

# Maine Audubon Opposes Plum Creek's Proposal for the Moosehead Region



## **Moosehead Region**

- In addition to the state's largest lake, the Moosehead Lake region includes a myriad of smaller lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, and mountains. It is home to many important fish and wildlife species, including native brook trout, common loons, numerous migratory songbirds, and the threatened Canada lynx.
- Nationally renowned, the region supports a natural-resource based economy that includes forestry, hunting, fishing, hiking, snowmobiling, skiing, and wildlife watching.
- Wildlife watching and recreation is already more than a \$1 billion industry in Maine, involving 53 percent of Maine residents.

## **Plum Creek in Maine**

- Seattle-based Plum Creek, a Real Estate Investment Trust, is the largest commercial land owner in the United States. It currently owns 8 million acres.
- In 1998, Plum Creek paid less than \$200 an acre to buy more than 900,000 acres of Maine Northern Forest zoned for forestry, wildlife habitat protection, and remote recreation.
- The company announced in April of 2005 that it would petition Maine's Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) for rezoning almost half of its Maine land to allow more development. Plum Creek has since reconfigured its plan twice, and recently made additional adjustments.

## **Scope of the Proposal**

- Plum Creek proposes to rezone 408,000 acres and immediately begin converting 20,000 of those acres into subdivisions and commercial development. Development plans call for 2,315 house lots and other accommodations.
- Compared to the scale of what currently exists in the Moosehead region, proposed development is the equivalent of two or three towns. It is by far the largest development ever proposed in Maine.
- Included in the proposal:
  - 975 house lots (also could include club houses, boat launches, and marinas).
  - A 4,446-acre resort with 800 accommodation units at Moose Mountain.
  - A 777-acre resort with 250 accommodation units at Lily Bay.
  - One 90,000 acre conservation easement to balance development and one 266,000 acre easement for sale to private groups.
  - The resorts could be built up to six stories high, and include gas stations, stores, golf courses, beauty shops, restaurants, cell phone towers, and club houses up to 5,000 square feet. Five proposed new commercial development zones outside of the resorts would allow similar development.

## **LURC's Role**

- LURC's seven commissioners will decide whether to approve Plum Creek's plan by determining whether it has "undue adverse impact on existing uses or resources" and strikes "a reasonable and publicly beneficial balance" between development and conservation.

- Maine Audubon is a formal intervener in the LURC hearing process, which means that our testimony will be a core part of the public record and final decision.

## Sample Findings

- Maine Audubon and the Natural Resources Council of Maine worked with 12 scientists and other experts to create testimony for LURC that presents analysis of how Plum Creek's proposal would affect wildlife and habitat and the region's prized natural character and burgeoning nature-based tourism economy. (Read testimony summaries at [www.maineaudubon.org](http://www.maineaudubon.org).)
- Development is overwhelmingly too large.
- Proposed conservation does not balance development in the plan.
- Conservation agreements (easements) do not guarantee protection for wildlife.
- Development is planned in prime habitat and other special natural areas where it doesn't belong.
- Instead of clustering development, which is far better for wildlife, Plum Creek's plan stretches over 20,000 acres and will increase traffic on 550 miles of new and upgraded roads.
- Prime Canada lynx habitat will be lost and collisions with vehicles will increase lynx deaths to an unacceptable level for a threatened species with only about 500 animals left east of the Mississippi.
- Increased development, boating, and fishing will reduce loon breeding and increase their mortality rates. Loons already have unusually low breeding success in the Moosehead Lake region.
- Water quality in several Class A streams and ponds will drop and no longer be suitable for native wild brook trout, a unique national treasure.
- Increased traffic will degrade habitat, interfere with movements of many wild animals, and result in local extinction of wood turtles.
- High-value wetlands for waterfowl and rare species like the least bittern and rusty blackbird are not adequately protected.

## A Different Plan

- With a plan very different from Plum Creek's proposal, the Moosehead region could concentrate growth in or adjacent to existing development. Careful planning could avoid high-value habitat, protecting resources key to nature-based tourism. Conservation agreements could be written with the standard language of strong Maine easements that better protect wildlife and habitat.
- Maine Audubon opposes Plum Creek's plan, believing it would be irresponsible to accept it. A state dependent on tourism dollars generated by visitors from all over the world can't afford to damage the outstanding natural resources that draw those visitors.
- Plum Creek has the capacity to create a plan that would truly serve the region's residents, visitors, and wildlife.

## Your Voice

- **Please speak on behalf of Moosehead by attending one of LURC's public hearings or writing a letter to: Land Use Regulation Commission, 22 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333, e-mail: [LURC@maine.gov](mailto:LURC@maine.gov)**
- **Hearings are 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2-6 p.m. on December 1 (Greenville High School), 2 (Augusta Civic Center), 15 (Portland Holiday Inn by the Bay), and 16 (Greenville High School).**

*November 2007*

