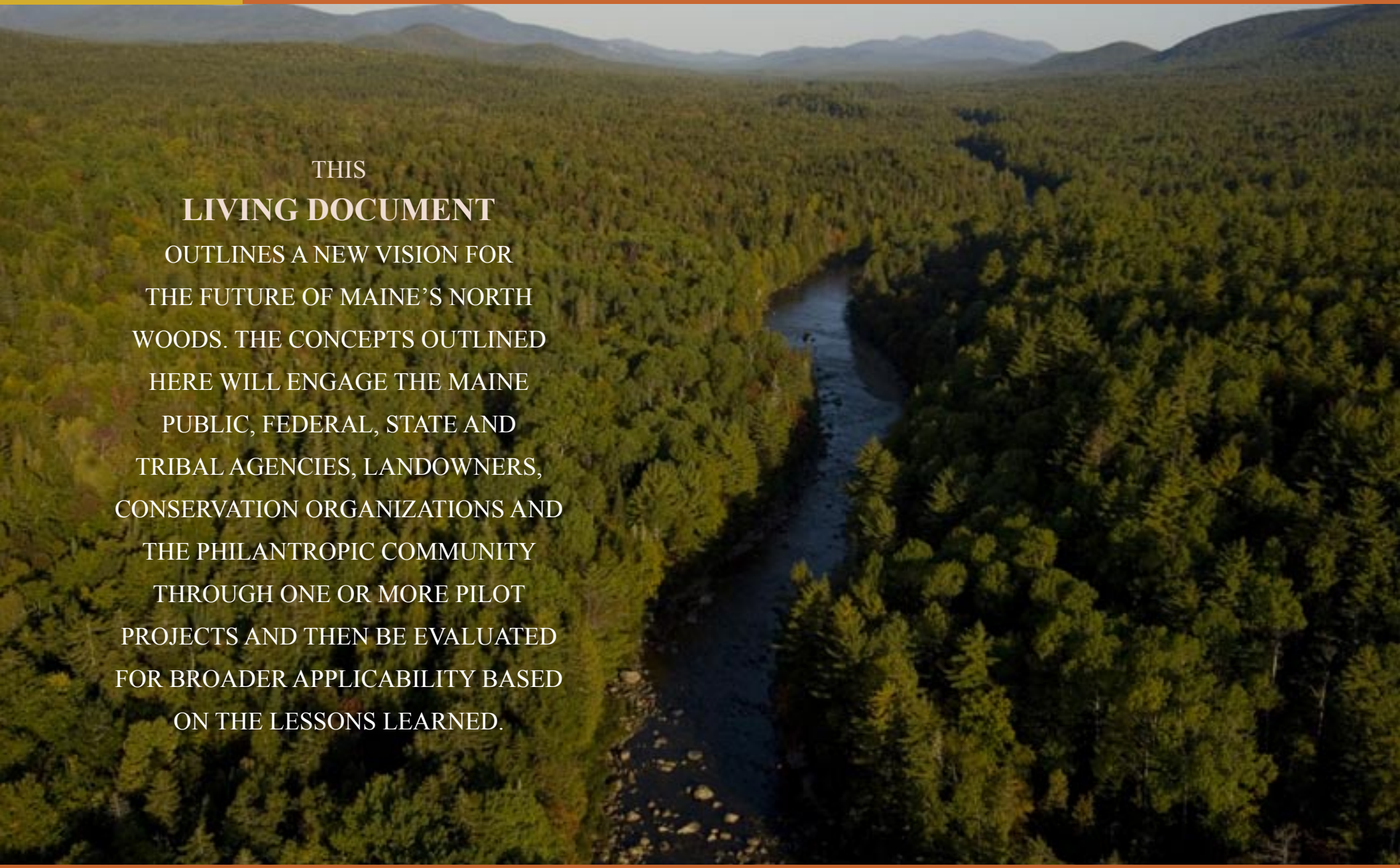
Keeping Maine's Forests

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THIS

LIVING DOCUMENT

OUTLINES A NEW VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF MAINE'S NORTH WOODS. THE CONCEPTS OUTLINED HERE WILL ENGAGE THE MAINE PUBLIC, FEDERAL, STATE AND TRIBAL AGENCIES, LANDOWNERS, CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PHILANTROPIC COMMUNITY THROUGH ONE OR MORE PILOT PROJECTS AND THEN BE EVALUATED FOR BROADER APPLICABILITY BASED ON THE LESSONS LEARNED.

