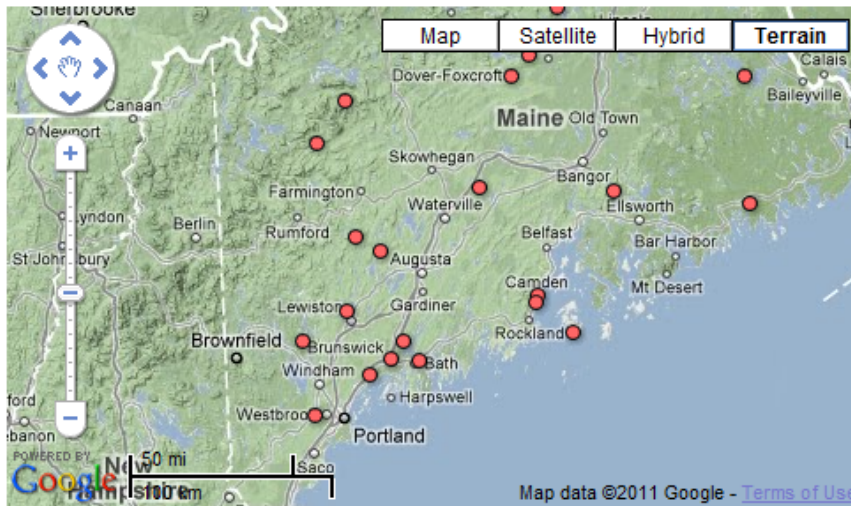


BANGOR DAILY NEWS

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Two Washington County projects among 22 to receive Land for Maine's Future funds



By Kevin Miller, BDN Staff

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ELLSWORTH, Maine — Two Washington County land conservation projects totaling more than 48,000 acres are among 22 proposals statewide selected for funding from the Land for Maine's Future program.

The winning projects were selected from 38 proposals seeking a share of \$9.25 million available in what [will likely be the last major round](#) of Land for Maine's Future funding for at least one year and maybe longer due to lack of money.

Created in 1987, the Land for Maine's Future program, or LMF, uses voter-approved bonds for conservation projects on exceptional ecological or recreational lands, farms threatened with development, commercial forests and waterfront areas important to commercial fishermen.

All told, the 22 projects will preserve roughly 76,000 acres throughout the state, including several small farms, an archaeological site in Dresden and more than 10,000 acres of high-alpine forest in Western Maine. The dollar figures for each project were not available Wednesday.

"These lands and the others the board selected are some of Maine's most special places," Don Marean of Hollis, chairman of the LMF board, said in a statement on Wednesday.

The two largest projects approved by the board are both located in Washington County and are part of a larger effort to protect from development more than 1 million acres of contiguous land — much of it working forest — in Maine and New Brunswick.

The first project, known as the West Grand Lake Forest, will protect 21,700 acres of lake frontage and working forests in the Grand Lake Stream area. The LMF funding will be one part of a \$24 million campaign led by the Downeast Lakes Land Trust.

“It’s a big boost to the campaign and a strong signal of the importance of the project to the state,” said Mark Berry, executive director of the Downeast Lakes Land Trust. Berry said the West Grand Lake project aims to sustain the region’s two leading economic engines: tourism in the Grand Lake Stream area and commercial forestry.

The second Washington County project is phase three of a long-term initiative to protect critical habitat in the uppermost headwaters of the Machias River. The Washington Bald Mountain project will preserve 27,164 acres, including 42 miles of frontage along tributaries to the five Machias Lakes and the Machias River, home to endangered Atlantic salmon.

The Machias River projects have involved a broad coalition of government agencies and conservation groups. Both the Machias project and the West Grand Lake project have also received federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Legacy Program.

Other approved projects include:

- 68 acres on Bald and Ragged Mountains in Knox County.
- 4,130 acres around Seboeis Lake in Lake View Township in Piscataquis County.
- The 780-acre Varnum Farm in Sebec and Dover-Foxcroft.
- 11,798 acres around Crocker Mountain in Carrabassett Valley that is part of the largest high-elevation forest in Maine.
- 25 acres on Seal Bay and Smith Cove on Vinalhaven.
- 1,285 acres along the Androscoggin River “greenway” in Jay, Livermore Falls and Canton.

The latest round of LMF awards depletes the programs’ bank account for conservation and recreational projects, although the program still has \$1.2 million left to allocate to working waterfront projects.

The Republican-controlled Legislature chose not to send a bond package to voters this year. Lawmakers could begin discussions of a bond package during a special session later this fall, however, it is unlikely a bond proposal will be sent to voters before next June or November.

As a result, LMF will not have additional money to distribute for up to two years.

Meanwhile, a survey commissioned by The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land found that 70 percent of respondents in Maine believe the state should still find ways to fund land and water conservation projects even in tight budgetary times.

The survey found that more than 70 percent of Mainers said it was “very important” to “extremely important” that the state protect drinking water sources, water quality in rivers and streams, working farms, fish and wildlife habitat and working forests.

“For Mainers, there is a very deep connection and understanding that investing in our natural resources is an investment in our economy,” said Kate Dempsey of The Nature Conservancy in Maine. “A huge percentage of people feel very strongly that the outdoors ... are a very important piece of who we are and why we live here.”

Created in 1987, the Land for Maine’s Future program has helped protect more than 530,000 acres in Maine through land purchases from willing sellers or conservation easements that restrict development yet keep the property in private hands. In each case, project proponents must match the voter-approved money dollar-for-dollar, although since 2000 each dollar of voter-approved bonds has leveraged \$2.50 in matching funds.

For a full list of the projects approved Tuesday, visit <http://bdn.to/lmfprojects>.