Maine Environment

LAND CONSERVATION CRISIS:
An Unprecedented Attack by Governor LePage

By Pete Didisheim

Maine’s most popular and successful land conservation program has been sabotaged by Governor Paul LePage. His actions put as many as 36 valuable conservation projects at risk and raise serious issues about the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program.

In a totally unprecedented and astonishing move, the governor has refused to release $11.5 million in voter-approved LMF funds. He has disrupted the work of the LMF Board (comprised mostly of his own appointees), launched politically motivated attacks on the LMF program, and made public comments about LMF that are patently false. The damage being done to LMF is serious, unacceptable, and must be stopped.

In Maine’s 195-year history, no governor has blocked the release of voter-approved bonds in the manner now being done by Governor LePage. And he’s blocked these not once, but twice: In 2013, the governor blocked these same LMF funds, refusing to release them until the Legislature passed the State’s hospital debt. After the Legislature passed a budget with the hospital payment, the governor signed the budget and promised, “As a measure of good faith, I am hereby directing the State Treasurer to begin to prepare matching funds above and beyond the LMF component—for exceeding the 1:1 match required by law.” But he never did.

Conservation Projects Jeopardized

Based on the governor’s promise, the State issued grant award letters for 30 projects in July 2014. Now, two years later, most of those projects and six more approved in early 2015 are hanging in the balance. Instead of acting in “good faith,” the governor is disrupting and jeopardizing nearly 50,000 acres of exceptional land for conservation, recreation, forestry, and agricultural purposes.

Here’s what’s at stake: the projects being blocked would protect important natural resources, wildlife habitat, and public access in 37 communities in 13 counties. They include working farms in southern Maine and working waterfront for commercial fishermen. One purchase awaiting state funds—the Cold Stream Forest Project in Somerset County—would protect more wild brook trout pond habitat than exists in the rest of northern New England. In 2014, this project was ranked as the third most important conservation project in the nation to receive federal funding from the Forest Legacy Program.

These land transactions were negotiated over a period of many years through the hard work of towns, land trusts, property owners, and state and federal agencies. Combined, they would leverage more than $30 million in matching funds above and beyond the LMF component—for exceeding the 1:1 match required by law.

Will of the People Ignored

There is no question that the will of Maine voters is being ignored as the governor heads down a path that could haunt the Legislature for years to come. As ransom payment to release the $11.5 million in LMF funds, the governor wants the Legislature to radically increase timber cutting in Maine’s Public Reserved Land forests and allow logging.

Solar Power: from Your House to the State House

As the opportunity for solar power continues to increase rapidly in response to declining costs and growing markets, NRCC is working on multiple fronts to increase access to solar for Maine people, businesses, and communities.

With the 30 percent federal tax credit for solar currently set to expire at the end of 2016, states that are taking their own initiative will be best poised to see continued growth in solar. Maine is lagging in the region in solar and is the only state with no real solar policy, so we’ve got our work cut out for us.

Fortunately, there is exciting solar action in Maine “from the ground up,” by homeowners, communities, and others looking to switch to a clean, local, stable source of power. NRCC has kick-started a new effort to bring knowledge and inspiration to four communities across Maine: Bowdoinham, Augusta, Farmington, and Hancock. In October, Emmie Theberge, NRCC’s clean energy policy advocate, gave presentations in the first two communities, in partnership with ReVision Energy, to help people better understand the benefits of solar—on their rooftops, in their communities, and for electricity consumers statewide. We hope this initiative will also inspire residents to consider community-based solar initiatives like those going on in Freeport, Wiscasset, and elsewhere.