Keeping Maine's Forests

A LANDSCAPE FOREST CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Proposed to

U.S. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE TOM VILSACK

And

U.S. SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR KEN SALAZAR

Developed by

KEEPING MAINE'S FORESTS STEERING COMMITTEE

August 2010

Keeping Maine's Forests Steering Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An unprecedented coalition of groups has joined together under the banner of Keeping Maine's Forests in an effort to conserve the state's magnificent forests and maintain a vibrant forest products industry. This proposal to the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture is the result of frank discussions among landowners, mills, conservationists, sporting and recreational interests, tribal nations and local communities seeking to identify shared interests and a common pathway forward.

This pathway involves building on the success of previous forest land conservation projects like the West Branch of the Penobscot, Downeast Lakes and most recently Stowe Mountain near Bethel, Maine; testing out new approaches through one or more pilot projects; and scaling up conservation efforts over time as confidence in the approach builds. This proposal provides the background and broad vision of Keeping Maine's Forests while describing two potential pilot projects, one in Maine's Downeast Forest and the other in Maine's Western Mountains, both of which can be immediately pursued if sufficient resources are available. The pilot projects represent the first phase of Keeping Maine's Forests after which the objectives and concepts contained in this proposal will be reviewed, assessed and revised as appropriate.

> ***"There it was, the State of Maine, which we had seen on the map, but not much like that - immeasurable forest for sun to shine on...:"***
>
> ***Henry David Thoreau, The Maine Woods***

As a result of nine months of deliberations and consultation with a wide variety of interests (see Appendix 1 for more on contacts), the participants of Keeping Maine's Forests have looked at Maine's forests – which are predominantly in private ownership – through a new lens. Historically, forest landowners have been asked to shoulder the primary responsibility for maintaining the many values of the forest which directly benefit the public such as wildlife, pristine lakes

and rivers, stored carbon, and recreational access. These are important public values and should be treated accordingly, rather than as liabilities which burden landownership. Keeping Maine's Forests seeks to reframe that relationship so that the public supports the long-term ownership objectives of forest landowners and develops mechanisms to reward them for maintaining and enhancing forest values with demonstrable public benefits for future generations.

Our Vision

We seek a future that maintains both the environmental and economic integrity of the Maine Woods, the largest continuous expanse of largely undeveloped and unfragmented forest in the Eastern United States. We envision the Maine Woods composed of a matrix of public land, private land permanently protected by conservation easement, land managed under long term agreements for habitat or ecosystem services and other private forest land. This matrix will help assure the vitality and competiveness of the forest products industry, sustain a healthy and intact forest, protect valuable habitat and provide for public recreation.

This matrix, and its benefits to the industry and the people of Maine, can be achieved through thoughtful and creative design and use of a variety of financial incentives that reframe the public-private relationship – rewarding landowners for long-term assurances of public benefits provided by these forests, and through investments in acquiring conservation easements and fee conservation lands.

To be successful, Keeping Maine's Forests must assure all of these continued public benefits:

- Maintain a stable or increasing flow of wood fiber;
- Promote healthy forests – sustainably managed;
- Safeguard key natural resources particularly water resources;
- Conserve and enhance key fish and wildlife habitats;
- Provide abundant recreational opportunities; and
- Sustain local economies.

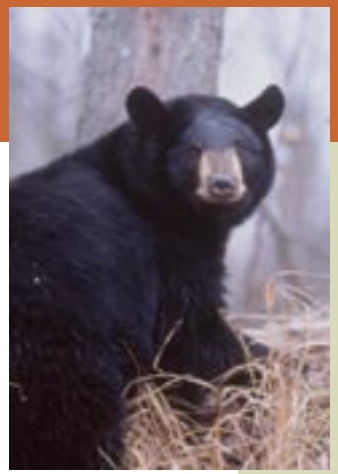
In the past, these objectives have often been viewed as being in conflict with one another. Moving forward, it is imperative that they be seen as mutually supportive of one another and pursued collectively.

