

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from electronic originals
(may include minor formatting differences from printed original)

2001 Status Report
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Maine Wildlife Park
Gray, Maine

The Maine Wildlife Park is normally open to the public from April 15 to November 11 each year. Because of heavy winter snowfall, the park did not open until April 28th. Despite opening 13 days later than usual, the park experienced about a 7% increase in attendance this year. Close to 85,000 people visited the facility during 2001, and revenues totaled \$256,679.00. (dedicated account interest included).

<u>Attendance Breakdown</u>	<u># of visitors</u>
Family Pass & Community Pass use (compiled from daily tally sheet)	4014
Fish and Wildlife Open House Day	1486
Complimentary Loon Plate Passes (compiled from collected passes)	4510
<u>Regular Admission</u> (compiled from cash register receipts)	
Seniors	4350
Adults	33,415
Groups	21,059
Children	15,457
Unstaffed Gate	581
<u>Grand Total</u>	84,872

The facility is staffed by four full-time employees who care for over 30 wildlife species on exhibit; orphaned and injured wildlife brought in by the public and Department staff; maintain buildings and grounds; construct new exhibits and displays; and staff the facility seven days a week throughout the year. Two summer college interns, 2 weekend wildlife caretakers, and 2 part-time seasonal individuals worked as Public Program Coordinator and Admissions Gate Volunteer Coordinator and are hired through a temporary services agency during the open season.

New Fee Structure

The wildlife park is incorporating a new admissions fee structure for the 2002 season (see chart below). (see Section 7653, #4: the commissioner may establish reasonable fees for admissions to the Maine Wildlife Park...) This will be the first admissions price increase since 1997. This year, we will allow kids from 4 & under free admission; previously it was 3 & under. We will extend operating hours from 9:30-4:00pm, leave by 5:30pm daily; to 9:30-4:30pm, leaving the park by 6:00pm daily. With total visitors in 2001 approximately 85,000, an increase of 5700 visitors over the 2000 season, we are anticipating a near-future need for paid staff to lead tours and staff the admissions gate, a need to expand our educational programming, an increased cost of staff salaries and benefits; and generally increased costs of doing business.

	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	
Adults	\$3.50	\$4.50	
Children 5-12	\$2.00	\$3.00	
Sr. Citizen	\$2.50	\$3.50	
Group (15+)	\$1.50	\$2.00	
Tour/program	+\$.50		+\$1.00
Individual pass	\$20	\$30	
Family Pass	\$35	\$45	
Community Pass	\$100	\$150	
Mountain Lion	\$100	\$100	

New Programs

In order to increase visitorship and thus revenues, the Wildlife Park continued to increase advertising for the 2001 season, which included weekly publicity in area event calendars and vacation guide pullouts, radio advertising, print ads and coupons, participation in festivals and parades as exhibitors, membership in the Portland Convention and Visitors Bureau, ads in the Maine Tour Connection magazine, and cooperation with the Office of Tourism. The Wildlife Park was featured in a variety of television and newspaper stories, and in Public Service Announcements on the Outdoor Cable Channel. Special events held during the peak summer season included the Fish and Wildlife Open House, Full Moon Night Hikes, WBLM Radio Day, the Loon License Plate complimentary pass

program, Brownie Day, Summer Wildlife Days, etc. LL Bean entered into a partnership with us this year when they offered a free pass to the wildlife park with the purchase of items at the LL Kids store in Freeport. To promote this program, LL Kids had some great displays up in the store for the better part of the summer season. A new exhibit at the Kittery Visitors Center was an attractive centerpiece for visitors to learn about the park as they entered the state.

The Maine Audubon Society (MAS) continued their 5-year association with the Park, operating their nature, wildlife and conservation bookstore and gift shop as a concession at the Wildlife Park. MAS fully provides merchandise, staffing, hardware, and administration associated with regular operation of a branch of their gift shop, sold Department merchandise, and provided the Wildlife Park with 50% of the net. Total sales reached \$61,585.96. The Park realized \$10,610.82 in additional income and the store continues to attract a good clientele.

Existing Programs and Enhancement

During 2001 we continued to have the entrance gate staffed throughout the season. This was accomplished with the Wildlife Park's organized force of volunteers, over 40 of whom donated close to 1300 hours staffing the front entrance, taking admissions fees, directing visitors and answering questions. A paid Volunteer Gate Coordinator administers the volunteers in this essential program.

