

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Landowner Relations Program



2023 Annual Report

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Program Introduction and Overview

Maine's Landowner Relations Program within Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is tasked with providing support and resources to private landowners across the state as well as outreach and education to outdoor recreational users who benefit from access to private land.

The program provides tools and resources to landowners who wish to keep their land open for public recreation, landowners who face challenges with issues such as trespass, litter and damage from wildlife, and landowners who need information and guidance on properly posting their land to exclude or limit public access.

In addition to providing support to private landowners, the program also works to provide broad public outreach and education to help inspire and influence outdoors users of all types to respect and appreciate access to private land as well as providing tips and guidance on how to find ways to support private landowners in Maine.

Responsible use of the Maine outdoors is key to sustaining Maine's longstanding tradition of shared access.

The program is managed by two Game Warden Corporal positions and supported by two Game Warden Deputies as well as staff within MDIFW, MDACF and several partnering organizations across Maine.

2023 Budget Information

The annual FY budget for the Landowner Relations Program is funded with revenue that includes \$150,000 from the general fund and an annual average of \$180,000 in special revenue from the sale of the specialty sportsman license plate, registration fees and donations through the Outdoor Partners program. The resulting annual fiscal year budget for the program is approximately \$330,000.

Notable expenditures (2023 calendar year)

Landowner Cleanup Day	\$9,500.00
Equipment and Materials for Landowner Support	\$47,000.00
Outreach Materials	\$3,000.00
Items for Resale	\$9,200.00
Other Operational Expenses	\$60,500.00
Personal Services	<u>\$88,200.00</u>
	\$217,400.00

Landowner Support

Highlights

Support for Maine Farmers

This year the Landowner Relations Program funded the purchase of two 1-acre solar electric fence systems to use in conjunction with propane cannons on farms that were experiencing significant crop damage. This was effort to work with farmers who have issues with wildlife crop damage to demonstrate how this type of fencing can be used to mitigate ongoing issues. The fencing effort was successful on several of the test farms resulting in some farm owners purchasing their own fencing to use long term. These test locations were in areas with high levels of crop damage from deer where other methods have previously been utilized but found to be ineffective. The cost for 1 acre of fencing is \$1400.

Additionally, the Landowner Relations Program funded the purchase of 14 motion sensor propane cannons that were placed and deployed at locations with a high amount of crop damage from wildlife. The cannons are typically highly effective, although when utilized in areas near abutting landowners it can cause complaints due to the frequent loud noise.

Landowner Relations Deputy Program

2023 was the first full year of our Landowner Relations Deputy program. Starting with three part-time positions in the early part of the year, the program is now moving forward with two positions. The program is running very smoothly with the Deputies working on landowner issues in the field. The two Deputies have documented 115 calls for service as of November 29, 2023, all related to trespass, litter, illegal posting of property, and complex access issues. The Deputies have also been proactive in areas of abuse using game cameras for surveillance and assisting local wardens with monitoring these locations.

