

Preservation and Port: A Recipe for Prosperity
a permanent vision for Sears Island and Mack Point

Proposed to the Sears Island Planning Initiative Steering Committee
September, 2006

Governor John Baldacci has offered the citizens of Maine a truly unique opportunity to determine the future of Sears Island, and thereby resolve a public controversy that has caused uncertainty and conflict about this island, an important asset of upper Penobscot Bay, for more than 30 years. The opportunity is unique for two reasons: there is no industrial or transportation development proposal for the island being contested in the regulatory process, and the State is leading a planning initiative with broadly inclusive participation to seek a consensus recommendation for the island's management.

We, the undersigned, propose the following vision for consideration by the Planning Initiative. We also understand that there is more fact-finding yet to occur through the Steering Committee process, and we acknowledge that there might be new information revealed that would cause us to adapt and revise this vision.

Our vision is founded on these two core recommendations:

- that the entirety of Sears Island be permanently committed to conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental education; and
- that Mack Point, as one of the three ports of Maine, be fully utilized, enhanced, and expanded.

We envision that Sears Island will feature the following improvements to fulfill its conservation future and to establish it as a regional eco-tourism asset:

- trails of differing levels of challenge, from handicapped-accessible to narrow, wild footpaths;
- safe beach access points, secured from erosion, to provide for hand-carried watercraft launching, shellfish harvesting, and beach exploration;
- composting toilet facilities at primary trailheads and beach access points;
- signs and kiosks to provide management information and natural and human history interpretation;
- a building at the northern end of the island, up to 2,000 square-feet in footprint, sited and constructed as a model of the best practices in environmentally responsible construction, to provide a small visitor welcome and information center, facilities for stewardship of the island, and potentially the offices of a natural resource agency; and
- a parking area that is proximate to the building, screened with native vegetation, separated from the shorefront to provide an effective buffer, and sufficient in capacity to provide for expected levels of visitation.

Prior to construction of these improvements, an ecological and cultural inventory will be conducted on the entire island. A management plan will be prepared that utilizes that inventory to assure that the siting and construction of all improvements avoids degradation of the ecological and cultural resources of the island while offering visitors the greatest exposure to opportunities for experiencing and learning about those resources. The ecological inventory and management plan will be regularly updated.

We envision three scenarios for ownership of Sears Island:

- continued State ownership with a conservation easement held by a second organization (e.g., the Town of Searsport, a land trust, or a Federal agency);
- ownership of the entire island by a Federal resource agency (e.g., Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge), or ownership of part of the island with the State or non-profit organization; or
- ownership by a non-profit organization (e.g., a land trust) with a conservation easement held by a second organization (e.g. State agency, Town of Searsport, or a Federal agency).

Under each scenario, we anticipate that one or more organizations (e.g., Friends of Sears Island, a land trust, the holder of the conservation easement) will provide volunteer assistance to the owner for stewardship of the island.

We envision that Mack Point will continue to be an important economic asset, from the Penobscot Bay region through central and northern Maine, and that it needs to complement the other principal ports of the state, Portland and Eastport. To fulfill this crucial transportation role, we understand that the port facilities at Mack Point will be expanded when demand for additional facilities is demonstrated, and that they will be enhanced with new shipment handling equipment and technologies as such develop and are appropriate to serve the needs of Maine.

We envision that Mack Point will operate, expand, and enhance its facilities by utilizing the best available environmental practices.

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