

Fully fund the Land for Maine's Future program.

The Land for Maine's Future Program has been one of the state's outstanding achievements, securing public access to land from the shores of the St. Croix River to the trails of Tumbledown Mountain to the forests around Mount Agamenticus in York.

All told, the program has supported over 120 projects throughout all 16 of Maine's counties, following a model of land conservation based on the wishes of Maine's citizens, both statewide and regionally. The result is a long list of protected resources, including farmland, snowmobile trails, wilderness areas, game preserves, state parks, working forests, mineral sites, beaches and scenic mountain tops. Land preserved under the program is available for traditional uses, including hunting and fishing.

While providing recreational access to families throughout the state, Land for Maine's Future funds have been a significant economic stimulus: ask the town manager of Washburn who describes the multi-use trail in his community as an "economic bonanza." Without funds available, however, the state is helpless when opportunities arise: ask outfitters losing access to traditional sites or sportsmen losing water access from the North Woods to the south coast. While we sit by, land costs are rising dramatically.

In 1987, in 1999, and then again in 2005, Maine voters approved bonds of \$35 million, \$50 million, and \$10 million to fund the Land for Maine's Future Program—and they did so by margins of nearly 70 percent.

Why is fully funding the program—now—so critical? Opportunities to protect key parts of Maine's outdoor heritage are slipping through our fingers because the funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program is limited, while development pressures are greater than ever. Next month, the board will receive a large pile of extraordinary applications proposing to spend the latest \$10 million bond many times over. As a result of the previous lack of funding, projects are backed up. So the program will be out of money soon and opportunities will be lost.

Since 1987, the Land for Maine's Future Program has been there when Maine people faced these issues. Maine legislators' leadership can ensure it will be there again.

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