

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)

2004 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. During 2004, we experienced about a 23% increase in attendance. For a comparison, state parks experienced a 3% decrease in overall attendance. 2004 was considered a 'down' year for Maine tourism because of poor weather, but this benefited the park in that it was overcast a lot, but not a complete washout. About 112,394 people visited the facility during 2004, (this year counting the 14,000 3 & unders which get in free) and revenues totaled \$491,728. (\$5969.00 in dedicated account interest is included).

<u>Visitation</u> (compiled from cash register receipts)	<u># of visits</u>
Seniors	6555
Adults	40,958
Children	19,121
3 & under	13,896
Groups	20,995
<u>Other Attendance</u>	<u># of visits</u>
Family Pass & Community Pass use (Compiled from daily tally sheet)	7953
3 Mountain lion	
6 Individual	
272 Family passes	
33 Community passes	
Fish and Wildlife Open House Day	2916
<u>Grand Total Visitation</u>	112,394

Staffing

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. Up to 10 seasonal staff are hired through a temporary services agency during the open season. Many of these part time staffers return year after year and have provided dedicated, innovative and invaluable help in caring for our wildlife while providing quality experiences to our visitors. Our current goal is to financially demonstrate that the wildlife park can support another, much needed, full time staff person. The same 4 full time positions have operated this facility as a visitor center since 1982; to date, visitors have quadrupled and buildings/exhibits increased 8 fold.

For the 2nd year, we have an Americorps Member working on special projects including trail work and improvements, web site redesign, and high school and college volunteer recruitment for park special projects. In addition, this person has been a tremendous asset in networking the park computer systems, designing and organizing databases and files, creating and maintaining new exhibits, and contributing to regular daily park duties.

Fee Structure

The wildlife park increased 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 had free admission. This is still a bargain entry fee, and we received little if any complaints about it. The fee increase certainly helped in the overall increase in revenue for 2004.

	<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 2004 season, which included weekly publicity in area event calendars and vacation guide pullouts, print ads and coupons, participation in festivals and parades as exhibitors, membership in the Portland Convention and Visitors Bureau, and cooperative marketing 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 and paid advertising on the Outdoor Cable Channel, Channel 13 Doug's Discovery, Channel 6, and various local cable channels.

Special events held during the peak summer season included the Fish and Wildlife Open House, successfully held in September this year to provide information about the bear referendum and to segue into the fall hunting season; Full Moon Night Hikes, Halloween Night Walks; WBLM Radio Day, Brownie Days, Summer Wildlife Days, etc.

Nature Store: The Park Superintendent took over business operations for the Nature Store this year, implementing a store 'facelift', purchasing merchandise, stocking, hiring, record-keeping, business plan development and the like. Experienced retail store staff from previous years were instrumental in their assistance. The Nature Store saw \$106,503.00 in total sales, and realized \$25,811.00 in profit. The nature store is very popular with visitors, and with this first year of retail sales experience, we hope to make it more so in the future. All nature store revenues are deposited into the park dedicated account, from which the entire park budget, (operations, personal services and capital improvements) are drawn.

During 2004 we continued to have the entrance gate staffed solely by **volunteers** throughout the season, over 40 of whom donated close to 1300 hours staffing the front entrance, collecting admissions fees, directing visitors and answering questions. A paid (temp) Volunteer Gate Coordinator administers the volunteers in this essential service.

The popular **fish and wildlife education** programs for elementary, middle, high schools and homeschoolers continued, with 1503 participants in 27 programs this spring, and 886 in 20 programs during fall; for a total of 2389 students in 37 programs during the 2004 season, offered in May-June and Sept.-October, (a slight increase over 2003). 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 2005 season.

