



WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

Week ending December 18, 2009

State law assigns four core duties to the State Planning Office that include: 1) conducting continuing economic analysis, including economic forecasting, 2) coordinating the development of the State's economy and energy resources with the conservation of its natural resources; 3) providing technical assistance to towns and regions; and 4) providing technical assistance to the Governor and Legislature by undertaking special studies and plans and preparing policy alternatives.

DIRECTORS POLICY AND MANAGEMENT TEAM

Information on Local Government Cooperation in Maine announced today.

Regionalization can help cut costs and lower taxes, while providing excellent services and growing our economy. Communities around the state are collaborating to reduce costs, improve efficiencies, and enhance services. Did you know 45.5% of the State's General Fund revenues are disbursed to municipalities and counties for a local government purpose? Did you know that Maine has almost 500 municipalities, plus 16 counties? That's a local government administration for every 2500 Maine residents. Maine has over twice as many local government employees as state government employees. Visit the newly created [site for local government cooperation](#) for examples, information, and resources for those seeking to meet financial challenges through greater local government cooperation and regional approaches to service delivery. **CONTACT: Jody Harris at 287-5424 or jody.harris@maine.gov.**

Mobilize Maine picks up speed. The Maine Quality of Place Council heard last week that Mobilize Maine has sparked interest across the state. Mobilize Maine is an economic development planning effort that draws on local citizen and business expertise to identify a region's place-based assets for the economic opportunities they present. It is based on the idea that, in order to prosper, Maine must invest in its own indigenous assets. Northern and Eastern Maine and the Kennebec and Androscoggin Valley regions have held Mobilize Maine visioning and goal-setting sessions and attracted large numbers of participants. DECD and the state's six regional economic development districts are leading these efforts. They are seeking \$2 million in federal

funds and asking Maine businesses to donate to fund Mobilize Maine. The Quality of Place Council heard the update at their December 10 meeting where they agreed that Mobilize Maine would help fund quality of place initiatives on the ground. At their meeting, the Council also developed a strategy for communicating to legislators the importance of passing LD 1389, the Governor's Quality of Place bill, which was held over from last session. The bill adds asset-based development to our state economic development policy and would help garner federal grants and private donations. **CONTACT: Jody Harris at 287-5424 or jody.harris@maine.gov or Sue Inches at 287-2989 or sue.inches@maine.gov**

LAND FOR MAINE'S FUTURE

Land for Maine's Future Program Contributes to Pleasant Mountain Preserve – a Regional Conservation and Recreation Project located in Cumberland and Oxford Counties. The *Land for Maine's Future Program*, with contributions by Loon Echo Land Trust and assistance by the ME Department of Conservation, Bureau of Parks & Lands has completed the fee acquisition of 61 ± acres of a forested tract, located along the northeasterly slopes of Southern Maine's mountain gem – Pleasant Mountain. The property will be held and managed by the Loon Echo Land Trust subject to a Project Agreement with ME Department of Conservation. Rising above the surrounding landscape, these scenic, forested slopes provide wildlife habitat and have historically been a hiking destination, providing a recreational link to other parcels of conserved land along this stretch of one of Maine's significant mountains. These lands provide traditional public access for outdoor recreational purposes. **CONTACT: R. Collin Therrien, rcollin.therrien@maine.gov, 287-5619 or Tim Glidden Tim.Glidden@maine.gov, 287-1487.**

COASTAL PROGRAM

On Tuesday, December 15th, the Maine Department of Conservation in conjunction with the State Planning Office officially designated three areas within Maine state waters as Ocean Energy Test Sites. The locations include an area off of Boon Island, in York County, an area off of Damariscove Island in Lincoln County, and an area off of Monhegan Island in Lincoln County. The latter will serve as the University of Maine's Offshore Energy Research Center, while the remaining two will be for private industry technology proving. The principles behind this designation are to further the development of offshore, deep water floating wind platforms, to facilitate Maine's movement away from fossil fuel use, and to foster a green, renewable energy industry

in the state. The University of Maine received an 8 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to help with research and development. The grant also indicates that the federal government considers the state of Maine to be on the leading edge of offshore wind technology in the United States. **CONTACT: Matt Nixon at 287-1491 or Matthew.E.Nixon@maine.gov .**

ECONOMICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Maine's Regulatory Fairness Board Meet in Augusta on Monday, December 14th . The Board is comprised of public members of Maine's business community and staffed by the SPO Economics and Demographics Team. The Board is established to hear testimony and to report to the Legislature and the Governor on regulatory and statutory changes necessary to enhance the State's business climate. The purpose of the hearing was to provide an audience for business owners, advocates, and trade association representatives to discuss problems that businesses have encountered in complying with Maine laws and regulations. The Board will report specific suggestions, partly based on testimony received at this hearing that could improve communications, programs, or policies between Maine's businesses and state agencies. The Board is appreciative of those who took time out of their busy schedules to present on Monday. Future hearings (dates to be determined) will be held in different locations throughout the state to encourage additional public participation. More information about the Board is available at: <http://www.maine.gov/spo/boards/regulatoryfairness>. **CONTACT: Thomas Merrill at 287-1478 or thomas.merrill@maine.gov.**

October 2009 Retail Sales released. Total taxable retail sales in October 2009 were down 3.9% from October 2008, and 7.9% lower year-to-date compared to the same period last year. Food store, General Merchandise, and Auto Transportation sales were higher in October 2009 than in October of 2008. Building Supply sales were 18.1% lower through October compared to the same period last year. Retail sales data is available for download on the State Planning Office website at <http://www.maine.gov/spo/economics/economic/retailsales.htm>. **CONTACT: Thomas Merrill at 287-1478 or thomas.merrill@maine.gov.**

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY

The Governor's Office of Energy Independence and Security (OEIS) conducted its off season oil survey and has found that the current statewide average cash price for No. 2

heating oil to be at \$2.55 per gallon, down one cent from last week. Within the OEIS sample, the lowest actual heating oil price of \$2.28 per gallon was found in the Southwestern region. The highest price of \$2.80 per gallon was found in the Northern region. The statewide kerosene price average is \$2.95 per gallon at this time. The statewide average for propane based on a use of 600 gallons a year was \$2.76 per gallon. At the time of this release the price of WTI crude oil, major driver of refined product prices, including heating oil was \$69.22. The next survey is scheduled for December 21st, 2009. **CONTACT: Jennifer Puser at 287-6250 or jennifer.puser@maine.gov .**