The popular fish and wildlife education program for elementary, middle and high schools visiting the Park continued, and we saw increased participation with 1545 kids in 25 programs during spring, and 964 kids in 16 programs kids during fall; for a total of 2509 kids in 41 programs for programs during the 2001 season held in May-June and Sept.-October - a 2% increase in attendance over last year. With education about wildlife and conservation programs a major goal of the Park, we will continue to add more programs to continue to increase our audiences for the 2002 season.

There is a large demand for guided tours of the wildlife exhibits, offered by our trained volunteers for school groups, scout groups, church groups, Elder Hostels and others. Over 1800 people were served by this program, participating in some 54 tours. A continuing problem is finding enough qualified

and available people to lead tours on weekday mornings to meet the demand we have for them. All education volunteers were trained and their volunteer time coordinated by the Public Program Coordinator; and continued to be a popular program both with the volunteers and the visitors to the Park.

The Sunday Summer Weekend Wildlife Program series continued to attract new audiences and be well attended. Special exhibits cover a wide array of fish, wildlife and conservation topics and are staffed by knowledgeable presenters from many different organizations, who chat with visitors as they pass through the Park. Programs occurred on 16 consecutive Sundays during June, July and August. This format has proved to be popular with visitors. Programs have already been scheduled for specific dates to be listed in 2002 summer event calendars from Boston to Bangor.

Night Hikes continued to be a great way to expand Park programming. The 3 scheduled night visits attract additional visitors who pay the regular admission fee for a 2 hour night visit. A particularly well-attended Full Moon Night Hike was held on Tuesday October 2nd for over 500 visitors, again a way to attract people to the park during the less well-attended times of our open season.

The Wildlife Park hosts an annual Volunteer Banquet in February to recognize and thank the over 100 volunteers that give their time to the park in so many ways. A summer picnic for volunteers and their families is hosted by the Park staff and the Friends of the Wildlife Park, as well. Park staff recognize and appreciate the efforts of volunteers at the wildlife park, many of whom have been volunteering steadily for years.

Improvements

The Wildlife Park entrance from Route 26 will be improved by the Department of Transportation in the spring of 2002. The MWP funded the relocation of a water main at the corner of Game Farm Road and Route 26. This project will make our entrance more safe, attractive, and visible from the steady traffic on Route 26. Work will begin this spring as soon as weather permits.

Construction began on a new Fisheries Exhibit building; housing 2 freshwater fish tanks, one for coldwater fish and the other for warmwater fish. Large, colorful interpretive signs will document the Department's fishery and stocking

programs. This will be an interim exhibit until a larger fish pool exhibit can be designed, funded and installed. (see below)

Work continues on upgrading our water lines, in sections, from the main out on Route 26 to all locations within the park. This is an expensive and time-consuming job that must be completed in order to meet the water needs of new exhibits and increasing visitorship.

A building footprint has been completed for a new Admissions, Nature store, indoor classroom, larger restrooms and office building at the main entrance to the park. This building was called for in the Master Plan to meet many identified and expanded park administrative, educational and retail needs. A variety of funding sources will be pursued so that work can begin on this building as soon as possible.

The new Maine Moose Exhibit, with associated land clearing and preparation, fencing and gate installation, new visitor pathways were completed, a feed barn and moose shelter will be opened next spring, and our 2 moose installed for the 2002 season.

Work continued on the new Maine Coyote Exhibit, funded by the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park. Land clearing, site preparation, drainage, building footings, and fencing (both above and below grade) have been installed. Construction of dens and holding areas will continue as weather permits this winter and into spring.

The Native Turtle and Wetlands Exhibit, funded by a Maine Outdoor Heritage Grant, is still undergoing final landscaping, fencing, paths and installation of the underwater 'turtle cam'. Several turtles were introduced to the exhibit to overwinter. More species will be placed in the exhibit next spring as the exhibit is completed. The eight 2' x 4' full color mural signs depicting the native inland turtle species are completed, and framing and installation will occur this season.

Staff housing renovations on the property were accomplished on one residence to allow the new gamekeeper (replacing retiring gamekeeper John Bentley) to move onto the Park property. His presence will add to the security of the park and its inhabitants.

