

Western Mountains Region Management Plan



View of Mahoosuc Mountains from Table Rock

**Maine Department of Conservation
Bureau of Parks and Lands**



January 4, 2011

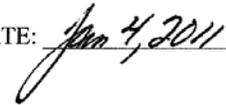
ADOPTION CITATION

In accordance with the provisions of 12 M.R.S.A. § 1847(2) and consistent with the Bureau of Parks and Lands Planning Policy and Integrated Resource Policy for Public Reserved and Nonreserved Lands, State Parks, and State Historic Sites (revised December 18, 2000), this Management Plan for the Western Mountains Region is hereby adopted.

RECOMMENDED:

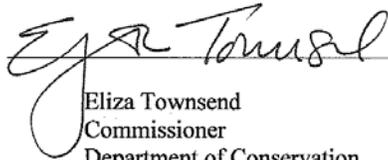


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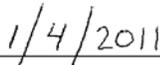


DATE:



Eliza Townsend
Commissioner
Department of Conservation

ADOPTED DATE:



REVISION DATE:

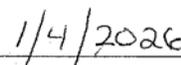


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Acknowledgements

The Western Mountains Region Management Plan was prepared through a collaborative effort involving contributions from the following Bureau of Parks and Lands staff:

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In addition, much of the material in the Plan related to natural resources, especially geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, natural communities, wetlands, ecological processes, and rare plant and animal species was provided by the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP). MNAP staff conducted natural resource inventories for the Bureau and provided a detailed report, written by Andy Cutko, which is quoted from directly and paraphrased throughout the Plan.

Information about historic resources was provided by Tom Desjardin of BPL, and information about pre-history is from the Maine Historical Society's website, mainememory.net.

The Bureau also acknowledges the helpful participation of the Western Mountains Region Management Plan Advisory Committee (Appendix A), and the many members of the public who participated in public meetings held during the preparation of this Plan and submitted comments on the Plan (Appendix A).

I. Introduction

About This Document

This document constitutes a fifteen-year Management Plan for 66,471 acres of state park and public reserved land in the Western Mountains region of Maine managed by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (the Bureau). The Plan summarizes the character of the region and the planning process, but its primary function is to 1) provide a description of the resources found on the properties addressed, 2) describe management issues identified by members of the public and Bureau staff, and 3) put forth management allocations and recommendations to be implemented over the next fifteen-year period.

One objective of the Plan is to provide a balanced spectrum of opportunities across the Bureau's lands and parks, keeping in mind the available opportunities in the Western Mountains region as a whole. In developing the management recommendations for each parcel, the Bureau has considered this broader perspective.

The Western Mountains Region Management Plan is also a commitment to the public that these properties will be managed within prescribed legislative mandates and in accordance with the Bureau's *Integrated Resource Policy* and its stated mission and goals. Future revisions to these commitments will occur only after providing opportunities for public comment. The Plan provides guidance to Bureau staff with responsibility for managing these properties, including a degree of flexibility in achieving the stated objectives. This document is not, however, a plan of operations.

An important aspect of the management of public lands is monitoring and evaluation of proposed management activities in terms of stated objectives. This Plan describes monitoring and evaluation procedures for recreational use, wildlife management, management of ecological reserves, and timber management.

The fifteen-year duration for this Plan is a departure from previous plans prepared for these lands. In 2007, the Bureau amended its policy to increase the Plan interval from 10 to 15 years. This change brings the Plan interval into closer alignment with Bureau forest management plan prescriptions, and most other resource management concerns other than recreation. The Bureau recognizes that some resources and management issues, most notably recreation, may undergo more rapid or unanticipated change over time. Thus, in addition to the fifteen year scheduled Plan revision, a review of current issues and progress on implementing the Plan's recommendations will be undertaken every five years, with a status report issued at that time to the advisory committee. If amendments to the Plan are then proposed, there will be an opportunity for public review and comment prior to their adoption. At the fifteen year interval, the Bureau will undertake a full review and revision of the Plan. The Bureau recognizes that several of the stated objectives will require longer than the fifteen year Plan period to achieve.

What Parks and Lands are included in the Western Mountains Region?

The Western Mountains region, for the purposes of this management plan, is the setting in which Bureau lands are located, beginning at the point where Maine's border transitions from being shared with New Hampshire to being shared with Quebec (in Bowmantown Township). The Rangeley Lakes region is in the center of this planning region, and the southern end includes Bethel area and the Town of Gilead.

State Parks and Public Reserved Lands of the Western Mountains Region

	Acres
Grafton Notch State Park	3,191
Rangeley Lake State Park	899
Mahoosuc Unit	31,764 fee 10,093 easement
Four Ponds Unit	6,018
Richardson Unit	18,484
Bald Mountain Unit	1,873
Dallas Plantation Lots North and South	439
Davis Lot	960 (common and undivided)
Lincoln Plantation Lots West and East	919
Magalloway Plantation Lot	1,044
Rangeley Plantation Lot	469
Stetsontown Lot	41
Township E (Smalls Falls) Lot	370
Total	66,471 (fee acres)

The parks and lands included in this plan contain an exceptional variety of recreational resources spanning the spectrum from rugged backcountry to accessible drive-to experiences. Ecological resources include unique alpine and sub-alpine communities, rare plant populations and connecting matrix forests. Fisheries resources and hunting opportunities abound, as well as productive timber resources critical to maintaining the public reserved lands system.

