**30% Land Group**

**Priorities SubGroup**

**DRAFT Recommendations**

**Feb 23, 2024**

**Big Picture Considerations**

* Tree growth and open space tax status, carbon offset lands, and areas protected through regulation provide some measure of conservation and climate values. However, as stated in *Maine Won’t Wait*, this goal focuses on permanent, enduring land conservation through the acquisition of fee and easement lands.
* Consider 2030 a milestone rather than an endpoint. Large, complex conservation transactions take many years and transcend state and federal administrations. How can we insulate this work from political fluctuations at the state and federal levels?
* Pragmatism: This is a broad, challenging topic, and we need to be realistic about how detailed/specific we can be in this time frame.
* The role of tribal lands and Indigenous stewardship needs further attention – continuing beyond/outside of this process.
* Recognize the need to conserve areas expected to have intrinsic, long-term climate resilience and biodiversity values while also seizing opportunities to protect critical resources threatened in the near future.
* Biodiversity-focused conservation objectives align well with wildlife watching and recreational access in many areas, especially in southern and central Maine, where most Beginning with Habitat (BwH) Focus Areas are within 30 miles of major population centers. (Focus Areas delineate significant concentrations of at-risk species and rare and exemplary natural communities where they co-occur with large intact habitat blocks.)

1. **Conserve areas that provide public access to Maine’s natural landscape.** 
   * New high-quality ADA-accessible outdoor recreation opportunities. These include boat access, trails, wildlife viewing, viewsheds, and other opportunities that reflect the many ways people engage with the land.
   * New parks and recreation infrastructure in and near urban areas to ensure all have access to a range of outdoor recreation opportunities. (See 3-30-300 rule; ‘close to’ includes 10 minutes… to an hour’s drive).
   * New parks and park infrastructure in urban areas to ensure all residents have access to a range of outdoor recreation opportunities.
   * Enhanced parking capacity for coastal boat launches to accommodate a range of uses.
2. **Conserve areas that support the conservation of the full diversity of Maine’s flora, fauna, and natural ecosystems.**
   * BwH Focus Areas in the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), particularly in southern and central Maine, and riparian and forest connectivity between the Focus Areas. *Increase conserved land in Focus Areas to at least 50% (still refining this metric).*
   * Special habitats: Areas that support at-risk species (e.g., 42 habitats associated with Species of Greatest Conservation Need in SWAP), Significant Wildlife Habitats, and rare and exemplary natural communities.
   * Late-successional and old-growth forests.
   * Softwood-dominated areas (and their connectivity and associated riparian areas) to be managed and maintained as mature forest/umbrella habitats for deer, migratory songbirds, pine marten, and many other species associated with this habitat type.
   * High-priority aquatic systems, including lake and pond systems, and sufficient buffers.
   * Expand Maine’s ecological reserve system, focusing on habitats of sufficient size and those not well represented in certain regions. (Reserves are one of the state’s only lands managed primarily for biodiversity and ecosystem services). *Increase state-owned reserve acreage by 50%*
   * Tidal marshes and adjacent uplands (‘marsh migration zones’) that provide connectivity and resilience in the face of rising sea levels and climate change.
   * Large intact core habitat and unfragmented habitat blocks, particularly in southern and coastal Maine.
   * Landscape-scale tracts with important habitat features in northern Maine.
   * Open habitats and grasslands can be maintained/managed to sustain species associated with these habitats.
   * Areas that score highly on climate resilience metrics (e.g., TNC tool)
3. **Conserve areas of significant cultural and socioeconomic value**
   * Land return projects that support objectives of Wabanaki tribes in Maine. Redefine cultural, commercial, and personal use in conservation provisions to include indigenous perspectives. Consider the benefits of tribal sovereignty in enabling access to resources that increase capacity for land management.
   * Fee or easement conservation of significant drinking water areas, such as Lake Auburn and Sebago Lake watersheds
   * Establish new cultural access provisions guaranteeing use and access by indigenous people, including a review of easement provisions. (*X-ref Funding/Systems group*).
   * Encourage collaboration between conservation-focused land trusts and community land trusts to create permanently affordable housing with connected conserved forest or conserved farmland.
   * Prioritize geographically distributed access for hunting and fishing.
   * Address historic and ongoing inequality by adopting an equity metric for all cultural and socioeconomic investments (‘deploy a geospatial and/or numeric metric to help prioritize investments more equitably’).

1. **Elevate the role and function of conservation planning in state agencies and among stakeholders**
   * Develop a strategic, stakeholder-led Landscape Conservation Design process led by the Beginning with Habitat Program.
   * Develop ecoregional priorities to ensure appropriate geographic representation of conserved lands.
   * Ensure sufficient staffing and funding for land acquisition, stewardship, and conservation planning (*X-ref Funding/Capacity Subgroup*)
   * Establish a central coordinating role for land conservation (*X-ref Funding/Capacity Subgroup*)