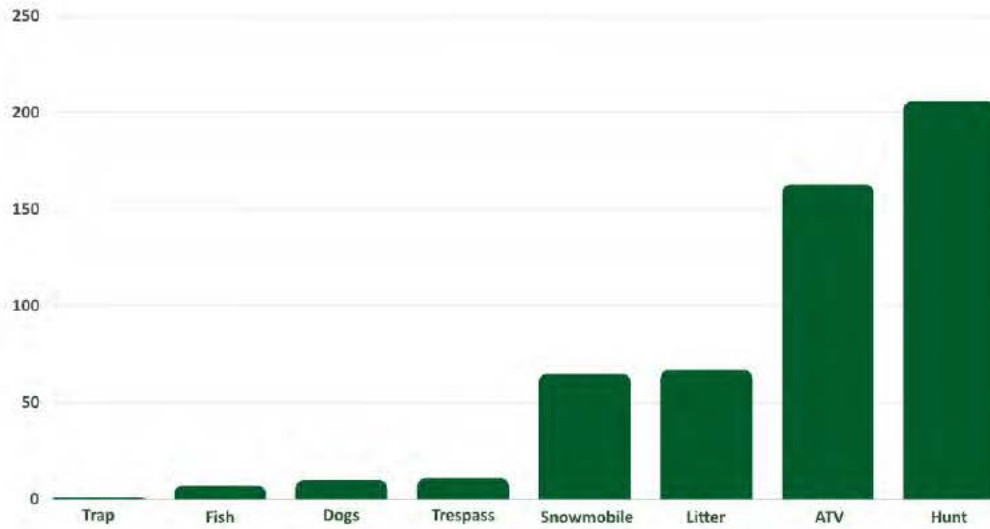
Trail Access Issue in Bingham

During the winter of 2023 Landowner Relations Corporals and Deputies worked on the very high-profile access issues on the Bingham railroad bed trail system. Landowner Relations Corporals and Deputies as well as District Game Wardens conducted high visibility patrols in the area to assist landowners with complaints of speeding snowmobiles and noise issues from modified exhausts. After several details were conducted some of the landowners decided to take their own action and closed the trail by putting up ropes and snow fencing. It was determined at this point that public safety was a concern and the trail was closed. Game Wardens continued to patrol the area for people who were riding on the closed trail after it was barricaded and signed. Several snowmobiles were caught on surveillance crashing into the fencing or lifting the snow fence and driving under it. The Landowner Relations program staff have continued to work on this issue with staff from DACF but at this time no resolution has been finalized.

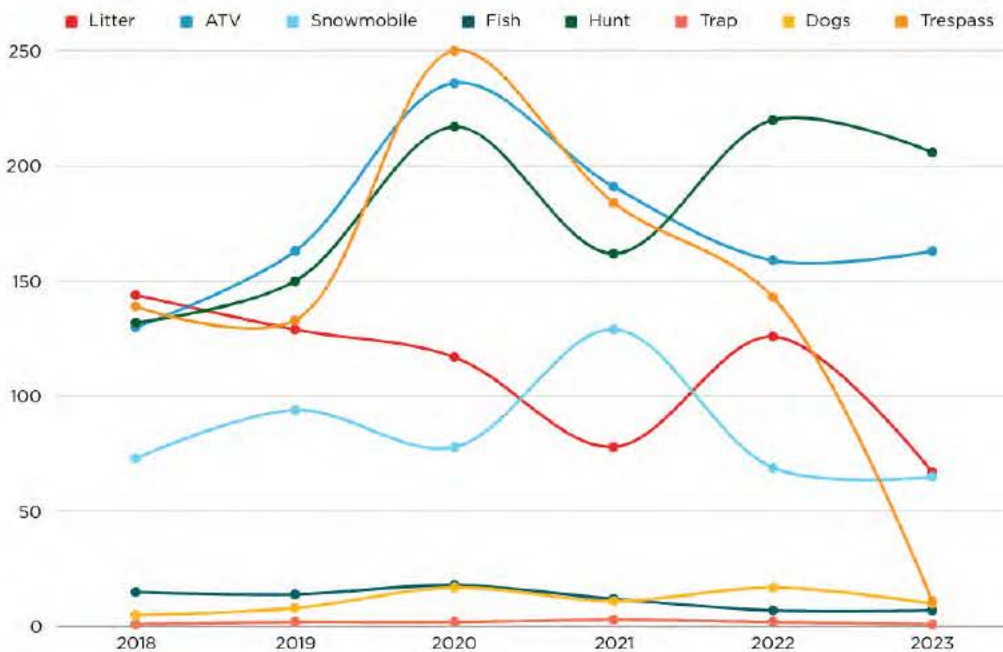
Landowner Relations Calls for Service

Maine Warden Service documented over 430 calls for service related to landowner relations during the 2023 calendar year.

Landowner Relations Related Calls
2023



Landowner Relations Related Calls
2018 - 2023



Landowner Appreciation Cleanup Event

The 2023 Annual Landowner Appreciation Day was a success thanks to the many volunteers who participated as well as 113 Maine Game Wardens and 34 Maine Forest Rangers. Together, the groups were able to remove approximately 30 ton of litter from the woods and waters of the State of Maine. In addition to support from volunteers, the event was generously supported by two key partners, Waste Management and BDS Tire.



