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2002 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. The park opened on schedule on April 15th this year, and experienced about a 5% increase in attendance. Close to 90,000 people visited the facility during 2002, and revenues totaled \$330,318. (Dedicated account interest included).

<u>Attendance Breakdown</u>	<u># of visits</u>
Family Pass & Community Pass use (Compiled from daily tally sheet)	4598
Fish and Wildlife Open House Day	4478
Complimentary Loon Plate Passes (compiled from collected passes)	3828
<u>Regular Admission</u> (compiled from cash register receipts)	
Seniors	5427
Adults	38,139
Groups	21,046
Children	15,414
Unstaffed Gate	1033
<u>Grand Total</u>	93,963

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; each hired through a temporary services agency during the open season.

New Fee Structure

The wildlife park incorporated 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 was the first admissions price increase since 1997. Children from 4 & under had free admission; 3 & under were free. We extended operating hours from 9:30-4:00pm, leaving by 5:30pm daily; to 9:30-4:30pm, leaving the park by 6:00pm daily. With total visitors in 2002 approximately 89,500, an increase of 4500 visitors over the 2001 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 and Expanded Programs

In order to increase visitors and revenues, the Wildlife Park continued to increase **advertising** for the 2002 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, movie ads in the S. Portland Hoyt Cinemas, and cooperative efforts with the Maine 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, Channel 13 Doug's Discovery and Channel 6 Bill Green show.

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 Days, Summer Wildlife Days, etc. We entered into a partnership with LL Bean for a 2nd year by offering 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. The lighted, color transparency exhibit at the Kittery Visitors Center is an attractive centerpiece for visitors to learn about the park as they enter the state.

The Maine Audubon Society (MAS) continued in their 6th 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 \$77,710.24. The Park realized \$14,169.47 in additional income and the store continues to attract a good clientele.

During 2002 we continue 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, with 1360 kids in 22 programs during spring, and 634 kids in 16 programs during fall; for a total of 1994 kids in 38 programs during the 2002 season held in May-June and

Sept.-October. With education about wildlife and conservation a major goal of the Park, we will continue to add new programs to try to attract new audiences for the 2003 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. However, a continuing problem is finding enough qualified and available volunteers to lead tours on weekday mornings to meet the demand we have for them. This program served about 596 children, participating in 21 tours. Volunteers gave over 142 hours of time to do this. If we can attract more volunteer tour guides, then we can expand this program, for which there is a steady demand. 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.

Daily summer Wildlife Shows in June; July and August were introduced again after a 2-year hiatus. These 15-20 minute presentations twice daily, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays were a very popular addition to visitors' park experience. Anywhere from 15-45 people attended each program on turtles, owls, and skulls in the new seating area under the pines, created for this purpose. Summer seasonal staff and volunteers gave the presentations. We hope to expand this successful program next summer.

The **Sunday Summer Weekend Wildlife Program** series, sponsored by the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park, continued to attract new presenters and audiences. These special exhibits cover a wide range 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 2003 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. Three themed night visits were offered this year – an owl prowl, a creatures of the night hike, and a Halloween hike. The Full Moon Halloween Night Hike was well advertised and attracted over 800 visitors for that single 2-hour period, many of them wearing their Halloween costumes. Developing these special programs is a great way to bring visitors to the park during our less well attended times of the year.

The Wildlife Park hosts an annual **Volunteer Banquet** in March to recognize and thank volunteers for giving their time to the park in so many ways. The Park staff and the Friends of the Wildlife Park host a summer picnic for volunteers and their families, as well. Park staff recognize and appreciate the efforts of volunteers at the wildlife park, many of who have been volunteering steadily for years.

Wildlife Park Superintendent, David Wilbur, was selected as one of the **2003 Maine Tourism Award** Recipients in the Attractions category, and will be presented with his award at the 2003 Governor's Conference on Tourism on February 12. The awards are given to *"To recognize those whose service and dedication has contributed to Maine's reputation as a vacation destination."*

Improvements

The Wildlife Park entrance from Route 26 was 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 made our entrance safer, more attractive, and visible from the steady traffic on Route 26.