Maine also needs new laws and regulations to improve access to solar for everyone. Although even minor solar legislation has faced stiff opposition from the governor and utility companies, we’ve made some progress and have some prospects for change. In 2014 NRCC helped pass legislation (over the governor’s veto) that led to a concrete analysis of the benefits solar provides to Maine. This year a comprehensive solar policy bill by Rep. Sara Gideon (D-Freeport) and a bill by Sen. Tom Saviello (R-Franklin) to help farmers install solar were both thwarted by opponents. However, we did lead efforts to pass (over the governor’s veto) a bill setting up a process at the Public Utilities Commission to develop a new solar policy by bringing interested parties together. The goal is a policy that accelerates solar in Maine from small rooftop projects to larger scale solar farms, and doing so in a way that is fair and maximizes benefits for consumers. Overcoming opposition from those who don’t want solar will take all of us working together when the new solar policy proposal goes to the Legislature in January. —Dylan Voorhees, NRCC Clean Energy Director

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I have been speaking with many of NRCM’s longtime members these past few months. They remember with pride how NRCM helped restore the Kennebec from a stinking industrial dump to a vibrant river that now supports the largest alewife run east of the Mississippi. They remember when we helped ban DDT, which allowed the comeback of Bald Eagles we can see so plentifully now. They remember when, together, we stopped a nuclear reactor from being built next to Acadia National Park.

Maine has made tremendous progress toward preserving their forests, restoring their rivers, and protecting our wildlife because NRCM and members like you put in the time and energy it takes to engage in the debates and make things right.

Every NRCM member’s efforts matter. I recently attended the memorial of one long-time member, Leon Gorman, a man who partnered with NRCM for decades. The grandson of L.L. Bean, Leon was a savvy businessman, a dedicated conservationist, and a lifelong outdoorsman. Despite globalization, L.L. Bean remained a Maine-based company. The L.L. Bean employees with whom I sat at the memorial spoke with great fondness and respect for Leon and the company he built.

Leon gave back to Maine, and his wife, Lisa, has been a full partner in their philanthropy. Maine students have access to great classes at our community colleges in large part because of the Gormans. Families and individuals who are struggling have access to food, shelter, and counseling because of the Gormans. Those of us who love the natural world—and Leon certainly did—are able to enjoy wild places and breathe cleaner air because of them. The last photo in the memorial slideshow captured him perfectly: Leon, with his backpack on, happily wading as he headed down the trail.

We are so fortunate that this kind of passion and commitment not only survives, but thrives in Maine. I see it in the next generation of stewards that have come together to create NRCM Rising, our initiative aimed at engaging young Mainers in protecting the environment. I see it in the townspeople across the state who are tapping into our Sustainable Maine program to find ways to reduce waste and move toward cleaner energy in their communities. I see it in the outstanding men and women who received NRCM’s 2015 Conservation Leadership Awards (see page 3). I see it in you.

So join us as we head into 2016. We are ready to reclaim the Land for Maine’s Future program from Governor LePage, ensure that our Public Reserved Lands are not overharvested, make solar energy accessible to more Maine families and businesses, and focus like a laser on creating a new National Park and National Recreation Area east of Baxter. Time and time again, we work together to make things right.
Looking to have your charitable dollars go farther? Want to make an even greater impact? Gifts of long-term appreciated stock are easy to make. They also provide tax incentives that help many donors to make larger gifts than they might otherwise.

For example, “Joe Paddler” has a stock account with a well-known brokerage company. One of his stocks has grown from $15 a share to $75 a share over the past few years. If he asked his broker to sell the stock, Joe would owe capital gains tax on $60 of appreciation for each share he sold.

However, if Joe gave the stock to NRCM, he would avoid the capital gains tax on the appreciation and receive, instead, an income tax deduction on the full value of the stock.

Let’s say Joe decided to give 100 shares of this stock as a year-end gift to NRCM. In making the gift, he would obtain a charitable income tax deduction of $7,500, even though he only paid $1,500 for these shares originally. With combined federal and state taxes above 30 percent, Joe could possibly save more than he paid for the stock in the first place!

A win for Joe, and a win for Maine’s environment.