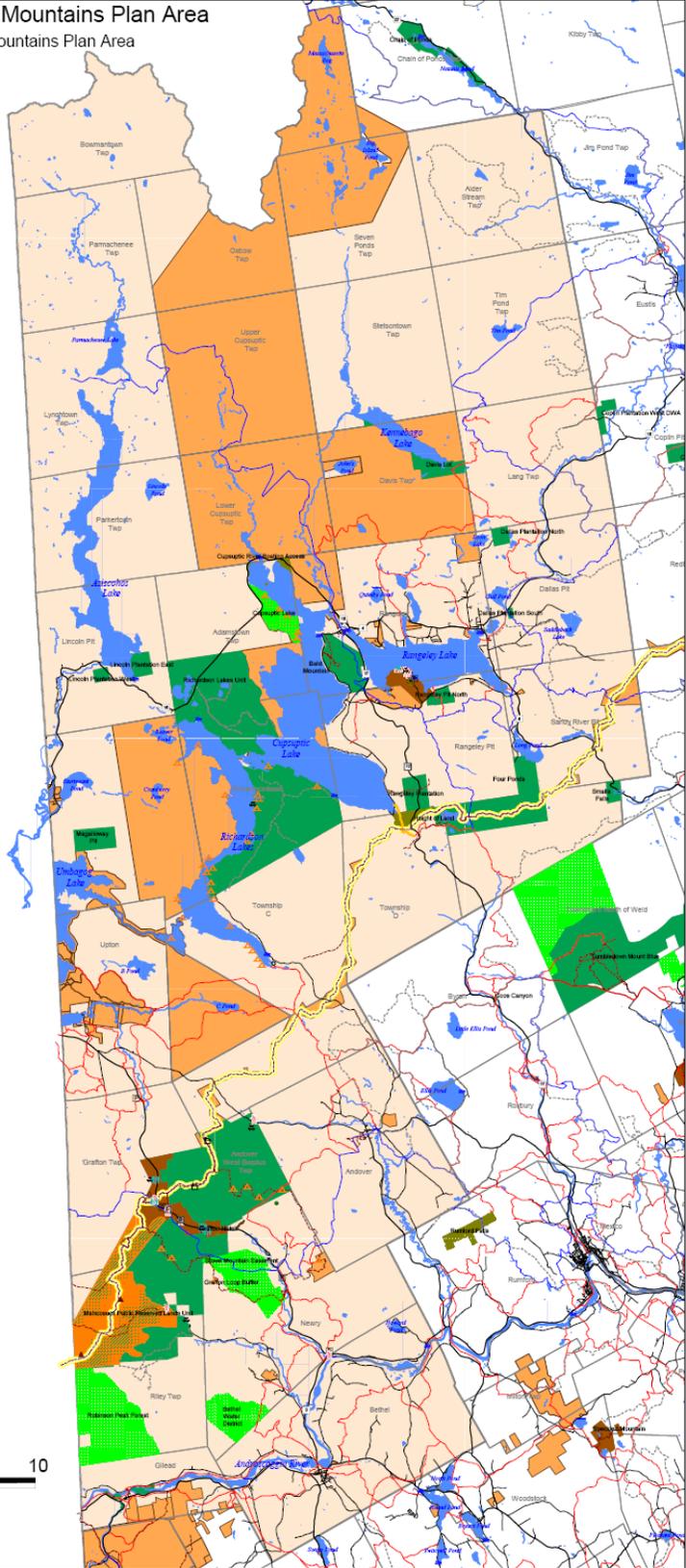
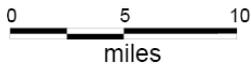
The key focus of this Plan is management allocations and recommendations for the Bureau fee lands mentioned above. However, other private and public conservation projects and lands in this region are an important context for planning the future uses and management of Bureau lands, and will be described in the Planning Context section.



Bureau of Parks and Lands - Western Mountains Plan Area
 Planning is for BP&L Lands Properties in Western Mountains Plan Area

LEGEND

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ BP&L Lands Properties ■ BP&L Essement Properties ■ Essement Enforcement Areas ■ Public Access Essements ■ Third Party Essements ■ Project Agreements ■ BP&L Parks Properties ■ Ecoreserve ■ Other Conservation Lands ■ Appalachian Trail Corridor ■ Western Mountains Plan Area □ Town Lines — ATV Trails 2010 — Snowmobile Club Trails — Snowmobile ITS Trails — Snowmobile Trail to be Relocated — Other Maintained Trails — MDOT Highways & Public Roads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Boat Launches Hand Carry — Boat Launches Trailerable ○ Park Headquarters ▲ Leanto ▲ Primitive Campsite ▲ Shelter ▲ Beach — Bridge ■ Day Use Area ■ Kiosk ■ Scenic Overlook ■ Parking Lot ■ Playground ■ Restroom or Outhouse ■ Trailhead
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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. For the Western Mountains region, this included:

Resource Assessments: The first phase of the planning process includes a thorough study of the resources and opportunities available on the Western Mountains Plan public lands. Beginning in the winter of 2008-09, Bureau staff undertook an intensive review of the natural and geological, historic and cultural, fisheries and wildlife, recreation, and timber and renewable resources. The Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) performed a natural resource inventory of Bureau lands in the region. Resource professionals from within the Bureau provided information on wildlife, recreation, and timber resources. Mapping and GIS-related information was also obtained as part of this phase.

