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Sebago ice fishing derby returns with rule to discourage dumping

BY PETE WARNER
BDN STAFF

The Sebago Lake Ice Fishing Derby kicks off this weekend with an estimated \$15,000 in cash and prizes up for grabs.

This marks the 21st year for the event, sponsored by the Sebago Lake Rotary, which also includes a concurrent derby that encompasses all bodies of water open to ice fishing in Cumberland County.

At Sebago, Maine's second largest lake, that means a chance for 1,000 expected anglers to pursue a large population of lake trout (togue), including some trophy-size fish.

The derby returns with a rule change this year, after more than 100 fish were discarded on the ice in 2021. The new initiative will incentivize fishermen to keep their fish — even if they aren't winning catches — to both reduce the number of togue and northern pike in Sebago and provide food for the community.

The Sebago derby is an important opportunity to

reduce the population of togue and northern pike, the latter of which are flourishing after being illegally introduced into the lake almost 20 years ago.

"Our goal is to reduce the lake trout population," said regional biologist Jim Pellerin, who estimates the total annual harvest of togue at Sebago ranges from 3,000 to 6,000 fish.

If the harvest doesn't match the natural reproduction of the lake trout, the population increases.

"I think last year the big derby harvested a little over 2,000 fish," Pellerin said. "That's a fairly large component of that overall harvest."

The Sebago Lake Ice Fishing Derby was originally a product of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife desire to thin the lake trout population. The species' expansion hinders the development of the landlocked salmon for which the lake is renowned.

To meet management goals, DIF&W and derby officials are taking a new approach.

Most ice fishing derbies pay out cash and prizes to the three heaviest fish in each species or group of species. As a result, anglers have traditionally kept only the largest fish to enter in the competition.

At Sebago, that means the smaller lake trout and invasive pike biologists are trying to remove are often put back into the water.

"The problem was that with social media people would cull a lot of their fish," Pellerin said. "They would know what's on the leaderboard and they would just release all of their fish that are not going to win, if that was the prize structure."

This year, the derby will continue to pay out for the three largest fish in each category. However, a new initiative will encourage anglers to register more lake trout, pike, pickerel and perch in return for door prizes.

"They get a ticket for each fish that they bring in and so the more fish they bring in, the better their chances of winning," said Cyndy Bell, the public rela-

tions chair for the Sebago Lake Rotary. "We have hundreds of door prizes that have been donated, so we're really excited that we have the support of the community again this year."

Pellerin hopes the new wrinkle will encourage anglers to harvest many more togue under 26 inches, for which there is no daily bag limit at Sebago, and take out a bunch of pike.

If each fish caught has value, fewer are likely to go to waste.

During the 2021 Sebago derby, a large number of lake trout wound up discarded on the ice. Although DIF&W later suggested the fish had been gathered up from across the lake and planted in one spot, the wasted togue generated outrage.

The new rules should cut back on such behavior, and the Rotary is continuing efforts to provide fish for the community. The Rotary collects any unwanted derby fish and takes them to Nova Seafood in Portland for processing.

"Typically it's made into



COURTESY OF KURT CHRISTENSEN

Dead lake trout lay on the ice at Sebago Lake in the wake of the 2021 ice fishing derby. A new incentive this year will give anglers a shot at raffle prizes for each fish registered.

fish chowder at Preble Street [Resource Center]," Bell said of the entity that serves people in Portland who are experiencing homelessness.

The recent weather has derby organizers keeping a close watch on ice conditions at Sebago, where the largest section of the lake, the big bay, has not frozen over again this winter. Now, warmer temperatures and expected rain could further erode ice on even those areas of the lake that have allowed for fishing and snowmobiling traffic the last few weeks.

"We're just hopeful that we can get some fishermen out there safely," said

Cyndy Bell, the public relations chair for the Sebago Lake Rotary.

Proceeds from this year's derby will benefit the 13 Feed the Need food pantries in the Sebago Lake region.

Fish from the Sebago derby have accounted for 7,128 meals at the shelter during the last 20 years, Webb said.

