

II. The Planning Process and Resource Allocation System

This section describes the Bureau’s planning process for development of its management plans and the statutes and policies that guide its management decisions. The planning process includes a robust public participation effort, intended to provide input to the Bureau’s management. In addition, the Bureau is guided by statutes requiring and directing the Bureau to develop management plans, and authorizing the Bureau to also create a system of ecological reserves. Overall, management of Bureau lands is guided by the Integrated Resource Policy (IRP), which itself was developed with a significant public process. Finally, the Bureau’s forest management, where allowed under the multiple purpose management system defined by the IRP, is conducted sustainably, and is third party certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) programs. The following describes these important influences guiding the development of this Plan in further detail.

Statutory and Policy Guidance

Multiple use management plans are statutorily required for Public Reserved Lands pursuant to Title 12 MRSA § 1847 (2), and must be prepared in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the *Integrated Resource Policy* revised and adopted in December 2000 by the Bureau. The Bureau’s Integrated Resource Policy document provides further policy guidance for development of resources management plans, and applies to Parks as well as Public Reserved Lands. Title 12 MRSA § 1805 authorizes the Bureau to create a system of ecological reserves on Bureau lands identified as potential ecological reserves in 1998 by the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project. These laws and policies direct the Bureau to identify and protect important natural, ecological, and historic attributes; enhance important fisheries and wildlife habitat; provide opportunities for a variety of quality outdoor recreation experiences; and provide a sustained yield of forest products by utilizing forest management techniques and silvicultural practices that enhance the forest environment. Appendix B contains relevant statutory guidance.

Public Participation and the Planning Process

Overall, the development of management plans includes a series of steps, each involving interdisciplinary review, as well as extensive efforts to solicit and consider public comment, in order to achieve a Plan that integrates various perspectives and needs while protecting and conserving the resources of the Bureau’s lands. Appendix A provides a summary of the public review process and Bureau responses to public comments.

Resource Assessments: The first phase of the planning process includes a thorough study of the resources and opportunities available on the Central Penobscot Region’s public lands. Beginning in the winter of 2010-2011, Bureau staff undertook an intensive review of the natural and geologic, historic and cultural, fisheries and wildlife, recreation, timber and renewable resources. The Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) performed a

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natural resource inventory of Bureau lands in the region. Resource professionals from within the Bureau provided information on wildlife, ecological recreation, and timber resources. Mapping and GIS-related information was also obtained as part of this phase. The staff participated in reconnaissance field trips inventorying and characterizing the land-based resources and recreational features of the Region. A two-day trip occurred in July 2011 with a large group of staff, followed by several one day trips by smaller staff sub-groups in 2012. Some of these trips were conducted by snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles.

Issue Identification/Discussion through Public Meetings: Another component of the planning process involved conducting a variety of forums to determine and discuss management issues needing to be addressed by the Plan. These forums included a Public Scoping Session held in Milo on July 28, 2011. This meeting laid out the objectives of and approach to Bureau management plans, and sought public input on the future they'd like to see for public reserved lands in the Central Penobscot Region. A written comment period followed.

Advisory Committee Formation and Review of Preliminary Inventory and Assessment: A Public Advisory Committee was formed in 2011. The Committee was informally split into two “sub-committees” comprised of individuals with overlapping interests in all of the reserved lands in the Region. Members of this Committee were selected on the basis of their regional and local knowledge of the Bureau’s Central Penobscot Region. On September 28, 2011 this committee met in Dover-Foxcroft to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the Central Penobscot Region. The Committee met on May 22, 2012 in Dover-Foxcroft to focus on the Seboeis Unit and the newly acquired south Seboeis Lake parcel, and to finish pending business regarding the Nahmakanta Unit and the smaller public lots. Ideas from these and the public scoping meetings were incorporated into a First Draft Plan.

Advisory Committee Review of First Draft Plan: The first draft of the Plan was available to the Advisory Committee in April 2013. The Committee met on May 1, 2013 in Dover-Foxcroft to review and discuss the Draft Plan and subsequently the Advisory Committee provided comments on the draft. The Committee met once more on June 19, 2013 in Dover-Foxcroft to discuss a new proposal for changes to the road system at Nahmakanta that had not been discussed previously.

Public Meeting on the Final Draft Plan: The Final Draft Plan was posted for review on the Bureau’s website on November 15, 2013, and was presented and public comment received at a public meeting on December 4, 2013 in Milo. A written comment period was scheduled from December 4 to December 26, 2013.

Commissioner’s Review of the Proposed Plan, and Plan Adoption: Comments received on the Final Draft Plan were considered in preparing a Plan for review by the Director of the Bureau and the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. The Bureau Director and Commissioner adopted the Plan after review and approval on February ___, 2014.

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Summary of the Resource Allocation System

The Bureau's Resource Allocation System is a land management-planning tool first developed in the 1980's, and formalized in a document entitled *Integrated Resource Policy (IRP)*, adopted in December 2000. The Resource Allocation System, which assigns appropriate management based on resource characteristics and values, is based on a *hierarchy* of natural and cultural resource attributes found on the land base. The hierarchy ranks resources along a scale from those that are scarce and/or most sensitive to management activities and where dispersed recreation facilities or activities are most appropriate, to those that are less sensitive and where more intensive recreation facilities or activities may be appropriate. The resource attributes are aggregated into seven categories or "allocations".

