

2022 ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

MAINE BUREAU OF PARKS AND LANDS



MAINE DEPARTMENT OF
**AGRICULTURE
CONSERVATION
& FORESTRY**



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Leaving a Legacy: Investing in Maine's Future

Maine's state parks, historic sites, and public lands have a rich tradition of serving as destinations for generations. These same parks and public lands have, for years and years, called to visitors seeking a taste of Maine's iconic natural and cultural heritage. While decades of appreciation and memories underpin the power and meaning of parks and lands, that time has taken its toll on the foundation of essential infrastructure and historic structures. Storms, heavy public use, and inevitable decay have created a long list of maintenance and replacement needs across the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) system.

While there is an enormous need to protect and enhance the public's state parks and public lands, the good news is that there is an opportunity to address these challenges. Fifty million dollars in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act is being put toward state park improvements across the state. This investment is emblematic of the spirit of and focus on keeping Maine's outdoor treasures just that - treasured resources available to generation after generation.

MAINE STATE PARKS

Making Beaches Accessible

- A mobility pathway is now available at Popham Beach State Park to improve accessibility to the beach. This project was developed by park staff in collaboration with Phippsburg residents and the I LOVE Popham Beach! community. **Beach mobility chairs are also available for visitor access to the beach.**
- A partnership between Maine State Parks and L.L. Bean made beach boxes available at Reid State Park, Crescent Beach State Park, and Popham Beach State Park. These boxes have a selection of beach products for visitors to borrow for the day while visiting Maine state park beaches.



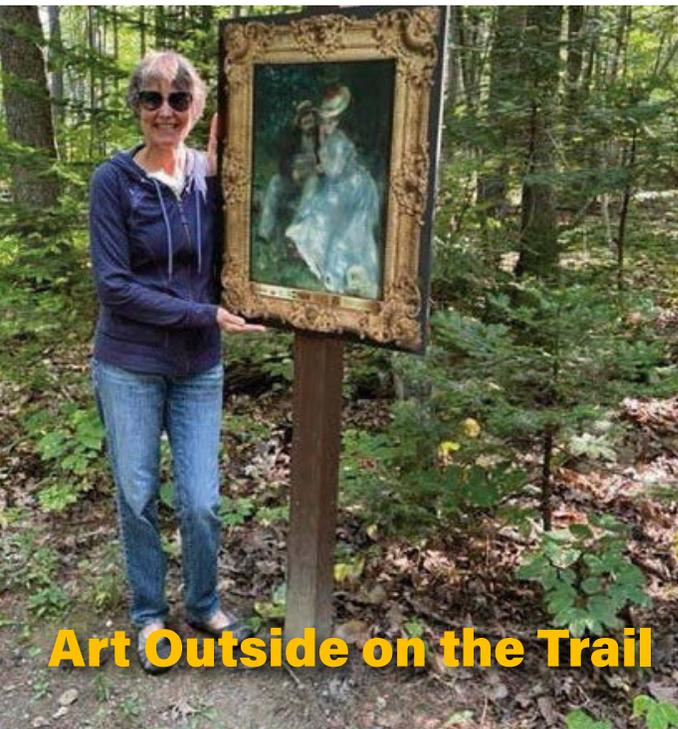
Maine people and our visitors continue to love our State Parks.

Breaking Records

- In 2022, **state park campgrounds were visited at a record level**, with more than 319,000 visitor nights recorded at the 12 parks that offer camping.
- Opening day reservations for campgrounds totaled over 9,000 transactions!
- It was another busy year overall for state parks - **more than 3.28 million people visited** one of the 48 parks and historic sites managed by BPL.

