

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2005 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 snow cover, the park did not open until April 21st. 2005 was again considered a 'down' year for Maine tourism overall because of poor weather; but unlike 2004, the many solidly rainy weekends, holidays and school program days of 2005 negatively impacted total park attendance. About 84,860 people visited the facility during 2005, and revenues totaled \$439,681 – about a 10% decrease in income from 2004. For a comparison, state parks experienced a 5% decrease in overall attendance.

<u>Visitation</u> (compiled from cash register receipts)	<u># of visits</u>
Seniors	5527
Adults	33,755
Children	14,926
3 & under (free)	10,308
Groups	11,682
<u>Other Attendance</u>	<u># of visits</u>
Family Pass use	4139
Community Pass use	2575
Fish and Wildlife Open House Day	2400
<u>Grand Total Visitation</u>	85,312

Regular 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. A major financial goal is to demonstrate that the wildlife park can support another, much needed, full time staff person. The same 4 full time positions have operated this 7 day a week, 365 days a year facility as a wildlife park since 1982; to date, visitors have quadrupled and buildings/exhibits increased 9 fold.

New Staffing

Merritt Foster, Assistant Superintendent and 30-year employee of the wildlife park, announced his plans for retirement in November 2005. A search for his replacement was immediately started, and Adam Farrington was promoted from gamekeeper in late January as the new Assistant Super. A position announcement for a new gamekeeper is currently being posted. The Superintendent of 2.5 years, Henry Hamilton, was dismissed from his position in November 2005. The position announcement was advertised January 13 and will close January 31, 2006. We

hope to find and hire a suitable replacement as soon as possible; and to have the park fully staffed and operational by April 1st.

A new Summer Program Manager started work in June. She made an excellent transition, and was able to improve upon and expand many existing programs, as well as introduce some new ones. For the 2nd year, Americorps Members worked on special projects including trail work and improvements, web site redesign, wildlife enrichment and enhancement of existing exhibits, and high school and college volunteer recruitment for park special projects. In addition, they have been a tremendous asset in networking the park computer systems, designing and organizing office procedures, databases and files, creating and maintaining new exhibits, and contributing to regular daily park duties.

New and Expanded Programs

With limited operating funds, the Wildlife Park maintained and somewhat expanded its **advertising program** in the 2005 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 television advertising on the Outdoor Cable Channel, Channel 13 Doug's Discovery, Channel 6, and various local cable channels; as well as a paid flight of ads on Channel 6 in July and August. Time Warner Cable gave the Friends of MWP a \$1000 cash grant & TWC estimated \$50,000.00 worth of advertising with 2,609 public service spots on TWC channels.

Special events held during the peak summer season included the Fish and Wildlife Open House, again held in September this year to segue into the fall hunting season; Full Moon Night Hikes, Halloween Night Walks; Brownie Days, Summer Wildlife Days, a Native American Powwow, etc.

Nature Store: An Americorps member took over business operations for the Nature Store this year, purchasing merchandise, stocking, hiring, record keeping, and the like. Experienced retail store clerks from previous years were instrumental in their assistance to him. The Nature Store saw \$97,793.92 in total sales, and realized \$21,045 in direct profit, while carrying \$10,960.00 worth of merchandise forward into 2006. 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.

As has been the case for years, the entrance gate continued to be 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 1309 participants in 23 programs this spring, and 302 in 10 programs during fall; for a total of 1611 students in 33 programs during the 2005 season, offered in May-June and Sept.-October. This represents a 32% decline in attendance. Gas prices have severely impacted school field trip budgets, with many schools having to cancel such trips altogether; or cut back and make difficult choices about where they will go. 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 2006 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 2005, this program served 1367 children, participating in 35 tours and special programs. Volunteers gave over 120 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 several 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 continued, revised, administered and enhanced 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 spring and fall day programs. Volunteers, Americorps members and summer staff assisted with these programs. We have offered, but not yet organized similar days for cub and boy scouts. We hope these special programs expand in the future.