Staff also participated in reconnaissance field trips to inventory and characterize the land-based resources and recreational features on Bureau lands. A two-day winter trip occurred in March 2009 with a large group of staff, followed by several one day trips by smaller staff sub-groups in the summer of 2009.

Issue Identification/Public Scoping Session: Another component of the planning process involved conducting public meetings to determine and discuss management issues needing to be addressed by the Plan. Two meetings were held in 2010: one on January 28 in Rumford and one on February 4 in Rangeley. A written comment period followed.

Advisory Committee Formation and Review of Preliminary Inventory and Assessment: A Public Advisory Committee was formed in the winter of 2010. Members of this Committee were selected on the basis of their resource expertise, and for their regional and local knowledge in areas important to the management of the Bureau's Western Mountains region properties. On March 25, 2010 this committee met in Farmington to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the Western Mountains region Parks and Lands, and to propose options to address these issues. The committee also discussed potential resource allocations for the landbase. A written comment period followed.

Advisory Committee Meeting on the First Draft Plan: A first draft of the Plan was posted in August. The Advisory Committee met in Farmington on September 7, 2010 to review the draft and provide feedback. A written comment period followed. Comments from the Advisory Committee on this First Draft Plan, along with any comments from other members of the public and various resource professionals, were considered in developing the Final Draft of the Plan.

Follow up Focus Meeting

As needed, the Bureau holds special focus meetings to address a particular issue. A focus meeting was held on October 14, 2010 in Newry because the topic of hiking trails in Grafton and Mahoosuc properties needed more attention. Advisory committee members were invited and many members of the public attended as well.

Public Meeting on the Final Draft Plan: The Final Draft Plan was posted for review on the Bureau's website on November 20, and was presented and public comment received at a public meeting on December 14, 2010 in Farmington. A written comment period was scheduled from November 20 to December 24.

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 Conservation. The Bureau Director and Conservation Commissioner adopted the Plan after review and approval on January 4, 2011.

Summary of the Resource Allocation System

The Resource Allocation System is a land management-planning tool developed in the 1980s, and formalized in the *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, to those that are less so. The resource attributes are aggregated into seven categories or “allocations,” including (from most sensitive to least sensitive): special protection, backcountry recreation, wildlife management, remote recreation, visual consideration, developed recreation, and timber management.

This hierarchy 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 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. Not all of these allocations are applied in this Plan.

Forest Certification

In 1999 the Bureau made the decision to demonstrate exemplary forest management, a statutory directive (See Appendix B), 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 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. Subsequent compliance audits took place in the summer of 2007, 2008, and 2009. Though the audits suggested some areas for improvement in the 2009 audit, otherwise, the outcome of those compliance audits was to award unconditional certification to the Bureau, with no CARs indicated.

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

The Mahoosuc Unit contains one of those ecological reserves—the second largest reserve in the system at 9,993 acres. Most of the Reserve (8,458 acres) has been classified as sub-alpine forest,

and 259 acres as alpine ridge. Notable features of the Reserve include: many populations of rare plants, a sub-alpine tarn (Speck Pond) and a rare Cold Air Talus Slope community. The Mahoosuc Ecological Reserve extends from 1,120 feet to 3,980 feet in elevation, leading to the variety of natural communities that have formed.

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.

III. The Planning Context

The purpose of the Western Mountains Region Management Plan is to plan for the Bureau's parks and public reserved lands in the region. The Plan has been developed taking into account the context of the region's other conservation lands and recreation resources. Examples of many of the major conservation and recreation resources are provided below, but this is not comprehensive—the full spectrum of resources in this region is rich and diverse and will not be fully described here.

The context for this Plan also includes the changing dynamics of land ownership patterns in the Region, which is affecting traditional uses and the local economy. The surrounding private landscape, dominated by large holdings managed for timber production, continues to shift to an ownership dominated by investor-owned companies. A report by the Open Space Institute predicted in 2008 that in the Mahoosuc Region up to 150,000 acres would be sold in the next 5 to 10 years, noting that landownership changes in the area had already reduced forest-related jobs, increased harvest rates, increased posted property, and encouraged development of previously undeveloped areas (Weinberg and Larson, 2008). In response a number of recent state, regional and national initiatives have targeted this area for recreation and tourism development, and land conservation.

