

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2003 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 April 19th this year, 4 days late due to snow cover and below freezing temperatures. During 2004, we experienced about an 8% decrease in attendance. In comparison, state parks experienced a 12% decline in attendance. 2003 was considered a 'down' year for Maine tourism, pretty much across the board. Over 87,000 people visited the facility during 2003, and revenues totaled \$319,694; (\$5633 in dedicated account interest is included). Budget balancing legislation deappropriated \$12,802 from our dedicated account this year.

<u>Visitation</u> (compiled from cash register receipts)	<u># of visits</u>
Seniors	5447
Adults	35,216
Children	13,408
Groups	19,018
Unstaffed Gate	2162
<u>Grand Total Visitation</u>	87,165

<u>Other Attendance</u>	<u># of visits</u>
Family Pass & Community Pass use (Compiled from daily tally sheet)	5203
Fish and Wildlife Open House Day	1696
Complimentary Loon Plate Passes (compiled from collected passes)	5015

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. Three 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 Superintendent

David Wilbur, Wildlife Park Superintendent for the past 28 years, and department employee for 35, retired in May. Henry Hamilton was hired as new park superintendent. For the past seven years Henry had worked in war torn areas of Sierra Leone, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Afghanistan. After 22 years working internationally in humanitarian relief and development, he was ready to return to his native Maine. We felt his experience in Africa, Central Europe and Central Asia would be applied most appropriately to the wildlife park. Henry started work in June, hit the ground running and has made a great start taking the park forward in project completion, budgeting, marketing, personnel management and more.

Fee Structure

The wildlife park must increase admissions fees for the 2004 season in order for revenues to more closely match expenses. (see chart below). (Also please see Section 7653, #4: the commissioner may establish reasonable fees for admissions to the Maine Wildlife Park...) Children from 3 & under will have free admission. Extended operating hours, established in 2002, have been much utilized by visitors. With total annual visitation reaching over 90,000 people on average for the last 3 years, we have a definite need for additional paid staff to lead tours, staff the admissions gate, help expand our educational programming, and maintenance and grounds help; as well as additional revenue to cover increased cost of staff salaries and benefits; and generally increased costs of doing business. The fee increase reflects an average 10% increase, with a projected increase in revenue of approximately \$25,000.

	<u>2003</u>		<u>2004</u>
Adults	\$4.50		\$5.00
Children 5-12	\$3.00	4-12	\$3.25
Children 4 & under	Free	3 & under	Free
Sr. Citizen	\$3.50		\$4.00
Group (15+)	\$2.00		\$2.50
Tour/program	+.50		\$.00
Individual pass	\$30		\$33
Family Pass	\$45		\$50
Community Pass	\$150		\$165
Mountain Lion	\$100		\$110

New and Expanded Programs

With limited operating funds, the Wildlife Park maintained but did not expand its **advertising program** in the 2003 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, 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 various other local cable channels.

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. 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.

Nature Store: The Maine Audubon Society (MAS) continued in their 7th (and final) year association with the Park, operating their nature, wildlife and conservation bookstore and gift shop as a concession at the Wildlife Park. MAS had fully provided merchandise, staffing, hardware, and administration associated with daily operation of a branch of their gift shop, sold Department merchandise, and provided the Wildlife Park with 50% of the net. Total sales in 2003 reached \$81,992.39, a 5.51% increase over 2002. The Park realized \$12,567.71 in additional income, after having to buy back \$3364.06 in remaining inventory from Maine Audubon.

Maine Audubon declined to renew their contract with the Park for the 2004 season, so Park staff will now operate it. This requires the addition of 2 more temporary staff to run the store, as well as much more time and attention from the superintendent to administer. The result will hopefully be a substantial increase in profits, a much needed boost to our annual revenue.

During 2003 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 (temp) Volunteer Gate Coordinator administers the volunteers in this essential program.

The popular **fish and wildlife education** programs for elementary, middle, high schools and homeschoolers continued, with 1158 kids in 20 programs, and 890 kids in 18 programs during fall; for a total of 2048 students in 38 programs during the 2003 season, offered in May-June and Sept.-October, (a slight increase over 2002). 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 2004 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. In 2003, this program served about 525 children, participating in 21 tours. Volunteers gave over 186 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 Summer Program Manager. A pilot program with Poland Spring High School this year had 11 high school interns doing an independent study at the park. Students were trained to lead tours for elementary students, and gave 106 hours to our tour program. We hope to continue this successful pilot in 2004.