Keeping Maine's Forests seeks to involve the US Departments of Agriculture and Interior to test and implement approaches that could be used to achieve these goals. Through a strategic and creative partnership, Keeping Maine's Forests offers an opportunity for making federal conservation and stewardship programs more relevant and cost-effective than ever before and to make the Maine Woods a model for landscape management and conservation that will provide a sustainable flow of wood to the state's forest products industry while conserving significant environmental and recreational values.

Forests: Maine's Defining Natural Resource

Maine's forests have traditionally been and remain today the very foundation of the state's economy. In fact, Maine's forest products industry ranks first in the country in terms of its contribution to the state's economy and second in the nation in terms of its contribution to state jobs (based on available data). The more than 200 forest products facilities in the state are both diverse and innovative, including both traditional products such as paper and lumber as well as emerging markets for energy and chemical production. Maine's forests are also the base for a growing tourism and recreation economy which currently contributes billions to the state's economy.

Were Thoreau to return today, he would find that the Maine Woods remain remarkably like they were when he last visited more than a century and a half ago. Today, forests still blanket some 90% of Maine's area, and are without doubt the state's single largest natural asset and an extraordinary resource of national and global importance. What we know as "the Maine Woods" is an extraordinary 12 million acre expanse of contiguous forest stretching from the White Mountains along the Maine-New Hampshire border, north to the Allagash Wilderness Waterway and east to the Downeast coast. It comprises the greatest continuous expanse of unbroken forest in the Eastern United States, encompassing the largest intact temperate broadleaf and mixed forest in the nation and one of the best examples in the entire world.



Here one encounters an array of fish and wildlife found nowhere else in the Eastern United States. What Mainers consider common species such as wild brook trout, moose, loons and black bears draw people from around the planet. As the impacts from global climate change grow, the Maine Woods offer an extraordinary opportunity for carbon storage and to facilitate the adaptation of forest ecosystems. The Maine Woods provide an essential base for Tribal Nations to sustain cultural values and contribute to their livelihood. They are also home to world-class outdoor recreation destinations – from the nation's best wild brook trout fishery to classic Maine sporting camps and the Appalachian Trail.

Public Values on Private Lands: Maine's Unique Forest Management Tradition

Why have the Maine Woods retained so much of their special character?

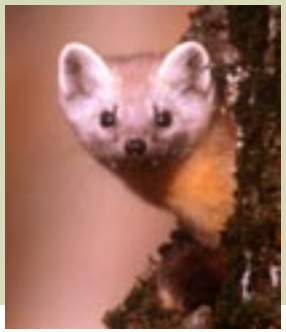
The fact that a resource of such extraordinary value and national significance remains intact today is a testament to those who have who have owned and managed these lands through the generations. All of the public values that exist in Maine's forests today have evolved in the midst of a working forest that has been harvested for hundreds of years. Unlike the vast expanses of public lands elsewhere in the country, Maine's forests remain largely in private hands while still providing a wealth of public benefits. For generations, the owners of large tracts of Maine's forests have managed their lands primarily as a resource for the forest products industry. Their stewardship not only furnished natural resources for their mills, it also prevented subdivision of these lands, provided quality habitat for fish and wildlife and maintained public access for outdoor recreation.

Maine's Forests in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities

What is the future of Maine's Woods? No one person or interest has or should have the answer.

Wildlife

Maine forests are home to over 85% of the remaining wild brook trout populations in the lower 48 states, and support more moose and bear than any state save Alaska. The Maine Woods harbor such rare, threatened and endangered species as Atlantic salmon, Canada lynx, wood turtles, Bicknell's thrush, black terns, yellow lampmussel and the extremely rare Tomah mayfly. Abundant insect life feeds the young gray jay, the three-toed woodpecker and the spruce grouse. The unbroken forests coupled with thousands of streams, wetlands, lakes and ponds provide habitat for species that stay close to home and those that need to range, accomodating one of the most diverse array of large and small predators in the entire country, including carnivore species from weasels, marten, raccoon and fisher to bobcats, red fox, lynx and coyotes.