Historically, year-end is a popular time for making stock gifts. In fact, most stock gifts occur during the fourth quarter of the year. Many donors review their portfolios to select those stocks that have appreciated the most (and, critically, have been held for more than a year). These donors give stock instead of cash because they have discovered the value—and enjoyment—of increasing their holdings during the fourth quarter of the year. Many donors review their portfolios to select those stocks that have appreciated the most (and, critically, have been held for more than a year). These donors give stock instead of cash because they have discovered the value—and enjoyment—of increasing their holdings.

Have you considered making a gift of appreciated stock to NRCM? It may be better for you than making a gift of cash. Your CPA or investment advisor can advise you on whether such a gift makes sense for you. —Gretta Wark, NRCM Senior Director of Philanthropy

For more information about tax-wise gifts, please contact Gretta J. Wark, Senior Director of Philanthropy at (207) 622-3101 ext. 206 or Matt Scease, Associate Director of Philanthropy, at ext. 230.

Taking Stock . . . and Giving It

Congratulations to Our 2015 Conservation Leadership Award Winners

NRCM was pleased to honor our 2015 Conservation Leadership Award winners on October 14th at Maple Hill Farm Inn in Hallowell. More than 100 people attended this special event celebrating five individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to protecting Maine’s environment. The awards were presented following a reception and congratulatory remarks by Executive Director Lisa Pohlmann and Board Vice President Russ Pierce. Each winner shared his or her own remarks, a highlight of the evening. View photos from the event and read the award citations at www.nrcm.org. Special thanks to Maine magazine, media sponsor of this special event.

Bob Cummings (Phippsburg), Lifetime Achievement, for his extraordinary contributions to the conservation of Maine lands

Phil Coupe (Portland) and Fortunat Mueller (Portland), for their vision and leadership in moving Maine toward a clean energy future

Susan Davies (Liberty) for helping protect Maine from mining pollution

Bonnie Pooley (Bethel), People’s Choice Award, for her outstanding success in engaging young people in the work of protecting Maine’s environment

NRRC 2015 Board Members

Sarah Short (Portland) is development director at the Mitchell Institute. A native of North Carolina, Sarah spent her summers on Mount Desert Island and always wanted to live in Maine full-time. Prior to moving to Maine, she worked in fundraising at the Union of Concerned Scientists. She participated in the Lift 360 nonprofit board member training last fall and chose NRCM as her mentoring organization. She is also active with NRCM Rising. She has a BA from Amherst College and an MBA from Yale University.

Bill Meserve (Winchester, MA) is a retired partner at the law firm of Ropes & Gray. He has a summer home on Cushing Island. He serves on the Bingham Foundation Advisory Committee, on the Appalachian Mountain Club board in Maine, and on other boards in New England and beyond. Bill has degrees from Tufts, Harvard, and the London School of Economics. He enjoyed a visit to the proposed National Park lands with NRCM staff and has been an advocate for NRCM’s funding proposals.

Dennis King (Freeport) is CEO of Maine Behavioral Healthcare. From 1999-2015 he served as the CEO of Spring Harbor Hospital in Westbrook. He was the founding CEO of The Acadia Hospital in northern Maine. He has an MPA from the University of Maine. Dennis was on the NRCM board from 2010 to 2011 and is looking forward to joining us again. He and his wife, Sandra, have a camp on Green Lake in Hancock County and have been NRCM members for more than 20 years.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT for a New National Park for Maine

Have you signed our petition yet? Sign today in support of a new National Park and National Recreation Area in Maine’s North Woods and then share it on your Facebook wall!

www.nrcm.kintera.org/parkpetition

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Special Memberships Given
May 1, 2015 to September 30, 2015

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Special thanks to these members!

