

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2024 Annual Report on Landowner Relations

**Presented to the 132nd Legislature Joint Standing Committee on Inland
Fisheries and Wildlife**



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Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

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Executive Summary

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 Part Time Game Wardens as well as staff within MDIFW, MDACF and several partnering organizations across Maine.

Accomplishments

Support for Maine Farmers

During 2024, the Landowner Relations Program continued to offer farmers the option to borrow a 1-acre solar electric fence system to use in conjunction with propane cannons to offset some of the significant crop damage from wildlife. The fencing loaner program allows farmers to test the system to determine if it is worthwhile for them to purchase their own system for future use. Several of the farmers who tested the fencing system through the program last year have since opted to purchase their own. The cost of the fencing system is \$1400.

In the upcoming year, the Department is preparing to roll out a cost share fencing program that will further assist farmers through outreach and education and will offer financial assistance to offset the cost of purchasing fencing to prevent crop damage from wildlife.

Discontinued Roads and Recreational Access

Corporal Kris MacCabe sits on the Commission of Discontinued and Abandoned Roads, which is working to identify viable solutions to resolve some of the complex issues around many abandoned or discontinued roadways in the state. Game Wardens are seeing an increase in conflicts between landowners and land users related to the use of discontinued roadways that are on or adjacent to privately owned land, which can often be very challenging to resolve.

Sign Program

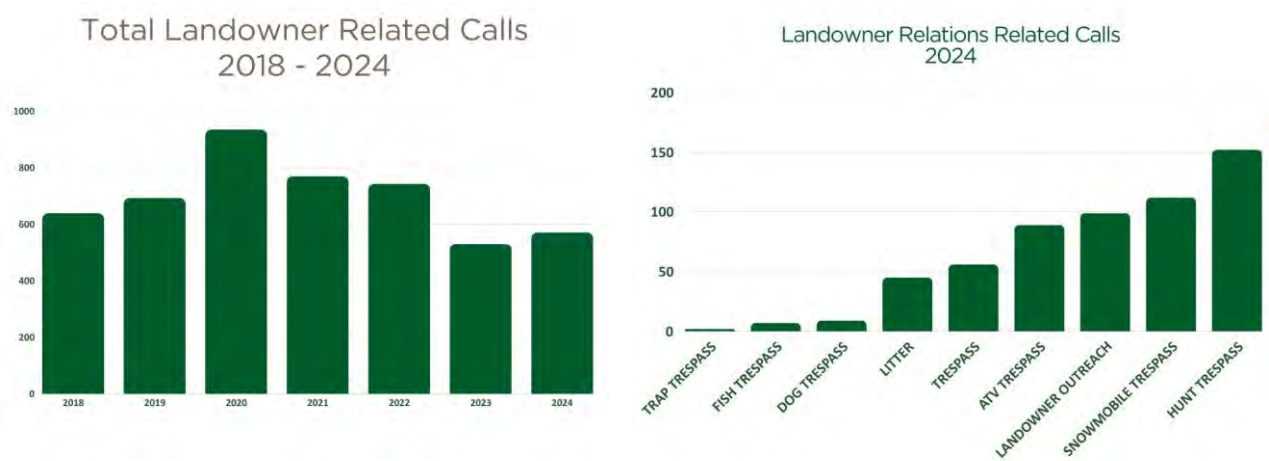
For many years the Landowner Relations program has offered a variety of signage to landowners to help mitigate new or ongoing conflicts with users on their property. Historically, the signs were available at no cost, with the exception of the Access by Permission Only signs, which have been sold for \$0.50 each. Recently, the Department has revamped the sign program to update the signage to messaging that reflects common issues or concerns that landowners are currently facing. In the past, landowners could order signs through the Department's online store or by calling the main office. The new



sign program now allows landowners to submit an online request for signs at no cost and provides an opportunity for the Department to gain additional insight into the conflicts that the landowner is facing by collecting some additional information from the landowner at the time of the request. Over time, we will be able to track trends and adjust signage offerings or develop new tools accordingly. This new format also allows the opportunity for landowners to request to be contacted by a member of the Landowner Relations team for further support.

Landowner Relations Calls for Service

Maine Warden Service documented over 593 calls for service related to landowner relations during the 2024 calendar year.



Landowner Appreciation Cleanup Event

The 2024 Annual Landowner Appreciation Day was a success thanks to the many volunteers who participated as well as 119 Maine Game Wardens and 28 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.



In addition to the few sites that were submitted directly by landowners, there were 147 sites that were identified by Maine Warden Service and Maine Forest Service. 17 dumpster locations set up around the state that resulted in a total of **29.79 tons of disposed waste and 796 tires**.

Land User Outreach

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, the annual Moose Lottery Festival that was held in Presque Isle this year, the Forest Heritage Days event in Greenville, and the ATV Maine trade show, the State of Maine Sportsman Show, Eastern Maine Sportsman Show and the Maine Agricultural Trade Show.



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). Next Step 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, 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, ATV Maine, Maine Forest Products Council, Maine Shellfish Council and numerous clubs and organizations throughout Maine.

Corporal MacCabe worked with Information and Education staff to produce a new podcast series entitled Private for Public that launched in Spring 2024. 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. Season 2 will be released early 2025. The podcast series is available on all major podcast platforms and at <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/news-events/podcasts/private-for-public.html>.

Over the past year, the Information and Education Division has continued to conduct extensive outreach and education efforts 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 tools 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 400 email bulletins through direct email and included landowner relations related messaging in over 90% of the deployed bulletins which reached over 42 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 2024 is 19.4%).

During 2024 the Department had a cumulative (organic) reach of 1.7 million on Facebook and 200,200 on Instagram. All digital communication posts and bulletins direct readers to the landing page at <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/programs-resources/outdoor-partners-program/index.html>

Budget Overview 2024 Calendar Year

Landowner Cleanup Day	\$9,500.00
Equipment and Materials for Landowner Support	
Capital Equipment (3 ATV's and 2 surplus snowmobiles)	\$38,600.00
Suppressed rifles for nuisance wildlife control	\$7,000.00
Cellular Game Cameras and Service Fee	\$5,000.00
Gates, Propane Cannons, Electric Fences, Range Finders	\$9,051.69
Sign Program Orders and Shipping	\$9,350.29
	\$66,011.98
Outreach	
Landowner Recognition Merch. (Clothing, Carved antlers, Leatherman, hats)	\$5192.30
Outdoor Partner Gear and Merch Outreach	\$9,406.27
Advertising	\$10,986.00
	\$25,584.57
Other Operational Expenses	
Central Fleet Vehicle Lease and repairs	\$31,008.26
OIT	\$1,526.00
Equipment Repairs	\$3,840.00
Personnel Service (% Full Time Cpl and Deputies)	\$43,924.67
	<u>\$80,298.93</u>
Total 2024	\$181,395.48