Over the past 20 years, there have been dramatic changes in forest land ownership that had been relatively stable for generations. Previously, most of the Maine Woods was owned by paper companies that relied upon these lands to supply their mills. Today, Maine's forests are largely owned by a new generation of investors that own these lands independent from the mills, though still relying on vibrant wood markets. This change has generated some public concern that the enormous benefits that these forests have provided for many generations could, over time, be lost. It has also led to unprecedented opportunities for forest land conservation. (see page 21).

In recent decades, Maine has tried to plot a course through often heated debate, through contentious referenda and regulatory proceedings, through a tug of war that has left blisters but no winner or coherent vision. Instead, the answer is

emerging from this effort through recognition of shared interests and through collaboration and commitment to joining forces for the sake of the largest contiguous forest east of the Mississippi.

A Public-Private Partnership to Provide New Direction

As we build a foundation of trust, Keeping Maine's Forests now offers a bold initiative to advance national conservation goals in a manner consistent with the traditions and needs of Maine people. This collaborative initiative honors the full spectrum of values Maine's forests provide - from wood to wildlife - by working with landowners to support their long-term ownership objectives and maintain timber supply while, at the same time ensuring that the forest will continue to provide its many public benefits. It seeks to accomplish this objective through a two-pronged approach of land conservation and stewardship.

Keeping Maine's Forests will focus primarily on creating opportunities for willing forest landowners to ensure that their lands are not developed and can remain an active part of Maine's productive timber base. In addition, it is time to recognize that, while it is reasonable to expect forest land management to meet established regulatory standards, such as protecting water quality, there need to be new mechanisms developed to fairly compensate landowners for the societal benefits provided by maintaining forest attributes such as biodiversity, wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and public recreation. These go beyond legal responsibility of land ownership. This approach builds on the model in place for conservation of public values on private agricultural lands and the emergence of markets for ecosystem services.

Recreation

Recreation in the Maine Woods wears many faces. There's the look that seems equal parts terror and exhilaration rafting through a Maine river gorge; the surprise at seeing a moose step into the pond just yards from your canoe; the steady eyed expression of the hunter staring down his sights; the goggled-helmeted bearing of the snowmobiler; the quiet intensity on the face of the fisherman setting his fly. These, and the faces of ATV riders, cross-country and downhill skiers, birdwatchers, mountain climbers, botanists, and camp owners are all reflections of the dual roles recreation plays in Maine's Woods.

Recreation embodies so many of the time-honored traditions of Maine people, whether the annual moose hunt or the once-in-a-lifetime family trip down the best wilderness canoe rivers in the East. But just as importantly, recreation as an industry allows Maine guides, outfitters, sporting camp owners, restaurateurs and many others to make their livings here just as their families have for generations.

KEEPING MAINE'S FORESTS

Over the past decade, Maine has led the nation in working with large forest landowners on working forest easements and developing shared conservation outcomes. Keeping Maine's Forests seeks to build upon and improve that success. A comprehensive box of conservation tools such as easements, long-term stewardship payments, and fee acquisitions, designed to meet the needs of individual landowners while assuring the continued public conservation and recreational benefits allows a tailored approach to conservation across the Maine Woods.

In contrast to uneven and piecemeal public support for stewardship efforts that have been the norm, Keeping Maine's Forests envisions a stewardship initiative to address comprehensively a broad range of resource management objectives in a coherent and cohesive manner. As part of the pilot project phase, Keeping Maine's Forests proposes to design a practical approach to compensate landowners for the benefits the public derives from their lands. After evaluation following the pilot project phase, this approach could be made available across the region and complement the growth of markets for ecosystem services.

Pilot Project Proposal

Keeping Maine's Forests proposes to test the best approaches to implement these concepts over the next two to three years on specific ownerships and to refine the concepts outlined herein. Two potential pilot projects are outlined in this proposal: one in the Downeast region of Maine and the other in the High Peaks region of Western Maine. Each incorporates multiple landowners that have expressed an interest in participating in conservation and/or stewardship initiatives. Both involve acquisition of both conservation easements and fee lands that would connect existing conservation ownerships resulting in an extraordinary example of landscape conservation.