Warden Josh Pollard working with local high school students to cleanup a remote FFO trout pond of old discarded boats.

This year there was an online submission form setup for landowners to submit potential cleanup sites for the event, which resulted a total of 8 submissions from landowners. The majority of the submitted sites were old farm dump areas on land that had recently been purchased and the landowner was looking for assistance with removal. In addition to the sites that were submitted directly by landowners, there were 147 sites that were identified by Maine Warden Service and Maine Forest Service

There were 22 clubs that signed up to participate statewide and 10 clubs that reported totals.

CLUB	TRUCK LOADS
Wilton Fish and Game	21.5
Husson University Con Law Club	20
Family Snowmobile Club (Bangor)	8
Linneus Snowmobile Club	6
Land Share Riders ATV Club (Parsonsfield)	6
Thorndike ATV Club	4
Easter Maine Community College	4
Bethel Home Church	3
Bucks Mills	2
Over the Hill ATV Club (W. Bath)	1

There were 15 dumpster locations setup around the state that resulted in a total of 22.86 tons of disposed waste and 625 tires.

DUMPSTER LOCATION	WASTE PER TON	TIRES	OTHER
Bangor	3.71	110	4 freon units
Livermore	2.89	29	
Sidney	2.80	47	
Alfred	2.54	14	1 mattress
Jonesboro	2.50	43	3 freon units
Gray	2.43	147	2 mattresses
Gilead	2.33		
Strong	1.59	221	
East Millinocket		14	
Ashland			
Houlton			
Eagle Lake			
Presque Isle			
Greenville			

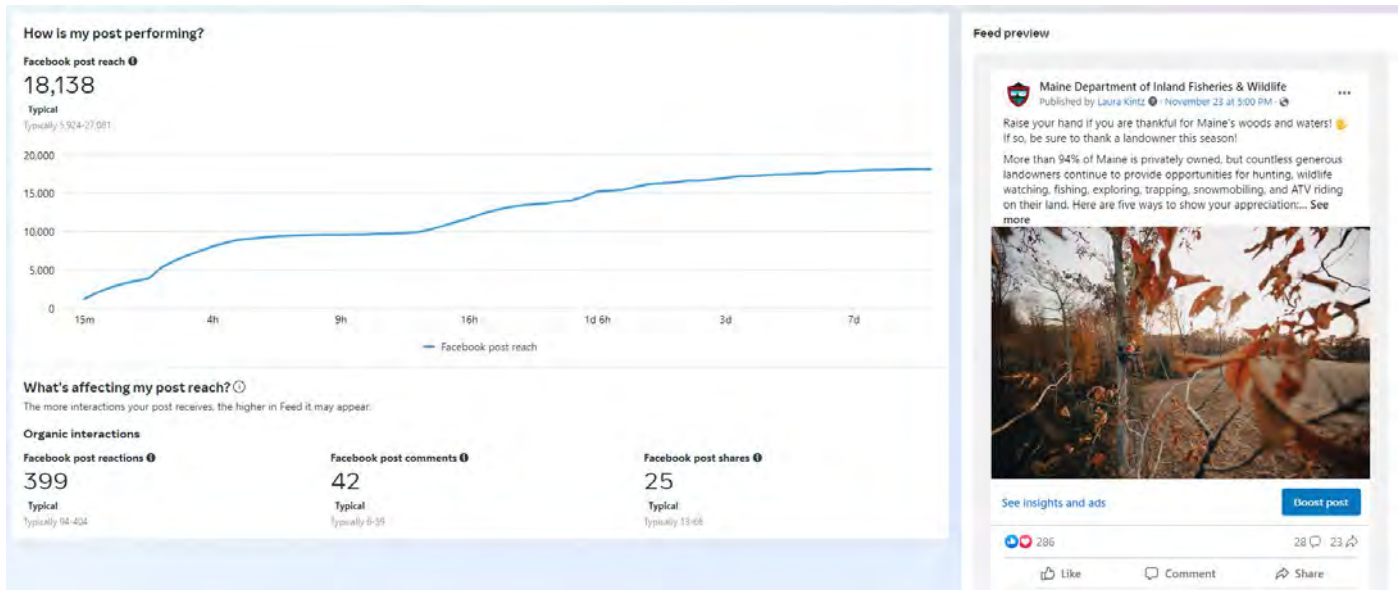
Land User Outreach

During 2023 the Information and Education Division continued to conduct extensive outreach and education to help influence and inspire land users who participate in all outdoor recreational activities to support and respect private landowners and to be responsible users of the Maine Outdoors.