We continue to follow the 10-year Master Plan for the Wildlife Park. This plan has assisted the facility in identifying goals and objectives, a logical sequence of capital improvements, and plans for accommodation of an increase in visitors, among other things.

The Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park

This nonprofit group was organized in 1991 in response to the threatened closure of the former Game Farm as a cost-savings proposal to the Legislature by the Department. The group seeks to increase public awareness and participation in Wildlife Park programs and exhibits, as well as solicit donations above and beyond admission fees to provide monies for programs and improvements at the Park. Its members hope to see the Wildlife Park continue to grow to meet the needs for wildlife and conservation education in Maine. Friends volunteers constructed an attractive new building to house ice cream, candy, soda and carrot/apple (for the wildlife) sales during 2001, and netted their organization about \$14,397. Funds from this and other activities allow the Friends to plant and maintain annual and perennial flower beds and hanging flower baskets throughout the Park, produce and mail a Friends of the Wildlife Park informational newsletter 3 times a year, buy and maintain complementary wheelchairs and strollers for visitors as they enter, sponsor the Sunday Summer Wildlife Days, and more. The organization has collected about \$15,000 for Furbearer exhibit improvements, currently targeted at the new coyote exhibit. The Friends have also made financial contributions to the moose and deer yard exhibits.

2002-2003 Wildlife Park planned capital improvements/expenditures and other Fund-Raising Initiatives

The Maine Wildlife Park's next exhibit development priority will be to construct the new White-tail Deer Exhibit, and dismantle the old exhibit during the 2002 season. Preliminary work has been accomplished such as construction of the feed/catch barn; clearing the fence line, installation of water lines and watering tubs, construction of viewing overlooks, etc. Fred Thurston of Conifer Industries, has donated a generous \$10,000 towards this project, and for completion of the moose exhibit.

Deer yard relocation (in conjunction with perimeter fence installation)

Estimated Costs: \$25,000.00

Other Exhibit Priorities

Existing Furbearer exhibit relocations

Estimated Costs: \$50,000.00

Build new show fish pool (needed to replace Dry Mills Hatchery pool which could be closed at any time depending on downstream water quality issues)

Estimated Costs: \$95,000

Annual Operating Costs

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for fiscal year 2001 was \$340,288.00. (includes all salaries and operations). IFW regular (general fund) revenue covered salaries of \$62,222. General operating expenses of \$96,787.00, capital improvements and equipment costs of \$53,825.00, and personal services of \$127,454.00; a total of \$278,066.00, were borne by the Maine Wildlife Park dedicated revenue account.

The cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for the first 6 months (July–December) of fiscal year 2002 was \$170,718. A salary of \$32,226 was borne by the MDIFW General Fund. Three full time permanent positions totaling \$59,019.00, and general operating expenses of \$68,350.00 of all other and \$11,123 of capital, were borne by the dedicated revenue account.

The First Regular Session of the 115th Legislature mandated, through Chapter 591 (dated 7/17/91), that a dedicated account be established in which to deposit all Maine Wildlife Park revenues. Fiscal Year 1994 was the first year that any portion of the dedicated account was allocated. Monies from admission and donations had been allowed to accrue, with interest, in the dedicated account from July 1, 1991 to July 1, 1994 in order to provide a starting point from which to begin operating the facility from its own revenues. The cash balance in this account as of December 31, 2001 was \$339,678.00; of which \$167,197 is obligated for outstanding contracts and operating expenses for 1/1/02 to 6/30/02.

Section 7735-a of Chapter 591 also mandated that this facility become “increasingly financially self-sustaining”, which has been demonstrated since 1997 by assuming the salaries of three full time gamekeepers from the IFW general fund, as well as the salaries of 6 summer temporary employees, leaving only the Superintendent's position funded by the Department's general fund.

Summary

If annual revenue, which is variable due to weather, the economy, and certainly current events nationwide, does not support the operation of the Park, (personal services and general operating expenses), the difference is withdrawn from the dedicated carrying account. Over the last 5 years the Wildlife Park has assumed more and more of its total annual operating expenses. The IFW general fund currently supports only 1 full time staff position, which allows the park to apply its funds to much needed capitol projects. With our expanded advertising plans, and the benefits of good weather during this season, the park was able to accomplish noticeable growth in improvements, visitors and income in 2001.