The hierarchy of the allocation system defines the type of management that will be applied depending on the particular resource attributes present, with *dominant* and *secondary* use or management designations as appropriate to achieve an integrated, multi-use management. Allocations, from most sensitive to least, include:

- **Special Protection Areas** (including Ecological Reserves and Significant Natural Areas)
- **Backcountry Recreation Areas** (Motorized and Non-mechanized)
- **Wildlife Areas** (essential wildlife habitat, significant habitats, and specialized habitat areas and features including rare natural communities)
- **Remote Recreation Areas**
- **Visual Protection Areas**
- **Developed Recreation Areas**
- **Timber Management Areas**

Appendix C includes a more detailed description of the Resource Allocation System categories and the management direction defined for each category.

Forest Certification

In 1999 the Bureau made the decision to demonstrate exemplary forest management through participation in two nationally recognized sustainable forestry certification programs. The Bureau was awarded certification of its forestlands under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) programs in 2002. These third-party audits were conducted to determine if these lands were being managed on a sustainable basis. Successful completion of the FSC/SFI systems also qualified the Bureau to enter into the "chain of custody" program to market its "green-certified" wood. The process for enrollment in this program was completed in 2003, with certified wood now being marketed from Bureau managed lands.

The process for conducting the SFI and FSC audits was rigorous and unique in that the Bureau underwent the two audit programs simultaneously. The audit was comprised of a field analysis of forest management practices at selected sites around the state, and an

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analysis of the Bureau's financial, personnel, policy development, and record-keeping systems. A Bureau-wide certification team was implemented to address "conditions" and "minor non-conformances" stipulated in the audit reports, including: significant enhancements to forest inventory data, development of a computerized forest-modeling program, a timeline for updating management plans for the entire land base, improvements in the use of Best Management Practices to protect water quality, and new commitments to public outreach and education programs. The Bureau is required to meet these conditions within certain timeframes in order to keep its certification status in good standing over the five-year certification period.

In 2006, the Bureau hosted its first full recertification by FSC, concurrently undergoing its first surveillance audit by SFI, the latter now required under SFI's updated standards. Although the field portion took place during and immediately after a heavy November rainstorm, Best Management Practices implemented on Bureau lands were working well, and certifiers for both systems were very pleased with Bureau silviculture at all sites visited. As is usually the case, there were several conditions (now called Corrective Action Requests, or CARs) made by each certification system, which the Bureau needed to satisfy as it continues to improve its forest management which has already been certified as being exemplary. The Bureau's second full recertification audit for FSC took place in December of 2011, again in challenging weather conditions. The BPL forests have again been certified as being well managed, with only a small number of corrective action requests (now known as minor non-conformances).

Ecological Reserves

The Maine Forest Biodiversity Project (MFBP) was formed in 1994 to explore and develop strategies to help maintain Maine's existing native species and the ecosystems that contain them. The MFBP was a consensus-based collaborative effort involving approximately one hundred individuals representing a diverse spectrum of interests and opinions: landowners, sportsmen, educators, advocates for property rights, foresters, wildlife and land conservation professionals, and representatives of the scientific community, state and federal agencies, and the business community. The inventory of potential ecological reserves conducted by the MFBP took place between January 1995 and October 1997, with guidance from a twenty-member scientific advisory panel.

Based on the work by the MFBP, the Maine Legislature in 2000 authorized the designation of ecological reserves on Department of Conservation lands (12 MRSA § 1805), and 68,974 acres were designated by the Bureau of Parks and Lands Director at that time.

In accordance with the legislative intent, these ecological reserves were established as 1) benchmarks against which biological and environmental change could be measured; 2) habitats adequate to maintain viable populations of species whose habitat needs are unlikely to be met on other lands; and 3) sites for scientific research, long-term environmental monitoring, and education. In addition, public access, hunting, and fishing are among the allowed uses on ecological reserves. The ecological reserves include

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many of Maine's best examples of alpine meadows, lakes and streams, wetlands and old growth forests.

The Central Penobscot Region contains two of these ecological reserves. The largest of Maine's ecological reserves is in the Nahmakanta Unit at 11,082 acres. A 775 acre reserve at the Wassataquoik Lot comprises nearly one quarter of the acreage of the Lot with an exemplary Silver Maple Floodplain Forest. The Ecological Reserve at Nahmakanta consists of two sections straddling the Appalachian Trail and includes the watersheds of the 5th through 8th Debsconeag Lakes, and several Exemplary Natural Communities.

Beginning in 2002, the Department of Conservation worked with a multi-disciplinary committee to draft an *Ecological Reserve Monitoring Plan* to guide periodic data collection at the landscape, stand, and species levels. The monitoring program is tied closely to other statewide and nationwide forest monitoring programs that use U.S. Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) methods. To date, 387 permanent monitoring plots have been established on 12 Ecological Reserves, with ongoing monitoring work increasing the number of plots each year. The long-term monitoring program and the value of ecological reserves to this program have been recognized as models for public lands throughout the northeast.