



2021-2022

RESEARCH + MANAGEMENT REPORT

Land Acquisition & Water Access Programs





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Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife protects and manages Maine’s fish and wildlife and their habitats, promotes Maine’s outdoor heritage, and safely connects people with nature through responsible recreation, sport, and science.

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Project Funding

These studies are financed in part through Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Funds under Projects 88D and 87R and through State Wildlife Grants.

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife receives Federal funds from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Accordingly, all Department programs and activities must be operated free from discrimination in regard to race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes that he or she has been discriminated against should write to The Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S.



Meet the Land Acquisition & Water Access Group



Bethany Atkins

Land Acquisition and Habitat Grants Biologist

Bethany manages the Department’s land acquisition program and purchase of Wildlife Management Area lands. Bethany also manages the Department’s responsibilities to several state and federal grant programs focused on land protection, public access, and habitat restoration including the Land for Maine’s Future Program, Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program, Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, and National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program. She works closely with agency, land trust and municipal partners to facilitate conservation work across the state.



Alison Truesdale

Land Acquisition Assistant

Alison works on all aspects of site assessment, due diligence, and grant applications for the acquisition of land for habitat conservation and public access to state waters. Alison is responsible for keeping the GIS conservation and water access data up to date; she also coordinates with state grant applicants to guide them through the processes of obtaining grants from the Land for Maine’s Future Program and Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund.



Diano Circo

Chief Planner & Federal Aid Coordinator

Diano directs the Water Access Program and manages acquisition, design, construction, maintenance, and recreational use of the Department’s 168 water access facilities. Diano represents the Department on a number of issues related to public access. He also coordinates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in policy development and oversight of the Department’s federal grants.

LAND ACQUISITION & WATER ACCESS PROGRAMS

Acquiring and managing land is the most permanent activity MDIFW undertakes to implement its mission of protecting and managing Maine's fish and wildlife and their habitats, promoting Maine's outdoor heritage, and safely connecting people with nature through responsible recreation, sport, and science.

In 2021-2022, the Land Acquisition and Water Access programs completed 16 projects covering 15,890 acres. 2,057 acres became state-owned, MDIFW-managed lands. The remaining 13,833 acres were acquired by other conservation organizations with grants secured by MDIFW. We also secured one easement, providing public access to Salt Pond in Blue Hill.

Land Acquisition Program

The goal of MDIFW's Land Acquisition Program is to provide a statewide, ecologically based system of land holdings for the protection and enhancement of important fish and wildlife habitats, while also providing opportunities for public access and recreation. When MDIFW acquires land, we work to restore or improve its habitat and public access, then manage it and make it available for public use in perpetuity by incorporating it into MDIFW's Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system. We carefully evaluate each parcel we purchase to make sure it meets Department goals, which may include protecting and managing important habitats, improving public recreational access, or developing or expanding WMAs. MDIFW also works closely with conservation partners, towns, and land trusts to secure funding for their habitat conservation and restoration projects.

FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDING

Most of MDIFW's land acquisition funding comes from federal and state sources. Federal sources include competitive National Coastal Wetlands Conservation grants, North American Wetland Conservation Act grants, and Recovery Land Acquisition grants, as well as noncompetitive Pittman Robertson Fund grants that are allocated to states. State grant sources include the Land for Maine's Future program, Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, and the state Duck Stamp fund, as well as donations from private foundations, landowners, and partner organizations.

In 2021, after many years of no new funding, the Legislature funded the Land for Maine's Future Program, the state's primary land conservation grant fund, with \$40 million to be granted to deserving conservation projects over the subsequent four years. In the first year, MDIFW received two separate grants which will contribute significantly to our land acquisitions in Regions F and G. We also served as the designated State agency for another 11 land conservation projects being completed by partnering land trusts. On these projects, MDIFW commits to permanently partner with the conservation landowner to oversee the parcels' long-term stewardship.

SPORTSMAN'S ACCESS GRANT

In late 2021, MDIFW completed its work under the federal Sportsman's Access Grant. This grant was funded through Pittman Robertson dollars matched with state funds including a Land for Maine's Future grant. We used it to acquire 18 parcels totaling nearly 3,700 acres in parts of central Maine that had little public access for hunting, fishing, and trapping. The largest parcel included over 1,000 acres of MDIFW's new Plymouth Bog WMA in Burnham. We purchased another 1,000 acres along the Carlton Pond headwaters in Detroit, as well as 425 acres in Embden, to establish the Fahi Pond WMA and provide previously non-existent public access to Hancock Pond. All of these properties now have permanent public access to benefit Maine sportsmen.

DEER HABITAT CONSERVATION

MDIFW has long worked with the Land Use Planning Commission and private landowners to improve deer habitat management on private lands through voluntary cooperative agreements. LD 404, An Act to Conserve Deer, directs MDIFW to add a new tool to its deer conservation efforts: acquisition and management of deer habitat by the Department. In the past year, MDIFW has actively cultivated projects important for deer, with projects underway in Regions D (Rangeley), F (Reed Deadwater-Juniper Brook), and G (Woodland and Washburn). After we close on these properties, they will become new WMAs on which our highest management priority will be to restore or enhance year-round white-tailed deer habitat.