Endorsement of the potential pilot projects by the Keeping Maine's Forests Steering Committee is intended to qualify the projects to take advantage of the federal programs that support the objectives of Keeping Maine's Forests. The landowner will negotiate the specific terms of any transaction with appropriate buyer representatives. As details for the components of the pilot project are developed, the Steering Committee will review the pilot projects to assess whether they meet the objectives identified as necessary for Keeping Maine's Forests' success. Based upon this vetting process, the Steering Committee will offer its support for funding and implementation of the pilot projects.

After one or more pilot projects has been implemented, the Steering Committee will evaluate the success of the project(s) in meeting the goals of Keeping Maine's Forests and reassess the long-term objectives of the initiative and whether, and how, the initiative should be expanded to the broader region.

Looking more broadly at the Maine Woods, four "Demonstration Landscapes" have been identified to illustrate the potential future outcomes that could result: Western Mountains & Lakes; Allagash & St. John Rivers; Moosehead to Katahdin, and Downeast. Each of these areas possesses an extraordinary array of conservation values; substantial existing conserved lands; forest landowners who have expressed interest in pursuing forest conservation and stewardship opportunities; and experienced non-profit conservation organizations prepared to take the lead on major conservation initiatives. It is important to note that not

Maine has taken steps to control its own destiny by building trust and dialogue among forest landowners, conservationists, the environmental community, recreational users and others.

all landowners in the demonstration landscapes have expressed interest in taking advantage of potential conservation or stewardship options.

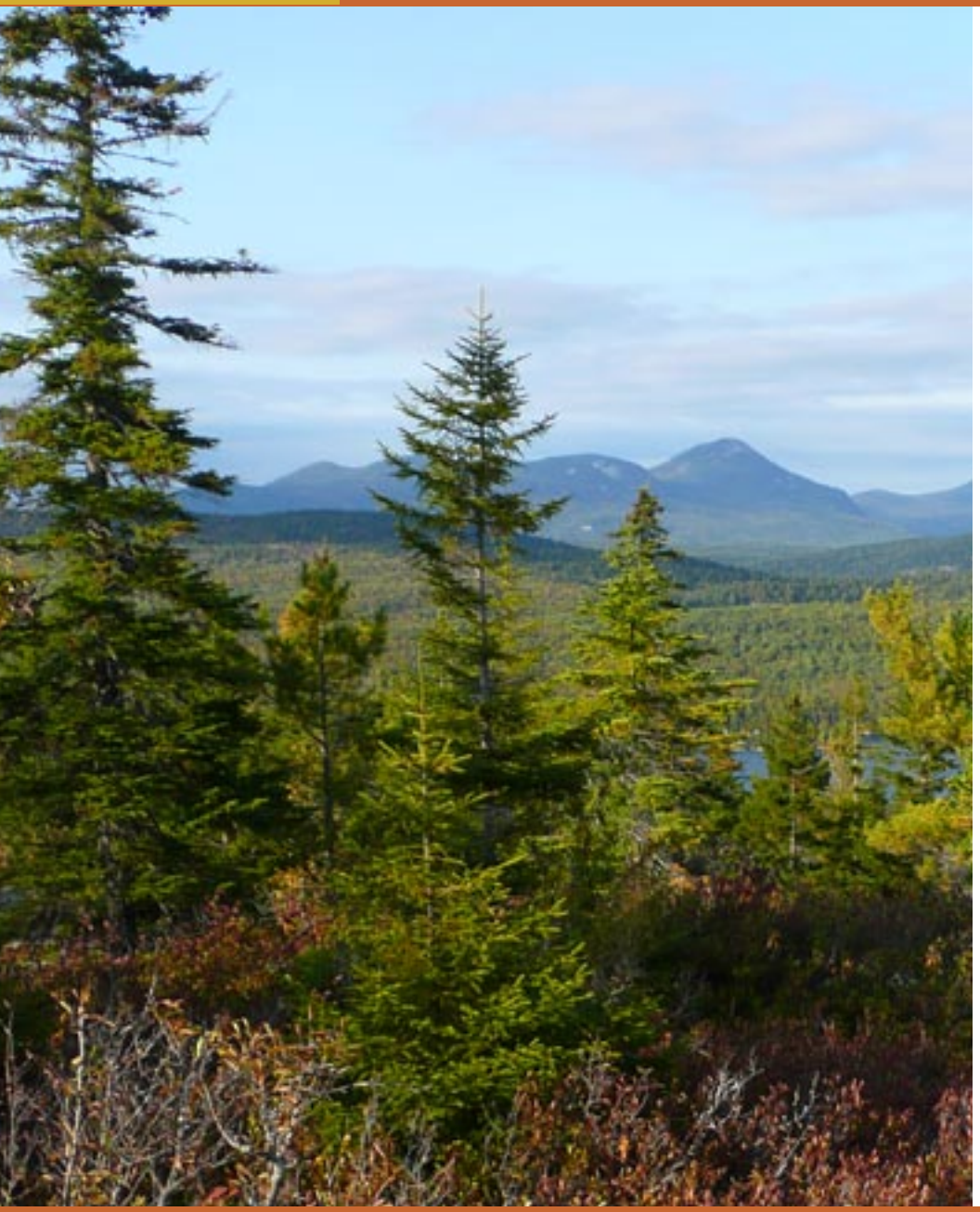
An Investment to Yield Enormous Dividends for the Future