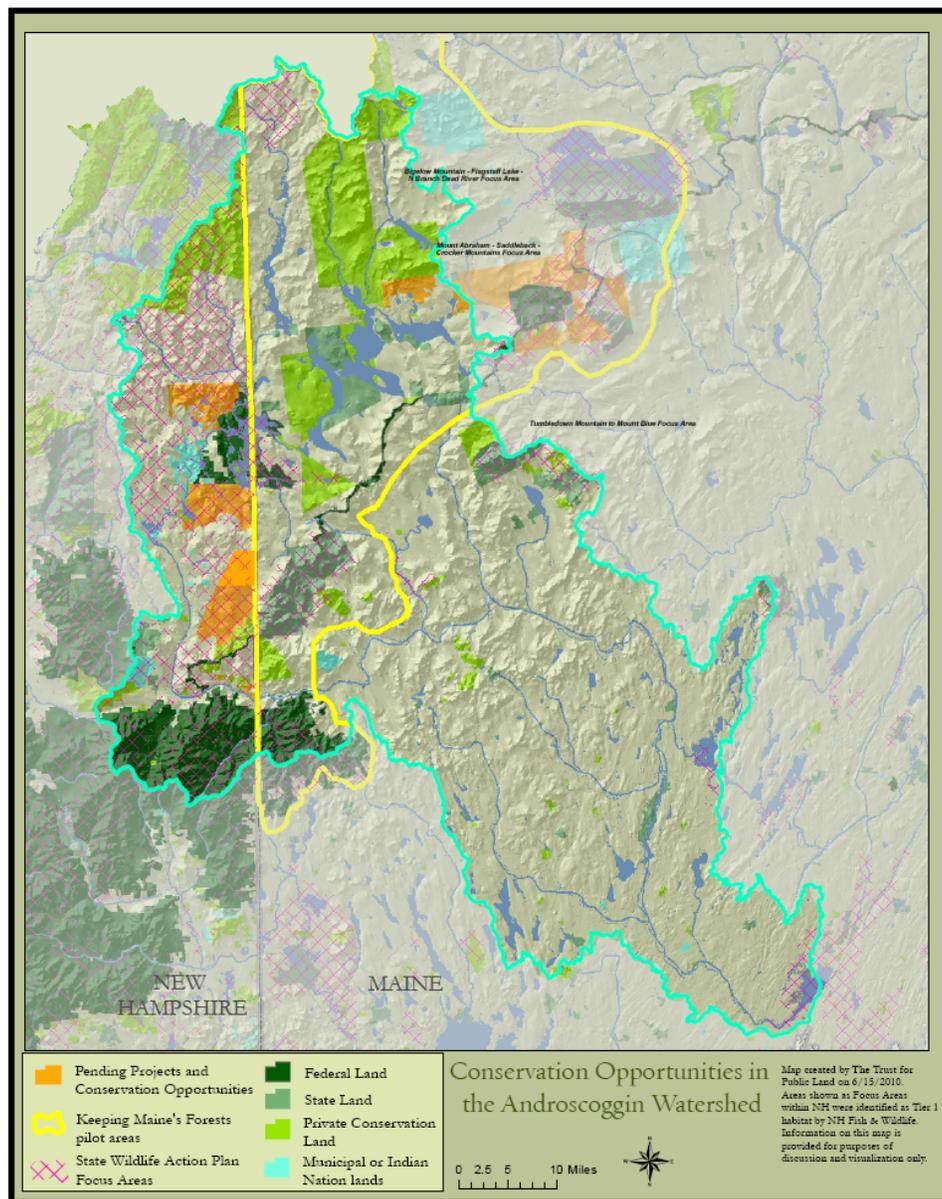
Conservation Lands and Initiatives in the Western Mountains Region

U.S. Forest Service—White Mountain National Forest (USDA Forest Service, 2009)

The White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) is the largest publicly owned block of land in New England (managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service). WMNF encompasses almost 800,000 acres, includes much of Northern New Hampshire and extends into Western Maine. The Maine portion lies directly south of the Mahoosuc Unit and southwest of the town of Bethel. WMNF is one of the most visited forests in the United States, with approximately 7 million visitors a year.

Management of the WMNF is guided by a “Land and Resource Management Plan” adopted in 2005. The WMNF is managed for multiple uses and features, including: timber management, heritage resources, wildlife and ecological values, and a myriad of recreational opportunities. It also contains six wilderness areas, with the Caribou-Speckled Wilderness (14,000 acres) located in Maine. There are many areas of overlap between management objectives of the WMNF and typical management of Bureau public reserved lands. Examples include forest management with ecological and scenic values at the forefront, and the diversity of recreational opportunities available.

Recreational opportunities in the WMNF include hiking, mountain biking, fishing, hunting, boating, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and rock-climbing, among others. Mt. Washington, the highest peak in the Northeast, is within WMNF in New Hampshire. Developed recreation sites include four alpine ski areas (operating under special permits from the WMNF) and 23 campgrounds. The Kancamagus Scenic Byway runs through the heart of the forest, and many significant roads run adjacent to and into the WMNF, making it an easily accessible destination. The Maine portion of the WMNF contains the 14,000 acre Caribou-Speckled Wilderness, where topography varies from lower hardwood slopes to exposed rocky peaks. The highest point in the wilderness is Speckled Mountain, at 2,906 feet, and 25 miles of maintained hiking trails lie within the wilderness. The Maine portion also provides camping opportunities. Snowmobile trail ITS 80 traverses a portion of the forest, connecting to Trail 19 in New Hampshire.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge (UNWR, 2009)

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge (the Refuge) surrounds Umbagog Lake in Northern New Hampshire and Western Maine and is located northwest of the Mahoosuc Unit and southwest of the Richardson Unit. The Magalloway Plantation Lot abuts the Refuge at its southwest corner. The Refuge was established in 1992 to protect wetlands and associated wildlife and to protect migratory birds. Its vision statement sees the Refuge as a link in a network of conservation lands, a center for showcasing good management, important habitat for many species (especially birds) and a place for wildlife-oriented recreation. Surrounding Umbagog Lake, wildlife habitat includes upland spruce-fir and northern hardwood forests, boreal and riverine wetlands, and lake habitats. A total of 229 bird species have been viewed at the Refuge and 137 species are known to breed there. Recreational activities permitted include: hunting, fishing, boating, canoeing and kayaking on lake and rivers, snowmobiling and camping.