Our summer staffers presented Daily summer Wildlife Programs 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, with over 900 total visitors attending. Anywhere from 25-35 people attended each program on turtles, owls, loons, big cats, ravens, eagles and furbearers in the seating area under the pines, created for this purpose. Summer seasonal staff, Americorps members, and volunteers gave the presentations.

The **Saturday Summer Wildlife Program** series, sponsored and small financial stipends provided 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 18 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 2006 summer event calendars from Boston to Bangor.

Night Hikes are normally 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. Unfortunately, rainy weather caused cancellation of the August event, and the Halloween Night Hike had to be postponed twice due to rain, and finally ran on another fairly rainy evening, resulting in lower attendance than usual.

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 recognizes and appreciates the efforts of volunteers at the wildlife park, many of who have been volunteering steadily for years.

Improvements

The wildlife park **Main Office**, now located in the central farmhouse residence is continuing to undergo extensive gutting, repairs and renovations to create separate offices and a break area for staff; as well as a new computer network for all staff members.

Work is still ongoing on the **parking lot expansion**.

A **new deck** is being put on the Visitors Center.

A plan for the last of the park's **water line replacement** has been engineered. Now funds must be found to pay for it.

Work began on a **new fox exhibit**, funded in part by the Friends of the Wildlife Park (details below) with in-kind site work accomplished by IFW engineers and park staff.

Work began on a new, state of the art **bald eagle exhibit**, funded by the Grace Butnam Foundation: donating \$25,907.10 to the Friends of the MWP park specifically for this project.

Work was completed on a **new raptor exhibit**, funded by the Stiffler Trust, donating \$7,000.00 to the Friends of the MWP specifically for this project; and the Friends funding materials fees (details below).

The Friends funded **additional fencing for the new deeryard**, (details below) in order to accommodate some rotation between 'pastures' to prevent over browsing and provide a way to separate sick or injured deer. Several deer were released last spring, and more are planned to go this spring in an effort to reduce the population in this finite space.

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.

Friend's volunteers continue to operate an attractive "**Snack Shack**" to house ice cream, candy, and soda sales. 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 often much more.

2005 Friends projects included:

The Snack Shack generated \$26,000.00, which included \$2,295.00 profit from a Penny Crusher Machine, \$4,223.00 from the plant sale and \$3074 donations for the Fox Exhibit fund.

The Friends supplied funds for the following projects:

1. \$11,312.00 towards the Fox Exhibit.
2. \$ 1,000.00 for 5 new strollers.
3. \$ 4,000.00 for plants and other expenses for the Gardens.
4. \$ 7,400.00 for deer exhibit fencing.
5. \$ 3,800.00 for a Penny Crusher.
6. \$ 450.00 for a 'Shaker Glider' for the Snack Shack porch.
7. \$ 1,200.00 for materials for the new Owl Display

In March, the Friends went to the Legislature and successfully requested the return of close to \$10,000 of the Park's dedicated funds, which had been 'swept' out of dedicated accounts.

2006 Wildlife Park needed capital improvements/expenditures (Not in order of priority)

New Fox Exhibits	Estimated Costs: \$70,000
Continuing Water line repair/replacement	Estimated Costs: \$80,000
Restoration of farmhouse	Estimated Costs: \$95,000
Dismantle Existing Furbearer exhibit and relocations	Estimated Costs: About 7-8 new exhibits @ roughly \$25,000 each
New Show Fish Pool	Construct a 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 2005 was \$485,131, which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 05 was \$439,681 (\$12,936.85 in dedicated account interest is included). \$45,4500 was used from the dedicated account to cover the shortfall. Similar to FY 03 and 04, the IFW general fund did not cover any park costs.

FY 05 general operating expenses were \$249,903; capital improvement or equipment costs were \$26,832 and personal services cost \$208,396; for a total of \$485,131 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 2006 was \$265,205. Total revenue to date in FY 06 is \$305,891. Four full time permanent positions totaling \$110,460 and general operating expenses of \$144,746 in all other and \$9,999 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, 2005 was \$366,378 of which \$237,068 is obligated for outstanding contracts and operating expenses for 1/1/06 to 6/30/06.

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.