This proposal identifies those programs within the Departments of Interior and Agriculture that have objectives and track records closely aligned with the Keeping Maine's Forests initiative and which could be utilized to help fund the proposed conservation and stewardship components. Seeking to ensure the future of the Maine Woods represents a major funding challenge that will need to be sustained over many years. Because these are resources of both state and national significance, and equally or more important to the citizens of Northern Maine, Keeping Maine's Forests proposes that costs be shared by federal agencies and state and private sources.

Keeping Maine's Forests is seeking $25 million of federal funding (above and beyond what Maine has been receiving for forest conservation and stewardship) to initiate the pilot project phase of Keeping Maine's Forests which will be supplemented by state and private funding. Based upon the success of the pilot project(s) and an assessment of landowner interest in participating in the Keeping Maine's Forests initiatives, long-term funding projections will be developed.

We seek a future that maintains both the environmental and economic integrity of the Maine Woods, the largest continuous expanse of largely undeveloped forest in the Eastern United States.

To succeed, the Keeping Maine's Forests initiative will require much more than funding. It will require increased flexibility on the part of federal programs for the use of the funds available. It must create an effective process to make decisions and evaluate progress. It must bring many more groups into the mix to ensure that the outcome ultimately reflects the interests of all who have a stake in it. Keeping Maine's Forests proposes to add representatives of local communities and a range of forest interests, as well as federal agencies, to the existing Steering Committee. This broader group will develop an implementation plan,



identifying where and how to focus initial efforts and resources, with projected budgets and a selection process for conservation and stewardship projects. Additionally, it will be critical to closely involve Maine's Congressional delegation throughout the implementation process.

Ongoing Assessment and Discussion:

Over the past months, the Keeping Maine's Forests Steering Committee has made tremendous progress in identifying common concerns and agreeing upon conservation and stewardship strategies to pursue as part of the proposed pilot projects. However, the Steering Committee members view this proposal and the Keeping Maine's Forests initiative as a dynamic effort that will evolve and improve based upon the experience with the pilot project(s), additional research and analysis, and ongoing discussion. The Steering Committee has identified a variety of challenges and issues that require its future attention that can help to refine and improve Keeping Maine's Forests and strengthen the partnership and resolve of its participants. These issues include:

- Assessing the impact of the Keeping Maine's Forests initiative on wood supply;
- Reviewing, improving and, where possible, simplifying working forest conservation easement standards;
- Assessing the success of the Keeping Maine's Forests initiative in protecting key ecological and recreational resources;
- Encouraging local and regional planning efforts that identify appropriate locations for future economic development and areas of high conservation need;
- Exploring forest conservation needs and opportunities in southern Maine;
- Creating an effective framework for programs that pay landowners for ecological services and societal benefits; and
- Monitoring development pressures in the Maine Woods.

What You Need to Know About

Maine's Working Forest

That a resource of such extraordinary value and national significance remains intact is a testament to those who have owned and stewarded these lands through the generations.