MAINE STATE PARKS

Art, Science, and Training



Art Outside on the Trail



Ranger Academy



**Sebago Lake
Living Shoreline
Project**

- BPL partnered with the **Portland Museum of Art (PMA)** and **L.L. Bean** to exhibit over two dozen reproductions of the museum's permanent collection at Sebago Lake, Bradbury Mountain, Scarborough Beach, and Wolfe's Neck Woods State Parks.
- BPL's **Ranger Academy** focuses on four pillars of training: Compliance, Enforcement, Interpretation, and Operations/Maintenance. In 2022, park staff spent two weeks focused on Interpretation, Compliance, and Enforcement.
- Sebago Lake State Park built a first-of-its-kind **living shoreline project at Songo Beach** to restore the beach and prevent future erosion. Natural materials sourced from the Park were used to build structures that capture and hold sand brought in by waves.

Investing in State Parks

In June 2022, Governor Mills visited Camden Hills State Park to announce the launch of a **\$50 million initiative to rebuild infrastructure at state parks across Maine**. This once-in-a-generation funding was part of the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan. The Bureau of Parks and Lands is using funding from this initiative and other funding sources to address safety and stewardship concerns, enable parks to accommodate continued visitor growth, and bolster Maine's vital tourism and outdoor recreation sectors.

- Projects accomplished include:
 - **Improvement and enhancement park roads** at Lily Bay, Sebago Lake, Rangeley Lake, Mt. Blue, Camden Hills, and Peaks Kenney State Parks
 - **Replacement of the bridge to Griffith Head at Reid State Park**
 - **Construction of a new ranger's cabin** at Michaud Farm on the Allagash Wilderness Waterway
 - **Redesign and improvement of the boat launch** facility at Colonial Pemaquid
- Ongoing projects include:
 - **Renovation of entrance stations and administrative offices**
 - **Improvement of bathrooms, water supply and wastewater systems**
 - **Improvement of accessible trails, and administrative offices**



The **FY23 Supplemental Budget reestablished 18 seasonal Assistant Park Ranger positions** eliminated during a prior administration. With state parks setting attendance records for the last two years, these positions are vital in managing people and natural resources at our treasured state parks.

OUTREACH

Making meaningful connections that are:

EXPERIENTIAL - providing visitors opportunities to immerse themselves in the outdoors

- The **Girl Scouts Love State Parks** weekend encourages the girls to explore and connect to nature in fun and engaging ways that foster their understanding and stewardship of the natural world.
- BPL's **Junior Ranger Program** was expanded to include all 12 state parks with campgrounds. Engaging activities encourage discovery, observation, and conservation, and foster volunteerism and learning about careers in the parks.
- Evening programs featured the **Acoustic Survey of Bats** — a partnership with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) using Echo Meter Touch devices to help participants better understand bats' ecological and economic importance while learning about current BPL/DIFW research.



INCLUSIVE - Recognizing the importance of making the outdoors welcoming for all

RELEVANT - fostering real world experiences and skill building

Teens to Trails contributed 320 volunteer hours at **Camden Hills State Park** during their Rendezvous 2022 weekend. The 55 students and 16 advisors were treated to a BPL star party that included night sky legends, wayfinding, and instruction on how to use the park telescopes.



OFF-ROAD VEHICLES



TECHNOLOGY SPOTLIGHT

The Sandy River bridge project offered a real-world opportunity for students at Foster Technical School in Farmington to **make a connection between what they learn in the classroom and what they see on their way to school.** Preliminary bridge designs were shared with the school, where students used the plans to learn about CADD modeling software and build a model of the **Sandy River Bridge** on the Whistle Stop Trail.



TRAIL PROJECTS

► Madison Branch Rail Trail

Last fall, BPL purchased a 32-mile rail line from Oakland to Embden to create a multi-use recreational trail.

► Whistle Stop Trail: Sandy River Bridge Replacement

BPL is working with the High Peaks Alliance to **connect the multi-use Whistle Stop Trail to Farmington's center by replacing the bridge over the Sandy River.** The new 336-foot-long crossing will be Maine's longest pedestrian, single-span snowmobile bridge in Maine. The project has been championed by Senator Collins, Senator King, and Representative Golden, and was recently awarded \$2,041,000 in federal funding.