In January 2009, a new Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Refuge was adopted. Central to the plan is managing for particular habitats and focal species, and toward this goal placing the well-being of the lake and associated streams as the highest management priority. Managing wetlands, floodplain, and lakeshore habitats as well as upland forest for focal species are also central to Refuge goals. Focal species (whose needs will be central to Refuge management) are priority birds of conservation concern as listed in the Northern Forest Ecosystem Bird Conservation Region.

As part of this plan, wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities are expanded in the Refuge, including expanded parking, trails, interpretive programming, and signage. New uses are allowed, such as bicycling and horseback riding. The Refuge area will be expanded by 47,807 acres (44 percent of this will be conservation easements). Currently the Refuge is only 21,650 acres, so will be more than tripled in size as a result of this plan. The Umbagog plan contains a “Proposed Refuge Expansion” map showing the general area in which it hopes to expand. This area extends east to the conservation easements west of Upper and Lower Richardson Lakes, and southeast, almost to the northern border of the Mahoosuc Unit and Grafton Notch State Park.

Mahoosuc Land Trust Conservation Lands

The Mahoosuc Land Trust was founded in 1989, and is based in Bethel, Maine, but serves the greater region surrounding the Mahoosuc Mountains in Central Oxford County, Maine and Eastern Coos County, New Hampshire. Their mission is “To protect and conserve land and traditional land uses including farming, forestry, recreation, significant habitats, scenery, and water resources for the benefit of the public” (Mahoosuc Land Trust, 2010). They own and maintain a total of 1348 acres of conservation land, including the Stewart Family Preserve (with the popular Puzzle Mountain hike), located close to the Mahoosuc Public Reserved Land Unit, the Rumford Whitecap Mountain Preserve (including another popular hike), and the Grafton Loop Trail parking area. They also own 5,556 acres of easements and collaborated with the Bureau on the acquisition of the Frenchman’s Hole parcel, which was added to the Mahoosuc Public Reserved Land Unit. The Mahoosuc Land Trust is part of a collaborative effort in the upper Androscoggin watershed working to establish the Androscoggin Canoe Trail to provides

access to the Androscoggin River via several landing sites between Shelburne Dam in New Hampshire, and Rumford, Maine. They also host guided hikes and interpretive programs.

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust- Conservation Lands in the Rangeley Region (RLHT, 2009)

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (RLHT) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the character of the Rangeley Lakes region through land conservation, water quality protection, education, and community outreach. Since its founding in 1991, RLHT has preserved over 12,500 acres of land including 45 miles of lake and river frontage and 15 islands. In addition they host a summer day camp for children and an outdoor adventure series, perform water quality monitoring with the help of volunteers and work to protect waters from invasive plants.

The Bureau has cooperated with RLHT on various conservation projects, and many of RLHT's fee and easement lands are adjacent to Bureau properties. The Bureau's Bald Mountain Unit was originally acquired by RLHT through their application for Land for Maine's Future funds—in fact the effort behind this acquisition led to the formation of the trust. Bald Mountain was later transferred to the Bureau and contains a popular hiking trail with stunning views of the region. Recently, RLHT purchased land on Black Point and South Bog Cove which are adjacent to Rangeley Lake State Park. The trust also owns their own parcels in fee and easement, including land along the Rapid and Rangeley Rivers, and extensive shoreland along Mooselookmeguntic Lake (some of which abuts the Bureau's Richardson Unit). RLHT has adopted management plans for many of their properties, which include specifics of forest management, recreation planning and wildlife management. RLHT works with many partners on various projects, including the Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway, Rangeley Region Guides and Sportsmen's Association, and the Forest Stewardship Council.

The Mahoosuc Initiative

The Mahoosuc Initiative is a partnership between several local groups based in the Mahoosuc region and regional groups who share an interest in the region. Their mission and goal is the following: “to provide Mahoosuc communities with information and tools to guide future change for the prosperity and well-being of all residents. The Mahoosuc Initiative seeks to play a leadership role by convening community conversations, providing technical assistance and research, and bringing new federal, state, and private funding to support projects in land conservation, sustainable forestry and other community priorities” (Mahoosuc Initiative, 2007). Partners in the Mahoosuc Initiative include: Mahoosuc Land Trust, Androscoggin River Watershed Council, Tri-County Community Action Program, Northern Forest Alliance, Appalachian Mountain Club, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, Forest Society of Maine, the Conservation Fund and The Wilderness Society.

In 2007, the Mahoosuc Initiative produced the “Mahoosuc Region Resources Report” in two volumes to help initiate dialog regarding the future of the region among stakeholders. Volume I describes the resource values of the region and the changing economy, land use and demographics. Volume II identifies leadership opportunities and strategies for Mahoosuc communities that want to take a greater role in shaping the future of the region. The report is used as a starting point for a conversation regarding the landscape and economy of the region at

an ongoing series of community forums, aimed at empowering residents and communities to take active roles in shaping the future of the Mahoosuc region.