Forest Condition:

- Maine's ***timber inventory has almost doubled in the past fifty years.***
- Maine ***is the leading states in the nation with 42% of its forest land base independently certified*** as sustainably managed and 100 logging firms attaining Master Logging Certification.
- Maine's ***forests are well balanced*** into the three stages of development with 29% in the seedling/sapling stage (young forest), 38% in the poletimber stage (medium-age growth) an d 33% in the saw timber stage (more mature growth).

Maine Jobs:

- Approximately ***one in every 15 Maine jobs*** are directly or indirectly dependent upon the forestry sector; Maine ranks among the very top states in terms of the contribution of the forest products industry to employment of its residents.
- Average paper manufacturing ***wages are nearly twice the state average;*** The annual payroll from Maine's forest products industry exceeds one billion dollars.

Manufacturing and Energy:

- Maine is the ***second largest paper-producing state in the nation;*** Over the past decade, the output from Maine's paper mills and saw mills has been near record levels.
- Maine's sawmill ***production of lumber has increased by 250%*** with ***hardwood lumber production by about 400%*** since 1975.
- Forest products account for approximately ***one-third of Maine's manufacturing output*** and approximately 18% of the state's foreign exports.

Climate Change:

- ***Maine's abundant natural regeneration perpetuates the cycle of sequestering carbon*** in Maine's managed forest lands.
- ***Energy production from wood biomass makes productive use of wood waste products***, provides a market for low-quality trees allowing for improved forest management and reduces Maine's dependence on fossil fuels.

Opportunities for the Future:

- ***The Advanced Engineered Wood Composite Center at the University of Maine at Orono is a world-class research initiative*** developing technologies that are leading the way to new applications and uses of wood for a variety of structural products; Research indicates that a variety of valuable products can be made from wood including substitutes for a number of fuels and chemicals currently derived from petroleum.

Common Ground and Accomplishment

Keeping Maine's Forests offers an innovative new approach to landscape scale conservation and stewardship involving primarily private lands. Unlike efforts that focus on restoration of degraded habitats and polluted water resources, it is a far more cost-effective strategy: acting before the landscape becomes fragmented or loses its unique character. It is equally concerned with maintaining both the natural and economic value of the forest. Keeping Maine's Forests offers a rare opportunity to make a farsighted investment in conservation and stewardship.

While the Keeping Maine's Forests initiative represents an ambitious endeavor, Maine's experience over the past dozen years suggests that it is an achievable undertaking. Since 1998, some 2.1 million acres of the Maine Woods have been permanently conserved through the collaboration of willing landowners, land trusts, Maine communities, and state and federal government. Over $280 million was been raised from public and private sources to acquire fee lands and conservation easements in the Maine Woods. Of that amount, over $170 million came from private sources demonstrating the level of commitment that has already been made to conservation of the Maine Woods and providing optimism that a true public-private funding partnership can be successful over the next decade and beyond.

By building trust and encouraging frank dialogue among forest landowners, conservationists, the forest products industry, tribes, communities, recreational users, and others, Keeping Maine's Forests seeks to empower this partnership to shape the destiny of the Maine Woods. Keeping Maine's Forests seeks the partnership of the Departments of Agriculture and Interior to realize an ambitious but achievable outcome that will pay deep and meaningful long term dividends.

And what do you think?

The thoughts and energies of a large number of people have gone into the Keeping Maine's Forests work so far. These folks come from different walks of life but share a belief that Maine's forests should - at a minimum - continue to offer the many important services and values they have in the past. They also agree that Maine works best when Maine people work together. There has been a great deal of outreach and more continuing, but your ideas may be just what's needed to move this effort forward.

Send your ideas this way

You can tear off this page and mail it to
Keeping Maine's Forests
P.O. Box 303
Brunswick, Maine 04011

or answer online at
keepingmainesforests.org
In either case, your help will be greatly appreciated.

Tell us:

If financial resources were available, what types of projects or services would be most beneficial for your community or interest? For example – Are there specific benefits derived from the forestlands that could be aided through a Keeping Maine's Forest project?

What types of projects and outcomes would make Keeping Maine's Forests a success in your eyes? What should we be most careful about?

Keeping Maine's Forests

To view or download the full proposal, for more information on Keeping Maine's Forests or to contribute your ideas, please find us on the web at keepingmainesforests.org