BY-THE-NUMBERS

Snowmobile Program

88,776 snowmobile registrations

12,989 miles of snowmobile trails

126,432 volunteer hours trail work and grooming

ATV Program

\$626,500 for 79 club grants

\$2.1 M for 47 municipal grants

5,715 miles of ATV trails maintained

3,595 miles inspected with Trail Inspection App

SUBMERGED LANDS

2022 SHORE AND HARBOR MANAGEMENT FUND GRANTS

- **Woolwich**
Installed an ADA boat ramp and float system at Nequasset Lake
- **Belfast**
Replaced two floats at the town's public landing
- **Poland**
Reconstructed a boat ramp for public access on Tripp Lake
- **Sorrento**
Replaced two floats at the town's dock system
- **Saco**
Replaced a deck crane at the town's public pier
- **Maine Island Trail**
Continued stewardship of island campsites

Most of the land in Maine that is covered with water is publicly owned. **BPL's Submerged Lands program helps maintain a balance between public trust rights for navigation and recreation and the demand for private and commercial uses of these lands.** Program funds from leasing and log salvage are used to support municipal harbor planning and public access improvements.

BOATING AND NAVIGATION

Boating Facilities Grants

- Aroostook County Commissioners for work at the Cross Lake Boat Launch
- Town of Carmel for work at the Damascus Landing

2022 Facility Renovations

- Installation of planks, riprap, and concrete mat to improve driveway access and extend tidal use at Colonial Pemaquid State Historic Site
- Repaving and repair of Johnson Bay Boat Launch



Richmond Maintenance Facility Renovations

Installation of a new navigational aids building and a heated carpentry shop will allow staff to work more efficiently. The navigational aids building will enable staff to store the truck and boat together, eliminating the need to unhitch equipment every night. And a new second driveway makes it easier for longer vehicles to use the site. Construction began in July 2022 and will be completed in Spring 2023.



PUBLIC LANDS

Timber Management and Wildlife

In addition to the overall exemplary forest management across the Bureau's public lands, several projects stand out for their ecological values:

- **Deer wintering areas were enhanced** at Dallas Plantation North and Duck Lake. Harvesting increased light to promote the growth of tree species such as spruce, cedar, and fir that will provide food and cover sooner than if these stands were not managed.
- **Habitat improvements at Scopan** focused on amphibians, small mammals, cavity-nesting species, fungi, and invertebrates by increasing the levels of large dead wood (both standing and downed).
- **BPL completed five years of surveys, contributing to DIFW's Maine Breeding Bird Atlas project.** Final survey work included a priority block of forest at Deboullie Public Land and a marsh bird survey at Seboeis Public Land. This data will contribute to our understanding of bird diversity and distribution on public lands.

Sustainable Forest Management

The Bureau has a **40+ year history** of exemplary forest management, yielding **some of the best-stocked timberlands in Maine**. Among the many values BPL's forests provide, they sequester an average of 100,000 metric tons of carbon each year which is enough to absorb the total carbon emissions of more than 6,000 Maine residents.

Management of public lands is almost entirely funded by revenues generated from timber harvesting. This revenue pays for recreational infrastructure (trails, campsites, and roads) as well as wildlife habitat and ecological protection activities. Other public benefits include economic contributions through recreational use and employment opportunities for contractors and materials for mills.

MACHIAS RIVER PRESCRIBED BURN

BPL and Maine Forest Service Rangers worked together to **conduct a controlled burn at the Machias River Corridor** Public Land Unit. Under near-perfect fall weather conditions for a "prescribed burn," approximately 10 acres were successfully burned **to promote the existing blueberry ground cover** and help regenerate new seedlings in a declining stand of red pine. This was also **a valuable opportunity for Maine Forest Rangers to safely conduct training operations with live fire conditions.**

PUBLIC LANDS RECREATION PARTNERSHIPS



Partnerships with trail groups continue to grow in significance across Maine Public Lands.