Mahoosucs Initiative members collectively and individually have been very active participants in conservation projects in the region. Examples include the Grafton Notch Forest Legacy Project which added 3,688 acres to the Mahoosuc Unit and the Stowe Mountain Forest Legacy Project, which led to a Bureau-held conservation easement on private land housing a portion of the Grafton Loop Trail. They are working on the Mahoosuc Gateway/Success Township project that would protect thousands of acres in New Hampshire surrounding the Appalachian Trail just before it enters Maine and the Mahoosuc Unit (and also protecting some side trails leading into the Mahoosuc Unit from the west).

Other projects of the Mahoosuc Initiative include development of a regional touring map and the initiation of the “Mahoosuc Community Wood Energy Project” which aims to use local forests to meet local energy needs and is assessing the potential for wood biomass energy facilities.

Recreation Resources and Initiatives in the Western Mountains Region

The region surrounding and including the Bureau’s Western Mountains planning region is rich and varied in its recreation resources. Hiking opportunities range from short day hikes to multi-day backpacking trips. The famed Appalachian Trail runs through the region—including the “Mahoosuc Notch” known as the “hardest mile on the Appalachian Trail.” Boating opportunities are abundant, from motorboating on the large lakes in the Rangeley region, to canoeing on the Androscoggin River and other more remote streams and tributaries. The Rangeley region has been famous far beyond Maine borders for its brook trout fishing and spectacular scenery since the 19th Century. The snowmobiling network of club and ITS trails are abundant and popular in this region, as well as downhill and cross-country skiing and ice climbing.

In their entirety, the outdoor recreation opportunities in this region are rich, varied and outstanding. As would be expected, this region draws many visitors, from within Maine, the United States and other parts of the world. This section describes some of the major recreational opportunities of the region.

Hiking and Backpacking

The Appalachian Trail: The Appalachian Trail (AT) is a 2,181 mile long footpath, stretching from Springer Mountain in Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. Completed in 1937, the AT is enjoyed by through-hikers (those who hike the entire AT), section-hikers, and day hikers. Shelters and campsites are available throughout the length of the trail, which also passes through many towns and cities. The AT is managed by the National Park Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, over 30 local AT clubs, the USDA Forest Service, and the other public agencies that host the trail (including the Bureau).

The AT runs through the Bureau’s Western Mountains planning region—and runs through three Bureau properties—the Grafton Notch State Park, Mahoosuc Unit and Four Ponds Unit. Altogether 25 miles of the AT are located on these properties.

Grafton Loop Trail: This is a high elevation, backcountry trail connecting a series of scenic peaks using the Appalachian Trail on the Grafton and Mahoosuc properties, as well as new trail on Bureau land and private land. The 42-mile trail takes approximately three days to hike. There are nine designated primitive campsites available. Many partners were involved with the Bureau in conceiving of and constructing the Grafton Loop Trail, including the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Maine Appalachian Trail Club, the Mahoosuc Land Trust, the Trust for Public Land, and many others, including the private landowners whose land the Trail crosses.

Day hiking opportunities: The mountainous terrain and stunning large lakes in the Western Mountains region make it an outstanding hiking destination. Some of the day hikes are on public lands, and are described in the Park and Unit descriptions later in this Plan. Many day hikes are on the properties of private landowners (both conservation and industrial landowners). This plan will leave it to the guidebooks to describe all the day hikes in the Western Mountains region though some are referenced above in the Conservation organizations and lands section above. An evolving new website, Mainetrailfinder.com, is also cataloguing hiking trails in this region and is expected to become a major source of information for hikers when fully developed.

Public Boat Access

Boat access to the waters of the Western Mountains of Maine is an important component of its regional economy and way of life. Boat access is provided for motorized and non-motorized boating, with boaters using access points for fishing, short day trips, and long, multi-day paddling trips. Within the public lands and state parks of the Western Mountain Region, there are three trailer accessible boating facilities and two hand carry facilities as shown below.

Boating Facilities on Western Mountain region Parks and Lands

Waterbody	Minor Civil Division	Park or Lands Unit	Ramp Type
Upper Richardson Lake	Richardsontown	Richardson Unit	Trailer
Mooselookmeguntic	Richardsontown	Richardson Unit	Trailer
Rangeley Lake	Rangeley	Rangeley Lake State Park	Trailer
West Richardson Pond	Adamstown	Richardson Unit	Hand carry
Kennebago Lake	Stetsontown	Stetsontown Lot	Hand carry

In addition to the above facilities there are 40 other state-owned or sponsored boat sites in Oxford and Franklin Counties including fifteen hand-carry sites and 25 trailer accessible sites, as shown below. State sponsored sites are typically owned by a municipality, or other governmental body, but may also include private land owners and power companies. All sponsored sites are under contract or permit between the owner and the state to provide public access.

