



## **Central Penobscot Region Management Plan**

Nahmakanta Advisory Committee meeting

September 28, 2011

1 to 3pm

Dover-Foxcroft Municipal Building

### **Minutes**

Kathy Eickenberg, Acting Deputy Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL), began the meeting at 1 pm by introducing the purpose of the advisory committee.

Amy Hudnor led the group in 'SWOT' analysis—identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Nahmakanta Public Lands. These are the factors identified:

#### **STRENGTHS**

- The current Nahmakanta management plan is a good foundation.
- The level of use is appropriate for the area.
- No reservations are needed for camping—there is a sense of freedom with this.
- The quality of the fisheries is good—and better than it used to be (maybe because of limited bait fishing).
- The recreation areas are well chosen and make sense.
- The large size of Nahmakanta public lands means many uses can be accommodated.
- There are not too many trails.
- The lack of signage gives a wilder character to the landscape.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Some visitors are deterred by uncertainty about campsites because they can't reserve or find out if campsites are filled.
- BPL's website does not have adequate information about Nahmakanta.
- Visitors are not adequately warned about encountering logging trucks on roads. This is a safety concern, especially for busses, who need to be escorted along the roads.
- There is inadequate signage to direct people to Nahmakanta and within Nahmakanta. Examples given where signs are needed: along the AT directing people to Tumbledown Dick Falls, on the roads to direct people to the Leavitt Pond trail, and other destinations. The Bureau's lack of capacity to make signs was discussed, as well as the NPS guidelines on trail signage. MATC offered to make trail signs. Road signage should be well-placed and not over-done to avoid detracting from the quality of the place.
- The condition of the road from Kokadjo is poor and there is no formal right-of-way for public vehicles (although easements for snowmobiles and ATVs have been put in place through the Plum Creek/LURC process). People coming from the south use this road most often because it is similar distance to the alternate route and they can avoid paying KI Jo Mary fees. AMC had been working with the Bureau to negotiate sale of their portion of the road to the state, however, with the administration change and staff

reductions at BPL, this has stalled. The road condition and cost associated with fixing it may be an obstacle.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- A hiking trail connection from Pollywog to Turtle Ridge would make for a great loop backpacking opportunity using the other existing trails.
- Creating designated campsites along the Debsconeag Backcountry Trail would provide a great over-night experience. This is in the 1995 plan, but has not been completed. Eighth or Sixth Debsconeag would be good locations.
- The Indian Camp at Pleasant Point Camps is a historical resource and should be protected in some way. Chewonki has evaluated some options in regards to historic preservation, but has not reached a conclusion.
- Securing road access to the Public Lands is an opportunity that should be pursued.
- Improvement to BPL's website would increase the public's knowledge of recreation opportunities.
- A hiking experience to Wadleigh Mountain could be created by re-habilitating the old fire tower and improving the trail to it. An alternative would be to design a loop hike around the mountain using ledge outcrops for views. This would be much less expensive. However, the fire tower would need to be removed if not re-habilitated, which would also be costly. Some enjoy the history and cache of fire towers, so rehabilitation should be considered.
- The larger region has many quality recreation opportunities—coordination in marketing could be helpful in attracting visitors.
- A non-motorized winter route in to the public lands from the east would be desirable. This could possibly go through TNC property and could allow dog-sleds and cross-country skiers.

#### THREATS

- Wild and native brook trout populations are a declining resource overall, and populations at Nahmakanta may be at risk from increased access. Risks include non-native introductions, over-fishing and sedimentation. The number of boats stored around ponds are an issue.
- Large user-groups have been visiting the public lands (including school busses). This may not belong under the 'threat' category, but it seemed the best fit.
- It is possible that the state budget shortfall could be a threat. Though funding for public lands comes from timber revenue on public lands, there are repercussions of the state-wide budget issues. For example, it is difficult to get vacant staff positions filled, even with dedicated timber revenue, because of the current climate.

#### BREAK

The second half of the meeting focused on issue identification and problem solving around certain topics.

#### **People-powered trails**

Amy led a discussion on people-powered trails and new opportunities and issues. As mentioned earlier under 'opportunities' a loop backpacking trip is desired by some, as this is a rather rare experience in the region. The Grafton Loop Trail could serve as a model. A loop which used the Debsconeag Backcountry Trail, the AT to Rainbow, then travelled south along Big Beaver Pond to Stink Pond would use much existing trail (it could even use part of a club snowmobile trail to get from Rainbow Lake and back to the Debsconeag Backcountry Trail). Another loop option is connecting Pollywog to Turtle Ridge to make a loop out of existing trails on the public lands. Backpackers would most likely encounter timber harvesting, but once active harvesting was completed this would be minimal (though the loop would cross several roads). Thinking even bigger, a backpacking loop that used Baker and Number 4 mountains and Crawford Pond could also be desirable. Backpacking trails should be managed both for individuals and groups. More discussion and research is needed on how much demand exists for these types of trails, how much use they

would get. Also, the issue of cost and how they will be maintained is a concern. Development of the loops discussed could stress Bureau resources. Trail volunteers are available, but someone to organize volunteers is needed. Perhaps a "Friends" group could be formed.

### **Motorized Trails**

Improved signage could be beneficial to the motorized users. A connection for ATVs is being worked on from Millinocket to Nahmakanta public lands, potentially connecting through the Deadwater Brook Rd. The Bureau needs to learn more about this and consider it in the context of the management plan. The 'primitive' snowmobile trail to Rainbow Lake gets some use and at times has been groomed. The Northern Timber Cruisers maintains this. There is some interest in connecting the snowmobile trail from near Female Pond north to Chesuncook Village. However, a concern is the Bureau's planned expansion of the deer wintering areas in that area, and the effect the increased snowmobile use could have on the deer. Funding for this trail may also be a problem, though in a 15 year plan, lack of funding now may not be good reason to eliminate the idea.

### **Ecological Reserve and Motorized Uses**

According to Maine Ecological Reserve legislation, existing motorized uses may be allowed to remain in an ecological reserve if all three of the following apply:

- Trails/roads must be well-designed, constructed and situated in a safe location
- The use may have only a minimal (if any) impact on the values for which the reserve was created
- It cannot be reasonably relocated outside the reserve

Amy presented early staff brainstorming as a starting point for the discussion on which motorized uses may not meet all three criteria. The ITS snowmobile trail and the vehicular access to Fourth Debsconeag and Nahmakanta Lake Camps seem to meet all three criteria. However, the road that veers left after the Bean Brook crossing does not seem to meet the criteria of 'cannot be reasonably relocated' because the drive-to access to get closer to Murphy Pond could be replaced by closer access to another attractive fishing pond. However, many Nahmakanta Lake Camps guests drive vehicles to the Murphy Pond barrier, then walk in to gain access to not only Murphy but other ponds to the north. Unauthorized ATV use has been observed beyond the Murphy Pond barrier. Nahmakanta Lake Camps uses a traditional snowmobile trail from the west coming off the Sias Hill Rd that travels through the ecological reserve before reaching their camps.

It is unclear whether ATV use on the vehicular roads in the ecological reserve has been authorized or not, so it is difficult to say if they should be evaluated as an 'existing motorized use' in the reserve. Inadequate signage may be partly to blame, and differences in Bureau maps of the public lands. However, if they were to be considered an existing motorized use, they might not meet the criteria of 'cannot be reasonably relocated' because they are not part of a trail system and access to lakes such as Fourth Debsconeag and Murphy Pond are experiences that can be had on other parts of the public lands. Not many ATV riders travel on these roads currently, but some off road ATV use has occurred starting from these roads.

The meeting was adjourned at 3pm.