- The Carabassett Region chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association is expanding riding opportunities by building **a new trail network on the Wyman and Crocker Mountain Public Lands.**
- The Moosehead Outdoor Alliance has established **12 miles of new mountain bike trails linking downtown Greenville with Little Moose Public Land.**
- The **Northern Forest Canoe Trail** worked with Western Region staff to add two campsites on Long Pond (Moose River), replace a privy at Hardscrabble Point north of Mount Kineo, and remove debris near Sugar Island campsites on Moosehead Lake.



TRAIL WORK BY TEENS

In September, **18 Portland-area high school students and 3 teachers** assisted the Maine Appalachian Trail Club volunteer and sawyer Steve Niles in clearing his adopted trail section on Little Bigelow Mountain. Students were recruited from Portland, Deering, Casco Bay, and South Portland High Schools and included five teenagers originally from Angola who recently immigrated to the U.S. The students hiked up Little Bigelow Mountain, cleared the trail of blowdowns, and trimmed brush from the summit to Safford Notch Campsite. **The students hiked 9 miles while working to improve trails on Little Bigelow Mountain.**

TUMBLEDOWN MCC WORK

A **Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) trail crew** and Bureau staff continued trail work at Tumbledown Mountain Public Land. The trail crew built a **22-step rock stairway, 2 large check steps, 3 large rock bars to prevent erosion, added 17 stepping stones, cleared blowdowns, and covered and closed unauthorized trails to decrease erosion and help keep hikers on official trails.** In addition to a camping restriction, education and compliance efforts helped inform hikers about how to protect sensitive resources. All trail work was planned to avoid impacts on nesting peregrine falcons.

LOGGING & FORESTRY EDUCATION GRANTS

BPL awarded a second round of one-time \$50,000 competitive grants to the St. John Valley Technical Center in Frenchville and Brewer High School. They will use the funds to buy forestry equipment that will serve hundreds of students for many years and to support ongoing forestry education programs intended to help train and inspire the next generation of Maine loggers. BPL has provided a total of \$250,000 in grants to five programs in Maine.



PUBLIC LANDS

TECHNOLOGY SPOTLIGHT



USING LiDAR FOR HABITAT MANAGEMENT

At Scraggly Lake Public Land, the Bureau is using Enhanced Forest Inventory (EFI) and inventory plot data in growth and yield models to **assess current and future deer habitat** under a variety of management scenarios.

The **EFI is developed using light detection and ranging (LiDAR) data which measures various surfaces using laser and GPS technology from aircraft.**

This project will guide management to ensure continued high-quality deer habitat in coordination with the sustainable management of other forest resources.

Once complete, resource managers from both BPL and DIFW will evaluate whether the same approach can be used in other deer wintering areas managed by BPL.

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES

Ecological Reserves have three primary functions: as benchmarks for monitoring change over time, to protect sensitive habitat, and as sites for research and education. DACF's Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) conducts monitoring and collects baseline ecological data for the Bureau's Reserve inventory. There are now 540 permanent plots on 18 State Reserves.

SPOTLIGHT: BIGELOW PRESERVE

- ▶ The **Bigelow Preserve Public Reserve Land is nearly 35,000 acres in size**. More than 2/3 of the property is sustainably managed for timber resources. The remainder is managed as an Ecological Reserve.
- ▶ The **Bigelow Preserve has been the most popular Ecological Reserve for independent scientific research**, and BPL has issued 10 Special Use Permits for research at Bigelow since 2020.
- ▶ In 2022, MNAP and BPL staff visited lower elevation areas on the south side of Bigelow that contained old forest characteristics, including an abundance of trees over 150 years old, large cavity trees, and large downed logs on the forest floor. An outcome of this work is that **BPL has identified approximately 1,400 acres to consider adding to the existing Ecological Reserve**. This proposed change will be reviewed through the management planning process.
- ▶ Since 2002, the **MNAP has conducted a continuous scientific forest inventory in Ecological Reserves**, with measurements on forest structure (tree diameters, condition, and height) and composition (tree and vascular plant inventory) collected every 10 years. In 2022, Bigelow forest inventory plots were re-sampled for the third time, reflecting 20 years of change.
- ▶ Forest inventory data is still being analyzed. However, incremental changes are observed at the plot level, such as the mortality of shade-intolerant species like quaking aspen replaced by shade-tolerant species like sugar maple.