A variety of outreach and communication methods were utilized to target messaging to several segments of outdoor users. Examples include digital communication tool such as direct email, paid ads on social media as well as organic posts on Department channels (Facebook and Instagram) as well as programmatic and paid search.

This year, the Department deployed nearly 300 email bulletins through direct email and included landowner relations related messaging in over 90% of the deployed bulletins which reached over 30 million recipients. Direct email is one of the most effective communications tools the Department utilizes with an annual average open rate of over 38% (national benchmark for government agencies for 2023 is 28.77%).

During 2023 the Department had a cumulative (organic) reach of 2.9 million on Facebook and 230,000 on Instagram, both increases from 2022. All digital communication posts and bulletins direct readers to the landing page at mefishwildlife.com/outdoorpartners



Updated and rebranded brochures were designed and disseminated. One brochure with information to support landowners who wish to allow access and one brochure that provides guidance on responsible use of private land for land users.

MDIFW staff attended several public events sharing information about responsible use of private land, including the Fryeburg Fair which saw over 300,000 attendees over 8 days.

Outreach and Education staff incorporated instruction on responsible use of private land in all the educational programming that was offered throughout the year (both in-person and online). These courses and workshops include mandatory trainings such as firearms hunter education, trapper education, boating, ATV/snowmobile education and bowhunter education. Additionally, programs are offered in general outdoor recreation (such as Camp North Woods, Becoming an Outdoors Woman, Sustain ME and other special programs). Enhanced Hunter Ed courses and additional shooting sports programs also reintroduce messaging related to responsible use of private and public lands.

Landowner Relations Corporals and Deputies attended numerous public meetings and events providing additional information to both landowners and land users highlighting the resources offered by the Landowner Relations Program. Examples include attendance at the annual Maine Municipal Convention, serving as the keynote speaker at the annual Maine Professional Guides Association Banquet, presenting at the annual Maine Outdoor Economy Summit, Maine Agricultural Trade Show and attending and speaking at meetings with Maine Snowmobile Association, Prentiss and Carlisle, and numerous clubs and organizations throughout Maine.

Corporal MacCabe has worked closely with Information and Education staff to produce a new podcast series entitled Private for Public that will launch before the end of the year. The series looks at the delicate and often complicated issue of access to private land in Maine while featuring representatives from various partner organizations, landowners from across the state and stories from land users who have found ways to provide support and appreciation for private land use. The podcast series will be available on all major podcast platforms and at mefishwildlife.com/privateforpublic

Outdoor Partners Program

The Outdoor Partners Program is an effort to provide an opportunity for outdoor users to support Maine's Landowner Relations Program by joining as a member. The \$15 annual donation fee provides funding to the program but is also a way to gain buy-in from outdoor users who can then become better informed about the importance of responsible use of the Maine outdoors.

Membership in the program has traditionally centered on traditional outdoor users such as hunters and anglers and is typically an opt-in for those users when they purchase their annual hunting or fishing license. The membership levels have been steady in recent years and in 2023 there were 1,492 individuals who donated.



**2023 numbers are through December 6, 2023.*

Traditionally Outdoor Partners Members received a set of discount benefits that were offered by a group of supportive businesses. Moving forward in 2024 the membership program will be adjusted and instead of offering small discounts, businesses and organizations can donate products or services that will be periodically raffled off to all Outdoor Partners members. Additionally, a new set of Outdoor Partner branded gear and merchandise will be offered for sale for those who wish to support the program in that manner. The sale of the products will also create revenue for the Landowner Relations Program. Efforts to market the membership opportunity as well as the new branded merchandise will be managed by Information and Education staff with a goal of targeting new segments of the outdoor recreation community and will hopefully expand participation beyond the traditional core user group who has participated in the past.