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Carol Gawlicki
Roger D. Gould
Bruce Guernsey
Daniel Hill
Mary Jo, and Isobel A. Anable
Leesa Barnes
Dr. Lawrence A. Boyle and Mrs. Victoria E. Russell
Julia A. Creighton
Robert Cote
Bob and Mary Ellen Cummings
George G. and Lynn L. Davenport
Gary Dawdon
Carol Gawlicki
Roger D. Gould
Bruce Guernsey
Daniel Hill

Honoraria and Memorial Gifts

Memories Nature Center in honor of Lisa Pohlmann
Sarah McCarthy in memory of Kirk Pfeffer
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Jennifer Shotwell in memory of Dr. David Pearce
Jeanne Shonto in memory of Don Teldota
Carey Watkins in memory of Walter Rand, Jr.

New members of PARTNERS IN MAINE’S FUTURE Program, our monthly giving club.

Members’ automatic donations help us save on administrative costs, including paper. Special thanks to these members!

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Give the Gift of Maine’s Environment This Holiday Season

Your gift memberships help us keep Maine’s lakes, rivers, and coastlines beautiful, our forests healthy, and our air clean. Special offer! Now through January 31, 2016, give a gift membership and receive a DVD of our Emmy-nominated film, Protecting the Nature of Maine, with each paid membership!

Give the code: NRCMnewsletter.

On the NRCM Blogosphere

 ► Dipping and Dashing for a Good Cause Guest blogger Emily O’Donnell is gearing up for her third year participating in our Polar Bear Dip & Dash.
 ► A Summer Adventure on Maine’s Public Reserved Lands, by NRCM board member Karen Herold
 ► My Walkabout at Dodge Point, by NRCM board member Jeff Pidot
 ► Update@Pontifex: Pope Francis Goes to Washington, by NRCM Associate Director of Philanthropy Matt Sease
 ► Exploring the Mahoosuc Public Reserved Lands: Grafton Notch, Baldpate, and More, by guest blogger Ryan Linn, creator of Guthook’s Hiking Guides apps for smart phones
 ► A New Maine National Park: The “Wow” Factors, by NRCM Environmental Policy Outreach Coordinator Ryan Parker

Spotlight on Sustainability

Have you visited our new web hub devoted entirely to sustainability in Maine? Get the latest about the people, places, and initiatives making a positive difference for our environment, from fresh local foods to clean solar energy to wasting food—the average person will eat about a pound of turkey, a quarter pound of green beans, and an eighth of a nine-inch pumpkin pie. For a green tip of the day every day, visit NRCM’s website at www.nrcm.org. And tune in to WCIZ 98.9 FM on your radio dial (web stream) to hear a new Maine Green Minute, every weekday, four times a day!

Green Tip of the Day

Earth-friendly Thanksgiving Many farmers’ markets stay open year-round. Buying locally puts far less pollution into Maine’s air and supports your neighbors. And plan carefully to prevent wasting food—the average person will eat about a pound of turkey, a quarter pound of green beans, and an eighth of a nine-inch pumpkin pie. For a green tip of the day every day, visit NRCM’s website at www.nrcm.org. And tune in to WCIZ 98.9 FM on your radio dial (web stream) to hear a new Maine Green Minute, every weekday, four times a day!

Do you have a photograph of Maine you’d like to share? A short poem? Send your submissions to beth@nrcm.org.

Join hundreds of brave Mainers for the Natural Resources Council of Maine’s 8th annual POLAR BEAR DIP & DASH!

Thursday, December 31, 2015
East End Beach, Portland
Dip, dash, or both!
Learn more and sign up at nrcm.kintera.org/dipdash.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR LEAD SPONSORS!

Our one-of-a-kind Nature of Maine calendar makes a great gift! Would you like extra copies? Contact us at nrcm@nrcm.org or call (800) 287-2345.

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This inspiring documentary/film features some of Maine’s most important success stories. Stunning footage and dozens of interviews bring the threats and the accomplishments to life—and remind us what can be achieved when concerned people come together for a cause in which they believe.

Pollution; ban billboards; establish the bottle bill; battle special interests with citizen pressure; fight for clean air and water; conserve, and restore our land, water, and air; and for future generations. Membership starts at $35/year. Join online at www.nrcm.org.

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