Maine's Ecological Reserves Help Us

- ▶ **Monitor change over time**
- ▶ **Protect sensitive habitats**
- ▶ **Conduct research & education**

MAINE CONSERVATION CORPS

564

visitors attended
educational
programs

40

environmental
programs
created

400.48

acres surveyed
for cottontails

40

site sampled for
soil lead testing

215.8

miles of trail
maintained

7.4

miles of new
trail created

141

locations
surveyed for
invasive plants

186

water testing
sites sampled

74

educational
events held

372

boats inspected

100

GIS resources
developed

56

volunteer
events held

"We work on trails and build people"

In 2022, **69 MCC AmeriCorps members** served **32 sites** to accomplish a wide array of conservation initiatives.

Since 1983, MCC's conservation projects have provided conservation employment, education, engaging volunteers, and placements that **promote leadership and personal development** through a strong tradition of conservation and natural resource stewardship.

Those who serve with the MCC gain an understanding of how conservation efforts can help protect wilderness settings and learn how to apply their acquired skills and knowledge to future career goals.

COMMUNITY, CONSERVATION, AND RECREATION FUNDING

These state and federal programs provide critical funding to conserve land and improve outdoor recreation opportunities in Maine and across the nation.

▶ LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

In 2022, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program **awarded \$3,793,270** for eleven new grants. The program also added a new full-time position focused solely on LWCF in Maine. This is the first staffing investment in the program since 1991.

▶ LAND ACQUISITION FUNDING

FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

Maine leads the nation by having conserved over 741,000 acres of forestland through this program. **BPL was awarded \$3,600,000 in FY23 Forest Legacy funding** to acquire a working forest conservation easement on 13,830 acres in Rangeley Plantation.

▶ RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

The Federal Highway Administration provides funds to develop and maintain trails for motorized and non-motorized recreation. Funding for Maine projects flow through Maine DOT to BPL. In 2022, **RTP awarded \$1,008,089** for 19 recreational trail projects across the state.

LAND FOR MAINE'S FUTURE

BPL has been awarded \$3,567,500 from the Land for Maine's Future program to support six projects in Kennebec, Oxford, Aroostook, Washington, and Cumberland counties. Ranging from 7 acres to 10,665 acres, these projects represent a variety of recreation, habitat, and conservation values.



Outdoor Recreation Investments Map

Many of our favorite playgrounds, ballfields, and neighborhood trails were made possible by the LWCF program. The new Outdoor Recreation Investments Map features **870 LWCF-assisted outdoor recreation projects in Maine.**

This terrific new web resource is available to the public and shows the importance of having outdoor places a 10- or 15-minute drive from our homes.



LAND ACQUISITION & PLANNING

➤ Kennebec Highlands

813 acres of highland wild blueberry fields, wildlife habitat, and recreational lands in the towns of Vienna and New Sharon have been permanently protected for outdoor recreation. The newly acquired lands represent the largest inholding within the Kennebec Highlands Public Land. The acquisition builds on more than 20 years of partnership between BPL and 7 Lakes Alliance to conserve 6,800 acres across this significant landscape.