All told, the Sebago Rotary also has donated more than \$1 million in support to worthy causes across the region.

For more information and ice condition updates for the 2022 Sebago Lake Ice Fishing Derby, visit the event's website.

Mills outlines plan for surplus

CBS 13

WESTBROOK — Gov. Janet Mills has unveiled her plan for the budget surplus that's worth \$822 million.

The plan would include a \$20 million fund for free community college and funding for free school meals for all students.

If approved, \$27 million will go toward funding free breakfasts and lunches for students at public schools like in Westbrook.



Mills

That's on top of \$10 million already set aside by state lawmakers.

"We're really leading the nation in addressing childhood food insecurity and making sure that kids have what they need so that they can grow and thrive," Anna Korsen of Full Plates, Full Potential said.

Superintendent Jake Langlais said the money from the state would make sure the program is paid for.

"It's been a real challenge these past few years because we don't gather the data like we used to as far as free and reduced lunch programs go," Langlais said. "So it's hard to get people's home income data the way that schools once did."

Korsen said there is one more step she'd like to see the governor take.

"Now that we have made sure that all kids get a healthy school meal at no cost, the next step is to make sure all kids have enough time to eat their school meal," Korsen said.

The program is working with the state to lengthen lunch times from 20 minutes to 30, according to Korsen.

The idea itself doesn't worry Langlais, however there are concerns on whether there will be enough support for the plan to follow through.

"I think these are all very good things, I just want to make sure that we can sustain them and that we are building smart," Langlais said.

Mills' budget still needs the stamp of approval, and if it passes, it'll go into effect on July 1.



BILL TROTTER | BDN

The town of Bar Harbor will demolish an old rampway building, which has been described as an eyesore, at the ferry terminal before The Cat ferry resumes operating from Bar Harbor this spring.

Pier

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run between \$17 million and \$21 million.

What sort of final design the town will pursue, and how it will pay for the project has not been decided. It will likely take a few years before it goes to a town vote for approval. But councilors were told this week the town al-

ready has enough money in its capital improvement budget that it can use to cover the anticipated cost of roughly \$200,000 to remove the old pedestrian ramp building and loading bridges.

"They're eyesores down there," council member Joe Minutolo said of the structures on the pier. "I am sure there are things blowing off of them in big winds."

The removal of the

building and loading bridges will at least slightly improve the pier's appearance, and will help reduce the load borne by the pier's pilings, officials said.

Mark Wilson, an official with Bay Ferries, told the council that when the town moves ahead with demolishing and rebuilding the rest of the old pier, the company will be willing to consider paying some of the costs of that project.

Delegation calls for warship named after Medal of Honor recipient Gary Gordon

BY SAWYER LOFTUS
BDN STAFF

Maine's top elected officials want a new, Maine-made Navy destroyer named after a Lincoln man whose heroism in the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu was depicted in the book and movie "Black Hawk Down."

The state's entire congressional delegation and Gov. Janet Mills sent a letter Monday to Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro asking him to name a new Navy warship built at Bath Iron Works after U.S. Army Master Sgt. Gary Gordon, a Lincoln native and Medal of Honor recipient who was killed in action in Somalia rescuing the crew of a downed helicopter.

Gordon was a Delta Force sniper during Operation Gothic Serpent, which culminated in the Battle of Mogadishu, the battle in



Gordon

which Gordon lost his life. The battle was cinematically recreated in the early 2000s movie "Black Hawk Down." He is portrayed by actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, of "Game of Thrones" fame.

During the battle, Gordon urged his superiors to let him go and protect the crew of a downed Black Hawk helicopter from a mob that was set to destroy the helicopter and its crew. He and another Delta Force sniper, Sgt. 1st Class Randy Shughart, were sent in to protect the helicopter and the crew.

Shughart and Gordon alone pulled the crew from the helicopter and defended their position until they ran out of ammunition. Both Gordon and Shughart were killed defending the helicopter and its crew.