State-owned or Assisted Boating Facilities not on Parks or Lands

Waterbody	Minor Civil Division	Owner	County	Ramp Type
Hancock Pond	Denmark	Denmark	Oxford	Trailer
Richardson Lake	Township C	Oxford Co	Oxford	Trailer
Cupsuptic River	T4 R3 WBKP	DOC	Oxford	Trailer
Lovewell Pond	Fryeburg	DOC	Oxford	Trailer
Bryant Pond	Woodstock	Woodstock	Oxford	Trailer
Saco River	Brownfield	DOC	Oxford	Carry-In
Little Penneesseewassee Pond	Norway	Norway	Oxford	Carry-In
Aziscohos Lake	Lincoln Plt	Seven Islands Land Co	Oxford	Trailer
Moose Pond	West Paris	West Paris	Oxford	Trailer
Kezar Lake	Lovell	Lovell	Oxford	Trailer
Saco River	Fryeburg	Fryeburg	Oxford	Carry-In
Penneesseewassee Lake	Norway	Norway	Oxford	Trailer
South Pond	Greenwood	Greenwood	Oxford	Trailer
Hutchinson Pond	Albany Township	DIFW	Oxford	Carry-In
Saco River	Fryeburg	DOC	Oxford	Carry-In
Androscoggin River	Rumford	Rumford	Oxford	Trailer
Androscoggin River	Bethel	Mahoosuc Land Trust	Oxford	Carry-In
Clay Pond	Fryeburg	DIFW	Oxford	Carry-In
Bald Bog	Brownfield	DIFW	Oxford	Carry-In
Ellis Pond	Roxbury	DIFW	Oxford	Trailer
Twitchell Pond	Greenwood	DIFW	Oxford	Trailer
Stanley Pond	Hiram	Hiram	Oxford	Trailer
Concord Pond	Woodstock	DIFW	Oxford	Carry-In
Keewaydin Lake	Stoneham	Stoneham	Oxford	Trailer
Moose Pond	Denmark	Denmark	Oxford	Trailer
Clemons Pond	Hiram	Hiram	Oxford	Trailer
Ellis River	Andover	Andover	Oxford	Carry-In
Androscoggin River	Hanover	DIFW	Oxford	Trailer
Androscoggin River	Hanover	Mahoosuc Land Trust	Oxford	Carry-In
Rangeley Lake	Rangeley	NextEra	Franklin	Trailer
Egypt Pond	Chesterville	DOC	Franklin	Carry-In
Porter Lake	Strong	Strong	Franklin	Trailer
Wilson Pond	Wilton	Wilton	Franklin	Trailer
Rangeley Lake	Rangeley	Rangeley	Franklin	Trailer
Clearwater Pond	Industry	Industry	Franklin	Trailer
Flagstaff Lake	Eustis	DOC	Franklin	Trailer
Mooselookmeguntic Lake	Rangeley	Rangeley	Franklin	Trailer
Little Norridgewock Str.	Chesterville	DIFW	Franklin	Carry-In
Bauds (Stump) Pond	New Vineyard	DIFW	Franklin	Carry-In
Quimby Pond	Rangeley	DIFW	Franklin	Carry-In

Fishing and Hunting

Fishing and hunting are traditional and ever-popular uses of public lands and many private lands in the Western Mountains region. The Rangeley Lakes region has been a renowned destination for hunting and fishing since the 19th Century, when the area was made famous by some of the earliest guides who promoted the region in newspaper columns and at trade shows. Visitors arrived by railroad and often traveled by steamboat to stay at hotels and camps in the region.

Today, fishing in the region remains popular, with landlocked salmon also an attraction as well as trout.

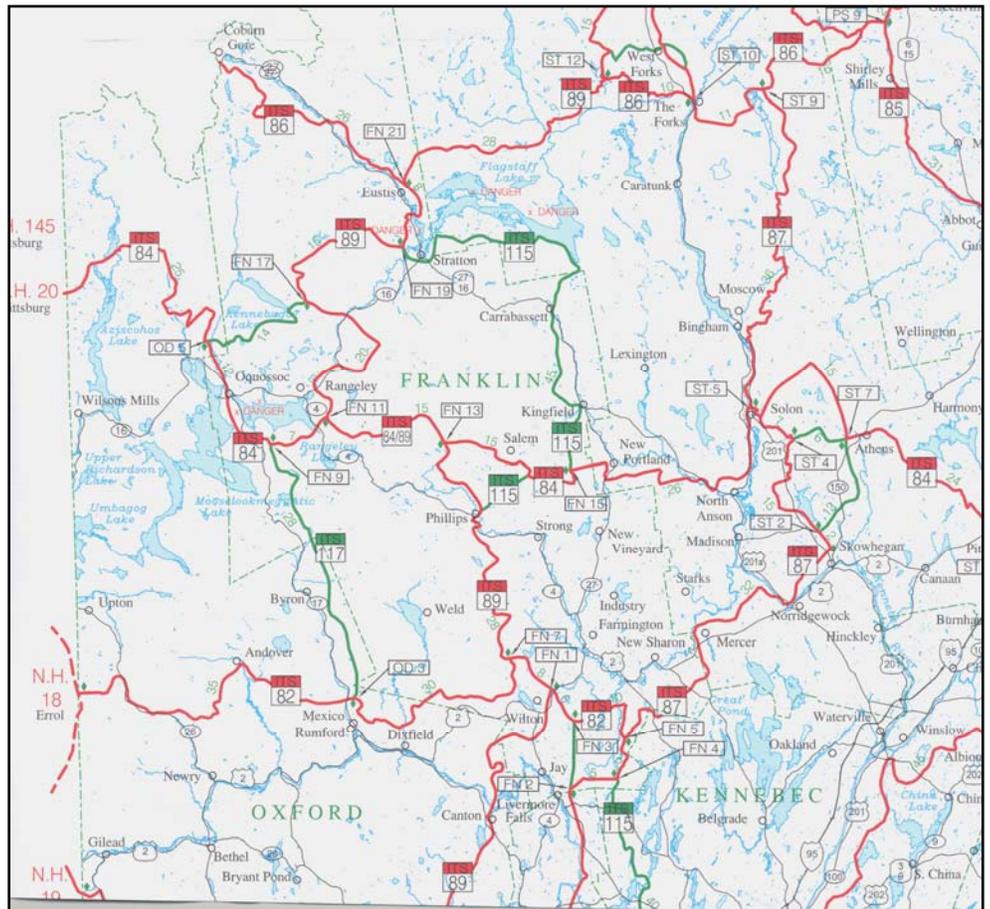
Most of the Western Mountains region is within MDIF&W Wildlife Management District 7, which is particularly known for good moose and bear hunting. Small game hunting is also popular in the region with ruffed grouse and snowshoe hare being the most popular.