➤ Rangeley Lake State Park

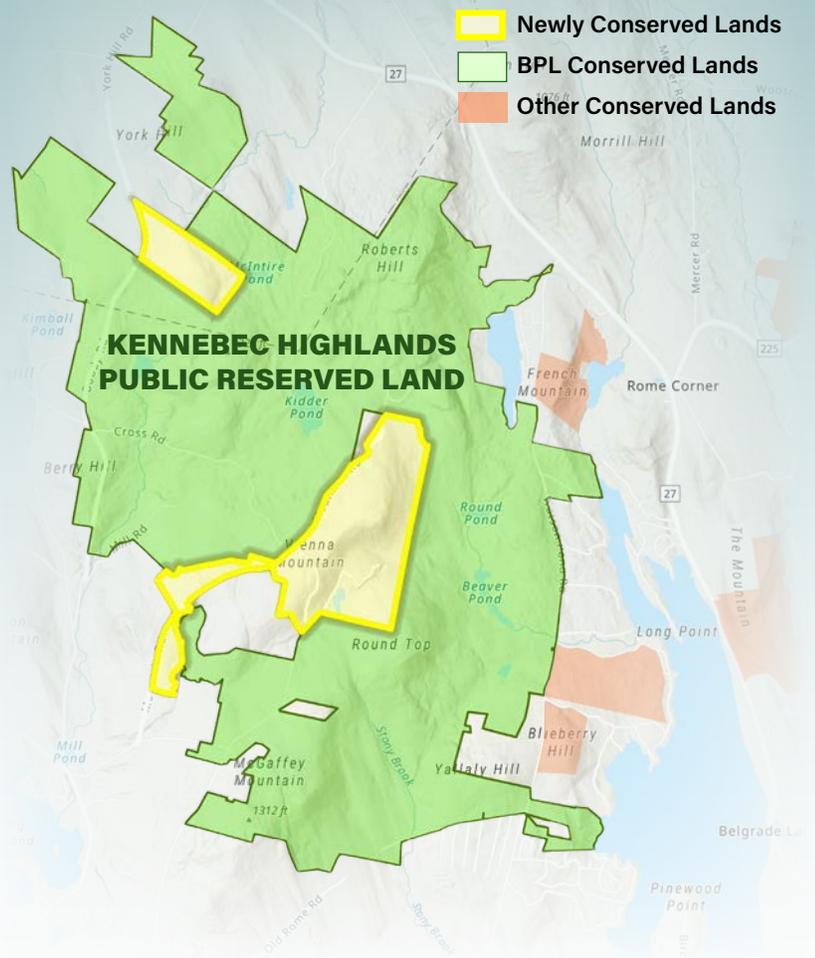
In December 2022, 8 acres adjacent to Rangeley Lake State Park were donated to BPL by Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust.

➤ Little Concord Pond

In December 2022, the Bureau acquired 175 acres adjacent to Little Concord Pond State Park in Woodstock.

"With remote ponds and miles of trails, the Kennebec Highlands is one of central Maine's best-kept secrets. Now with the addition of a scenic hilltop and hundreds of acres of beautiful fields and forests, the Highlands is an even bigger public asset to the region."

Andy Cutko, BPL Director



➤ Management Planning

In 2022, the Bureau adopted the management plan for the Tumbledown/Mount Blue State Park region, fulfilling its commitment to developing 15-year management plans for each public reserved and non-reserved land unit. This completion marks a major milestone! Since 2007, the Bureau has worked steadily to adopt 12 regional plans that together cover most of the state, plus unit-specific plans for Kennebec Highlands and Pineland Public Lands.



New Ranger Housing

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway (AWW) now has housing for all of the rangers that work hard on the river. The Farm Brook Cabin project was completed in November and will provide housing for the Assistant Ranger who works in the Michaud Farm District of the AWW. This district is just before Allagash Falls and the Town of Allagash and is one of the most vital communication hubs on the waterway. The Michaud Farm Rangers provide education and information to visitors of the AWW.

Staff Training

AWW Rangers participated in a new staff training in 2022. Two days and one night were filled with skill building. **Rangers learned camping skills, boat handling, camp inspection, and deep water and fast water rescue skills.** This training will help AWW Rangers better serve visitors to the AWW. The AWW also hosted its first-ever staff **Chainsaw Safety Instructor training.** This in-house, rigorous Train-the-Trainer program was conducted by Maine Forest Service Rangers. Six state park staff participated in the training.



Natural Resources Inventory Project

Noted ecologist Janet McMahon has been collecting comprehensive ecosystem data for the AWW Foundation's Natural Resources Inventory Project. Janet has spent 10 weeks over the last two years exploring the waterway, especially places seldom visited by humans. Janet spent the winter compiling her data and will share her findings with the Foundation this spring.



ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY



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Approved November 2023



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