In their letter to the Navy, Maine's top elected officials — Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King, U.S. Reps. Chellie Pingree and Jared Golden, as well as Mills — said the warfighting capabilities of a Navy destroyer would best represent Gordon's legacy and

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bangordailynews.com

remind the ship's crew of his heroism.

"With such a namesake, there is no doubt the crew of the ship would serve with the same pride, perseverance, and bravery as MSG Gordon," the letter states.

A memorial to Gordon was unveiled in Lincoln last August, immortalizing Gordon in his hometown.

Delta Force, officially known as 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, is part of the U.S. military's special forces, a distinguished group of warfighters known for their advanced skills.

The Battle of Mogadishu started Oct. 3, 1993, with U.S. forces fighting with a Somali warlord's soldiers. During the battle, two U.S. helicopters were shot down, and one of the crashed choppers was isolated from U.S. forces, which Gordon volunteered to go in and defend.

In all, 19 U.S. soldiers were killed during the two-day battle.

Millinocket's Dollar Tree store is closing

BY LIA RUSSELL
BDN STAFF

One of the main tenants in a Millinocket shopping plaza that sold last year for double its assessed value will close this spring.

The Dollar Tree store on Central Street in Millinocket will close nine months after the shopping plaza where it's located, the Northern Shopping Plaza, sold to a New Hampshire company hoping to revitalize retail in the former mill town.

The store is scheduled to close in mid-April, said Kayleigh Campbell, a spokesperson for Dollar Tree Inc., which owns both the Dollar Tree and Family Dollar chains.

Campbell declined to specify why the Millinocket store was closing, but said Dollar Tree occasionally closes stores due to myriad reasons such as rent increases, property sales and lease terminations.

The dollar store closure news comes three months after Dollar Tree closed its Madawaska store. The discount retailer also operates a Family Dollar store nearby at 781 Central St. in Millinocket. Campbell did not respond to a question about the future of that store.

Uri Pe'er, the owner of Northeast Living LLC, which owns the Northern Shopping Plaza, declined to comment and said Dollar Tree had instructed

him not to discuss the closure.

Pe'er bought the mall last July for \$1.6 million, more than twice its assessed value of \$738,000. He said he was drawn to the property because of its proximity to Baxter State Park and people moving to the Katahdin region.

The plaza is among Millinocket's top 10 property tax payers, according to a review of the town's assessment records. Other tenants include Tractor Supply and Millinocket House of Pizza.

Millinocket has striven to rebuild its economy after the Great Northern Paper mill closed in 2008, draining the town of hundreds of jobs. Local nonprofit Our Katahdin bought the mill site in 2017 and has slowly started attracting businesses — including a data center and an aquatic energy testing site — to the property.

Dollar Tree reported in November that it had made \$6.42 billion in sales between July and September last year, up from \$6.18 billion during the same period the year before. That announcement came the same day the retailer announced that it would raise most of its product prices to \$1.25 from \$1.00.

Dollar stores have become ubiquitous in rural and small towns, where its business model has flourished due to its reliance on low-wage labor and cheap goods.

Funeral home worker who stole wedding ring gets three months in jail

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

A Sanford man accused of stealing a wedding ring from a 102-year-old woman after her death has been sentenced.

Stuart Weston, 51, was sentenced in York County Superior Court in Alfred on Friday to serve three months in jail, according to the Saco Police Department.

Weston, who worked for Autumn Green Funeral Home in Alfred, was sent to pick up the body of Laura Wood at a Saco nursing home after her death on Jan. 21, 2021.

Her family learned that the ring — three rings fused together with an appraised value of \$4,000 —

and other items were missing a couple days later when they went to retrieve Wood's belongings at the funeral home.

The theft was reported to the Saco Police Department, and the ring was later found at a South Portland coin and jewelry buyer, where staff identified Weston after a review of records and video surveillance.

Wood's granddaughter, Emily Coyne, told the Portland Press Herald last year the ring was a family heirloom that symbolized her grandmother's nearly 80-year marriage.

Autumn Green Funeral Home told the newspaper that it terminated Weston's employment after learning of the theft.