Work continued on upgrading our water lines, in sections, from the water main 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 color architectural rendering has been completed for the new combined Admissions, Nature store, indoor classroom, expanded restroom and offices building at the main entrance to the park. This building was called for in the 1999 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. Match for this project has already been identified from the Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program.

Wildlife Conservation Restoration Program (WCRP) Funding assisted in the completion or near completion of the following exhibits:

Construction was completed 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 are being developed to 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)

The new **Maine Moose Exhibit**, with associated land clearing and preparation, fencing, gate installation, new visitor pathways, a feed barn and moose shelter opened in time for the June open house, with 2 moose for improved viewing by the public.

Work continued on the new **Maine Coyote Exhibit**, funded by the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park. Land clearing, site preparation, drainage, building footings, fencing (both above and below grade) and viewing pathways 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**, originally funded by a Maine Outdoor Heritage Grant, saw final landscaping, fencing, color interpretive signs and paths installed and completed. Several turtle species were introduced to the exhibit and provided great viewing opportunities. More species will be placed in the exhibit next spring as the exhibit evolves. This has proved to be a very popular exhibit, and we hope to continue to enhance this area next spring.

The **New White-tailed Deer Exhibit** is almost fully completed, with 2 new viewing areas, a viewing path, catch/feed barn and fencing. Six deer were turned out in the exhibit in January, and seem to be doing well. Maine Chapter of the Safari Club also donated funds that assisted with the completion of this exhibit.

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 2002, and netted their organization about \$24,616. 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; pay a local landscaper to do additional grounds work within 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, sponsor the Sunday Summer Wildlife Days, provide wooden benches for seating around the park, and more. The organization has collected about \$16,000 for Furbearer exhibit improvements, currently targeted at the new coyote exhibit. The Friends have also made financial contributions to the moose and deeryard exhibits.

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

Exhibit Priorities

Front Entrance Building: classroom, store, lobby entrance, restrooms, offices; some fundraising has begun, with match available from the WCRP.

Estimated cost: \$900,000.00

Existing Furbearer exhibit construction and relocations
Dismantle existing row of furbearer exhibits (circa 1950s)
About 7-8 new exhibits @ roughly \$15,000 each
Estimated Costs: \$120,000.00

Build new show fish pool large enough to be able to offer catch and release fishing opportunities to visitors, both children and adults alike. (Needed to replace Dry Mills Hatchery pool that could be closed at any time depending on downstream water quality)

Estimated Costs: \$95,000

Annual Operating Costs

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for fiscal year 2002 was \$336,747.00. (includes all salaries and operations). IFW regular (general fund) revenue covered salaries of \$64,614. General operating expenses of \$132,413.00, capital improvements and equipment costs of \$15,344, and personal services of \$124,376.00; a total of \$272,133.00, 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 \$187,781. A salary of \$36,220 was borne by the MDIFW General Fund. Three full time permanent positions totaling \$69,325.00, and general operating expenses of \$59,436.00 of all other and \$22,800 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 \$363,816.00; of which \$139,811 is obligated for outstanding contracts and operating expenses for 1/1/03 to 6/30/03.

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.

As a savings (of \$74,532 in FY 04 and \$75,116 in FY 05) to the IFW General Fund, the Superintendent’s position will be moved from the general fund to the wildlife park dedicated account. In addition, the position is scheduled to be upgraded to reflect the changing requirements of the job. Dave Wilbur, superintendent for over 26 years, will be retiring this year. We hope to be hiring for this new position by mid March 2003.

Summary

If annual revenue, which is variable due to and dependent upon weather, the economy, and most certainly, events nationwide, does not support the operation of the Park, (personal services and general operating expenses), the difference is withdrawn by financial order, from the dedicated wildlife park carrying account. Over the last 5 years the Wildlife Park has assumed a greater share of its total annual operating expenses. In FY 04-05, the park will take on all of its expenses, with no additional support from the Department general fund. We hope the park will be able to attract enough revenues to be self-supporting in the coming years as we continue to make improvements, create new and maintain existing exhibits; and hopefully, be able to increase staffing levels commensurate with the overall expansion.