Snowmobiling and ATV riding

The Bureau's Off-road Vehicle Division offers assistance and funding for ATV and snowmobile clubs performing construction, maintenance, and management in the Western Mountain region.

ATV Trails: There are approximately 250 miles of ATV trails in the region (on public and private lands), with only four ATV clubs providing construction, maintenance and management. The Bureau ORV division spends between \$60,000 and 70,000 per year on ATV trail maintenance in the Western Mountains region.

Snowmobile Trails: There are eight clubs maintaining snowmobile trails in the region (on public and private lands). During the winter of 2008-2009, the Bureau ORV division spent \$246,186 on the maintenance of approximately 565 miles of trails in the region. Most trails are considered vital connections (most are either ITS Connector or Corridor Trails, though there are some local or club trails as well).



Organizations and Initiatives

Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT, 2010)

The Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT) is a long distance paddling trail connecting the major watersheds across the Adirondacks and Northern New England. The 740 mile paddling route traces a history from early Native Americans through European settlers. The NFCT is also the name of an organization “connecting people to the Trail’s natural environment, human heritage, and contemporary communities by stewarding, promoting and providing access to canoe and kayak experiences along this route.” NFCT provides maps, books and web-based tools to connect people with this resource, helps connect paddlers with lodging, dining and other recreational resources along the trail, and hosts events. They coordinate volunteer efforts, including Waterway Work Trips and the Adopt-A-Segment program.



A section of the NFCT travels through the Rangeley Lakes region—through Richardson Lakes (with a portage at Upper Dam) and Mooselookmeguntic Lake. Therefore, the route travels along shorelines of the Richardson Public Reserved Land Unit and Rangeley Lake State Park.

Appalachian Mountain Club

The Appalachian Mountain Club is an organization that began in 1876, and promotes the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the mountains, forests, waters, and trails of the Appalachian region. They offer guided outdoor trips, lodging in huts, camps and campgrounds, and youth programs. They also organize volunteers to help with trail maintenance. AMC is also a policy advocate and owner of land and conservation easements.

In the Western Mountains planning region, the AMC maintains the Appalachian Trail and several side trails on the Bureau’s Mahoosuc Unit and Grafton Notch State Park south of Route 26.

Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC, 2010)

The Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC) began in 1935, and is a volunteer, non-profit corporation that manages and maintains 267 miles of the Appalachian Trail in Maine, its facilities and corridor. Its responsibilities include trail design, construction and maintenance, and monitoring of corridor activities. MATC coordinates volunteer opportunities, including: work trips, a trail maintainer program, and a corridor monitor program. They host “care-taker/ridgerunners” in four locations. They also publish “The Official Appalachian Trail Guide to Maine.”

The MATC responsibilities in the Western Mountains planning region include the Appalachian Trail from Route 26 northward to Route 4—considered their “Baldpate District”. This includes the AT and side trails in the northern portion of the Bureau’s Grafton Notch State Park and Mahoosuc Unit, as well as the AT in the Four Ponds Unit.

Planning Implications

The Bureau's parks and lands in the Western Mountains Region lie within Maine's most mountainous region, an area of expansive woodlands and lakes, where the culture and economy have been historically linked to both forest resources and outdoor recreation.

The outdoor recreation opportunities on the public lands are part of a much larger landscape-level system connecting mountain ranges and historic travel routes—including the nationally significant Appalachian Trail, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and an interstate system of snowmobile trails. The Bureau parks and lands serve to complement many of the conservation, recreation and tourism lands and initiatives in the greater region.

The dominant attraction of the area in general and the public lands in particular is its undeveloped character and natural beauty. Careful stewardship is needed to protect these values while managing the public lands for multiple public values, including recreation, wildlife habitat and timber resources.

A remarkable variety of conservation lands, organizations and initiatives distinguishes the Western Mountains region. There is much interest in and many opportunities for development of public-private partnerships to further conservation in this Region, and a growing recognition that land conservation adds value to the sense of place and quality of life important to the Region's economy.

Likewise there are abundant partnership opportunities for development and stewardship of recreational opportunities on Bureau managed parks and lands. The Bureau currently partners with many organizations—hiking clubs, snowmobile clubs, outing clubs, lands trusts, other state agencies—in provision and management and outdoor recreation opportunities. These collaborative relationships are essential to good stewardship of the public lands and parks.