There is a large demand for **guided tours** of the wildlife exhibits, offered by our trained volunteers and staff for school groups, scout groups, church groups, day cares, summer camps and others. However, a continuing problem is finding enough qualified and available volunteers to lead tours on weekday mornings to meet this ever-increasing demand. In 2004, this program served 1166 children, participating in 26 tours and special programs. Volunteers gave over 200 hours of time to accomplish this. All education volunteers were trained and their volunteer time coordinated by the Summer Program Manager. A continuing program with Poland Spring High School had 3 high school interns doing an independent study at the park. These students were trained to lead tours for elementary students, and gave many hours to our tour program.

Scout Days have been developed by the Summer Program Manager; to assist area brownies, junior and senior scouts to get their wildlife badges. Over 450 girls participated in these special spring and fall day 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 and moose in the new seating area under the pines, created for this purpose. Summer seasonal staff and volunteers gave the presentations.

The **Saturday Summer 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 Saturdays 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 2005 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 again offered this year – an owl prowl, creatures of the night hike, and a Halloween hike. The Full Moon Halloween Night Hike was well advertised and attracted close to 1000 visitors for that single 2-hour period, many of them wearing their Halloween costumes. The 2nd Halloween hike, held on the 31st, was not well attended, and we learned not to compete with the real Halloween festivities.

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

Two **Vault Toilets** were constructed at 2 separate locations (near the bear and turtle exhibits) this season. They are handicapped accessible, and have proven to be very popular with visitors.

The wildlife park **Main Office**, now located in the central farmhouse residence has undergone extensive repairs and renovations to create separate offices and a break area for staff.

The **old central deeryard** fence has been removed, and restoration of the several acre site begun. The possibility of developing this area for the **catch and release fish pool** is currently being investigated.

The **Tree Trail** was completed and opened to the public. A joint project with the Maine Tree Foundation, the trail is accessible by those in wheelchairs and by strollers, has tree ID and forest practices interpretation, and is very popular with visitors.

The **parking lot** is being expanded to accommodate our ever-increasing number of visitors.

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 local group was organized in 1991 in response to the threatened closure of the 'Game Farm' as the Department originally called it, as a cost-savings proposal to the Legislature. 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 fund additional programs and improvements at the Park. Its members hope the Wildlife Park continues to grow to meet the needs for wildlife and conservation education in Maine.

Friends volunteers constructed an attractive new building, the "**Snack Shack**", to house ice cream, candy, and soda sales in 2002, and added on to it spring 2004. Sales in 2004 netted their organization a little over \$26,000. 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; contract with 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 Saturday Summer Wildlife Days, provide wooden benches for seating around the park, and more. During 2004, Friends made substantial contributions to the vault toilet project, and the coyote exhibit, placed memorial plaques at the park, and purchased specialty animal feed. The Friends have also made financial contributions to the moose and deeryard exhibits.

2005 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 restoration

Estimated Costs: \$2000

Continuing Water line repair/replacement

Estimated Costs: \$30,000

Obtain grant funding for new eagle exhibit and rebuild

Estimated Costs: \$70,000

Stain Visitor Center and Rebuild Deck

Estimated Costs: \$7000

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

Because the Wildlife Park regular open season spans 2 fiscal years, it is a bit more challenging to report and make comparisons of revenues vs. expenditures. The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for fiscal year 2004 was \$350,590, which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 04 was \$390,361. For the first time, IFW general fund revenue did not cover any park costs. General operating expenses were \$154,796; there were no capital improvement or equipment costs; and personal services cost \$195,795; for a total of \$350,590, borne entirely 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 2005 was \$255,809. Total revenue to date in FY 05 is \$303,815. Four full time permanent positions totaling \$102,180, and general operating expenses of \$135,247 in all other and \$18,382 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, 2004 was \$427,134 of which \$235,700 is obligated for outstanding contracts and operating expenses for 1/1/05 to 6/30/05.

Section 7735-a of Chapter 591 also mandated that this facility become “increasingly financially self-sustaining”, which has been demonstrated since 1997 by assuming, from the IFW general fund, the salaries of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, two full time gamekeepers, as well as the salaries of up to 10 summer temporary employees.