate the breadth of private land stewardship that is found in Maine including free public recreational access. Should incentives be considered to encourage and reward landowners for engaging in sustainable land management and providing public access?

Maine Audubon is open to the idea of incentives that encourage and reward landowners for providing public access and engaging in sustainable land management that goes beyond minimum state standards and forest certification standards. However, any incentives must be balanced with the understanding that by law, wildlife and water are held in trust by (i.e. belong to) the people of Maine, and private landowners are temporary stewards of those resources. Nonetheless, many private landowners provide significant benefits to the public by allowing

access and use of their lands, and it is in the best interests of all parties (i.e. the public and private landowners) to maintain positive, working relationships. The North Maine Woods, for example, provides a valuable public service by managing 3.5 million acres of private forest land for public use. Their service attracts Maine visitors and as such, the Maine Office of Tourism might consider strategies to help support that service.

We also support promoting good stewardship of private lands. Anecdotally, we have heard that illegal dumping most often leads to landowners posting their property. The Maine Warden Service has done yeoman's work to prosecute these crimes. Maine Forest Rangers also often guard against actions that that may lead to private land postings. We encourage the Task Force to recommend that the wardens and rangers receive adequate funding to support this important work.

5. Are you supportive of providing additional public funding for land conservation in the future? If so, should it be in the form of a new Land for Maine's Future Bond issue or do you have other ideas (other states use a variety of taxes and fees)?

Yes, Maine Audubon supports a new Land for Maine's Future Bond issue because LMF enjoys tremendous public support and is a proven economic driver. Maine voters have consistently approved LMF bonds by nearly 2:1 margins since its inception over 30 years ago, which in turn has brought Maine more than \$100 million in federal and private matching funds. For every dollar of LMF bond money invested, it has brought in \$3 in matching funds, along with \$11 in benefits to Maine's economy, according to a 2012 analysis by the Trust for Public Land. Let's keep the benefits of program going!

That said, Maine Audubon is open to exploring additional strategies for directing public dollars toward land conservation, so long as it is not at the expense of LMF. For example, increasing the Meals & Lodging Tax or Sales Tax and directing some of those funds towards land protection is a way to have all users, both in-state and out-of-state, contribute to protecting and caring for these special places.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our thoughts with the Task Force.

Sincerely,



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