

Transportation & Conservation: 12/18/07
Bureau of Parks & Lands, Maine Department of Conservation
Alan Stearns, Deputy Director
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(207)287-3531

My focus is on conservation and recreation (as opposed to habitat, fish & wildlife)

I. Landscape-Scale Planning and Acquisition

- See maps. Maine's conservation landscape is changing quickly.
- **Control of Access:**
 - MDOT bought access on I-95 in the 1960's & 1970's, with significant resulting transportation and conservation benefits.
 - In the current era, conservation agencies (federal EPA, USFWS) are urging MDOT to retrofit existing roads rather than building new alignment, but tools for MDOT to buy access rights are seldom utilized, rusty, difficult.
 - Instead, conservation groups are buying access (fee or easement) in this decade, with resulting transportation benefits. MDOT should be at the table for planning and funding. Otherwise conservation groups are prone to "carve out" road frontage from conservation acquisitions as the most expensive and least ecological parcels.
 - Case study (good): Route 9 in Hancock & Washington Counties. TNC is driving the train. Miles of Route 9 already protected. More to come.
 - Case study (bad): Route 3 in Kennebec Waldo (there is no conservation agenda, thus no MDOT benefit.)
 - **Recommendation:** *BPL hopes to make BPL's Amherst acquisition a pilot success (hopes to get MDOT \$), with much more to come on Route 9. MDOT should choose a second highway corridor for additional focus & success.*
- **Scenic Byways**
 - Scenic Byways geographically tend to overlap with conservation acquisition priority areas: Grafton Notch; Route 201; Moosehead; Schoodic-to-Schoodic; Bigelow; More
 - Scenic Byway planning committees and administration tend to overlap with Land Trusts. Can this marriage be more deliberate? More efficient? More strategic? **Recommendation:** *MDOT should consider focusing its Byways administration grants toward existing local or regional entities, rather than supporting free-standing committees or free-standing staff.*
 - 2007 Grafton Notch acquisition is a great case study of BPL/MDOT partnership. BPL acquisition of 3700 acres of viewshed with USDOT/FHWA Scenic Byways Funds, along with USDA/USFS Forest Legacy Program Funds. **Recommendation:** *BPL recommends joint planning for strategic FHWA grant applications or earmarks of FHWA appropriations bills for additional acquisition along byway corridors matched with conservation \$.*

II. Recreation

- **Recreational Access at Bridges (snowmobiles, boats, fishing.)** Memorandum of Understanding in late 1990's: signatories MDOT, BPL, DIFW, DMR, SPO. Programmatic commitment to avoid the threat of legislation. Many great examples of success, some headaches, initiative died when task got cumbersome and leadership moved on. **Recommendation:** *BPL strongly recommends renewal of the MOU.* Great opportunity to demonstrate multi-agency efficiencies, build cross-agency constituencies, give MDOT employees a chance to be green.
- **Major new alignments: Presque Isle & Caribou.** See map. Major gap in recreational trail exists precisely where MDOT is planning new highway alignments. MDOT can barely justify new bypasses (weak purpose & need) but MDOT rejected request to add recreational trail to the purpose & need to beef up the project justifications.
- **Major new alignments: Wiscasset.** How much money has been spent on the EIS? Is there a plan for the East Coast Greenway as it passes through Wiscasset?
- **Major new alignments: Augusta East Side.** Connecting the Third Bridge to Route 17 presents a major opportunity to create (or destroy) trail connectivity in roughly the same corridor.
- **Maine Turnpike Widening (Portland-Falmouth).** Portland Trails has a mission, vision, agenda to leverage the widening for trail benefits. Why must it be imposed on transportation agencies, rather than invited & welcomed with expertise? Few entities other than Portland Trails have the sophistication to keep up with monstrous transportation projects.
- **Recommendation:** *MDOT should include recreation – especially linear trail connectivity -- as a stated goal, stated purpose & need, in all major new alignment projects.*

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