Sandy Cove, Harrington

NATIONAL COASTAL WETLANDS CONSERVATION GRANT FOR SANDY COVE

Maine estuaries provide essential feeding and resting grounds for shorebird species as they acquire the energy stores they need for their long and arduous migrations between northern breeding grounds and southern wintering areas. The Mill, Harrington, and Pleasant River estuaries support some of the highest shorebird use in Maine. A recent single bird count recorded over 1,700 shorebirds using the flats around Sandy Cove in Harrington. Great blue herons, bald eagles, osprey, American black ducks, bufflehead, long-tailed ducks, and common eider also utilize the flats, Lords Island, and the nearby uplands.

One necessary tool to protect shorebird species is the prevention of shoreline disturbance and development. In 2021, MDIFW was awarded funds from the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program to protect the Sandy Cove shoreline. Working with willing landowners, we acquired five parcels, securing Sandy Cove's entire north side and most of the undeveloped frontage on its south side. The state now owns a total of 87 acres at Sandy Cove, with 1.5 miles of shorefront along one of Maine's most important shorebird areas.

Water Access Program

Maine has an extensive and diverse water resource: nearly a million acres of lakes and ponds and thousands of miles of river brooks, streams, and coastline. MDIFW's Water Access Program works to ensure legal, appropriate, adequate, and equitable means of public access to waters where recreational opportunities exist. All MDIFW-owned water access sites provide a wide range of opportunities from trailered boat launches to hand-carry facilities, shore fishing, and walk-in access.

Population demographics and associated attitudes regarding public use are changing, and waterfront real estate costs are increasing as supply decreases. Continuing to make investments that secure public access is an urgent priority to ensure future generations have adequate fishing and boating access to public waters throughout the state.

In 1995, a Strategic Plan for Providing Public Access to Maine Waters for Boating and Fishing outlined priorities for acquiring and developing water access in Maine. These included preventing the loss of access sites, dispersing demand among priority waters, maintaining serviceability of existing sites, and expanding public access in areas where it is inadequate.

FEDERAL FUNDING

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Sport Fish Restoration Program – This program was created through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, which instituted federal excise taxes on sporting equipment used by hunters, anglers, boaters, archers, and recreational shooters. Revenues from these taxes are to be used for conservation, education, and public access. Federal taxes on motorboat and small engine fuels are also a source of funding.

STATE FUNDING

- **Boat Launch Facilities Fund (Maine Sportsman License Plate)** – Each initial plate purchased provides \$14 to the Boat Launch Facilities Fund, which is managed by the MDIFW Water Access Program. Subsequent renewals provide 15% of the renewal fee (\$3) to the fund. Since its inception, the sportsman plate has generated an average of \$124,704 per year for the Water Access Program.
- **Boating Facilities Fund (Maine Gas Tax)** – Through a cooperative agreement, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry allots a portion of state gas tax revenues attributable to motorboats to MDIFW’s Boating Facilities Fund, up to \$150,000 each fiscal year.

- Creating a range of ADA-accessible water access opportunities and improvements
- Developing a broad-based maintenance and improvement regime at Department-owned access sites
- Implementing strategies to ensure public access sites are visible and easy to locate
- Engaging and supporting private landowners who provide traditional access to ensure their land remains open to the public
- Refining engineering designs to create low-maintenance access with long-term site durability

TOGUS POND FAMILY FISHING AREA, AUGUSTA

In the fall of 2021, MDIFW opened the Togus Pond Family Fishing Area along Route 105. It’s Maine’s first multimodal, fully ADA-accessible fishing facility. The site offers two hand-carry launches and two casting platforms on Togus and Lower Togus Ponds connected by paved pathways, along with a fully accessible trailered boat launch on Togus Pond. The project was the culmination of decades of work by the Department to acquire the appropriate lands and design a facility that would remove barriers for anglers and boaters with mobility challenges.



Lower Togus Pond Casting Platform

ANNABESSACOOK LAKE ACCESS PROJECT, WINTHROP

In the fall of 2022, the Department opened a new trailered water access facility on Annabessacook Lake. Located on Holmes Road, it is the lake’s first developed public access facility (a previous rudimentary public site was closed by the Town of Monmouth due to safety and environmental concerns). In 2019, working closely with the Annabessacook Lake Improvement Association, we were able to acquire 13 acres on the lake. The new facility is fully ADA-accessible and provides parking near the water for 11 vehicles with trailers, plus another eight trailered vehicle parking spots at the entrance.

When funds are available, the Water Access Program also utilizes competitive state funding programs to assist with land acquisition and site development. These programs include:

- a) Land for Maine’s Future
- b) Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
- c) Shore and Harbor Management Fund

Some of the actions we are taking to help improve public water access include:

- Identifying and updating priorities for boating, shore fishing, and walk-in remote pond access, and developing and implementing corresponding strategies to retain or secure access



Annabessacook Lake Water Access Site in Monmouth