Scout Days have been developed by the Summer Program Manager; to assist area brownies, junior and senior scouts to get their wildlife badges. Over 470 girls participated in these special programs. We have offered but not yet organized similar days for boy scouts. We hope these special programs expand in the future.

Daily summer Wildlife Programs were presented by our summer staffers in June, July and August. These 15-20 minute programs were presented twice daily, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and were a very popular addition to visitors' park experience. Anywhere from 25-35 people attended each program on turtles, owls, loons, big cats, deer & moose, and seals 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 2004 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 prowler, a creatures of the night hike, and a Halloween hike. The August hike was cancelled due to rain. The Full Moon Halloween Night Hike was well advertised and attracted over 1000 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 our over 85 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.

Improvements

The new **Maine Coyote Exhibit**, funded by the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park was completed, opened and dedicated in early November. Total contributions for this project approached \$50,000. A **Gazebo Overlook** to the Coyote Exhibit was built with funds contributed in memory of an area teenager killed on his snowmobile. This addition cost some \$7000.00, not including the donated labor.

The **New White-tailed Deer Exhibit** was completed and opened in June, with 2 new viewing areas, a viewing path, catch/feed barn and fencing. Ten deer currently reside in the 3-acre exhibit and are doing well. Maine Chapter of the Safari Club also donated funds that assisted with the completion of this exhibit.

An **Indoor Classroom** was created from a former garage/storage space attached to the nature store. Additional storage space for the store was also renovated. The classroom gives us a conference room as well as a rainy day space in which to run our wildlife and conservation education programs.

Two **Vault Toilets** were researched, designed, and work started at 2 separate locations (near the bear and turtle exhibits) this fall. They will be handicapped accessible, and hopefully take some of the pressure off the use of our existing restrooms in the main log cabin visitors center.

The **old moose yard** was torn down and prepped for design and installation of new gray and red fox exhibits.

The wildlife park **Main Office** moved across the drive into the Farmhouse residence formerly occupied by superintendent Dave Wilbur. Extensive clean up around the grounds and some repairs and renovations inside have made for a much more spacious place for staff to work.

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 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, and soda in 2002. Sales in 2003 netted their organization a little over \$21,000. 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. This year they made substantial contributions to the vault toilet project, the coyote exhibit, memorial plaques at the park, and animal feed. The Friends have also made financial contributions to the moose and deeryard exhibits.

2004 Wildlife Park needed capital improvements/expenditures (Not in order of priority)

New Fox Exhibits in area of old moose yard

Estimated Costs: \$70,000

Old Deer Yard dismantling and restoration

Estimated Costs: \$2000

Continuing Water line improvements

Estimated Costs: \$10,000

Completion of tree trail

Estimated Costs: \$3000

Obtain grant funding for new eagle exhibit and rebuild

Estimated Costs: \$70,000

Stain Visitor Center and Rebuild Deck

Estimated Costs: \$7000

Roofing for rest of farm house, old office, Farrington house & Garage

Estimated Costs: \$8000

Restoration of farmhouse

Estimated Costs: \$95,000

Existing Furbearer exhibit construction and relocations
Dismantle existing row of furbearer exhibits (circa 1950s)
Estimated Costs: About 7-8 new exhibits @ roughly \$25,000 each

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 2003 was \$385,678.00. (includes all salaries and operations). IFW regular (general fund) revenue covered salaries of \$82,048.00. General operating expenses of \$120,531.00, capital improvements and equipment costs of \$47,335.00, and personal services of \$135,764.00; a total of \$303,630.00, 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 2004 was \$173,212. A salary of \$26,372.00 that had been borne by the MDIFW General Fund was transferred to the MWP dedicated account for FY 2003 as a Department cost savings measure. Three full time permanent positions totaling \$78,381, and general operating expenses of \$68,459 of all other and \$0 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, 2003 was \$368,271.00; of which \$159,000 is obligated for outstanding contracts and operating expenses for 1/1/04 to 6/30/04.

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 the superintendent most recently, (at a savings of \$74,532 in FY 04 and \$75,116 in FY 05 to the IFW General Fund); assistant superintendent, two full time gamekeepers from the IFW general fund, as well as the salaries of 7 summer temporary employees.

Summary

If annual revenue, which is variably dependent upon weather, the economy, and even national events; does not support the annual operation of the Park, the difference is balance forwarded from the dedicated wildlife park carrying account. In FY 04-05, the park took on all of its expenses, with no additional support from the Department general fund. We hope the park will be able to attract enough visitors, and thus take in enough revenue to be self-supporting in the coming years as we continue to make improvements, create new and maintain existing exhibits that reflect the programs and projects of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.