

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2006 Legislative Status Report
Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Maine Wildlife Park
Gray, Maine

The Maine Wildlife Park was open to the public from April 15 to November 11 this year. Overall, the gatehouse saw an increase of nearly 5.7% in attendance and 7.86% increase in revenue over calendar year 2005. Although an increase might be expected given a significant amount of poor weather and a delayed opening in Spring 2005, it was still a relief given rising fuel prices and the rainy spring and fall weather that affected all tourism-related businesses.

The park has struggled to meet budget since a legislative self-sufficiency mandate was implemented in 1994. Fiscal year 2006 was no exception. The park spent about \$20,000 more than it made, in large part due to the general rise in cost of doing business; but specifically in rising fuel, utility, and personal services costs. However, this is a significant improvement over the shortfall of over \$45,000 in 2005. To try to bridge this gap, admission fees for the 2007 season will be increasing. A comparison of admission fees for similar facilities around the state has shown that the park is an extremely affordable place to visit. The 2007 price increases have been projected to help the park adjust to rising costs and an increased budget, while being subtle enough to avoid attendance loss. (Please see attachment #1 for a detailed breakdown of admissions revenue)

MWP Admissions Prices	2006	2007
Mountain Lion	\$110.00	\$120.00
Family Pass	\$50.00	\$60.00
Senior Citizen	\$4.00	\$4.50
Child under 3	free	free
Adult	\$5.00	\$6.00
Community Pass Use	\$1.00	\$1.00
Ind. Seasn. Pass	\$33.00	\$35.00
Tours & Education Programs	\$1.00	\$1.00
Group	\$2.50	\$3.00
Child	\$3.25	\$4.00
Community Pass Sale	\$165.00	\$200.00

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 future 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 day a year facility as a wildlife park since 1982; to date, visitors have quadrupled and buildings/exhibits increased 9 fold.

New Staffing

There has been a number of full time staffing changes at the park this year. Curtis Johnson was hired as Superintendent in February 06. The Assistant Superintendent resigned in November 06. This position was advertised, candidates were interviewed and a new Assistant has been hired. A new Gamekeeper was hired in March 06. All of the park's seasonal part time workers returned to fill positions at the gatehouse, nature store, grounds keeping, assistant game keeping and education coordination. These seasonal people were extremely helpful in assisting new staff in transitioning into their positions.

Advertising

With limited operating funds, the Wildlife Park maintained and somewhat expanded its **advertising program** in the 2006 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, MPBN, and various local cable channels; as well as a paid flight of radio ads on WHOM in June, July and August.

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: Experienced Nature Store clerk Sherri Wilbur took over managing the Nature Store this year, purchasing merchandise, stocking, hiring, record keeping, and the like. The Nature Store saw \$95,323.41 in total sales, and realized \$24,590.29 in direct profit, while carrying \$7261.56 worth of merchandise into 2007. 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 1139 participants in 19 programs this spring, and 548 in 10 programs during fall; for a total of 1687 students in 29 programs during the 2006 season, offered in May-June and Sept.-October. This represents roughly the same attendance as in 2005. 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 and grant funding to try to attract new audiences for the 2007 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. There were 29 scheduled tours for 718 people this season.

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. There were 5 scheduled brownie and junior scout days with over 300 girls participating in these special spring and fall day programs. Volunteers 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. Anywhere from 15-35 people attended each program on turtles, owls, loons, big cats, ravens, eagles and furbearers in the amphitheater-style 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 and with 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. One of the most successful weekend programs was the 2nd Native American "Honor the Animals' Powwow. Over 4000 people attended this event, bringing in substantial revenue to the park. New programs and events have already been scheduled for specific dates to be listed in 2007 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 prowling, creatures of the night hike and a very successful Halloween hike that attracted over 700 visitors for the 3-hour event.

The Wildlife Park hosts an annual **Volunteer Banquet** in March to recognize and “thank” our close to 100 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 appreciate 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, has undergone 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.
- The **parking lot expansion** was completed to accommodate 48 additional vehicles.
- A **new deck** was replaced on the Visitors Center.
- A plan for the last of the park’s **water line replacement** has been engineered. Phase 1 of this extensive project will begin this spring.
- Work continued 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 continued on a new, state of the art **bald eagle exhibit**, funded by the Grace Butnam Foundation: donating over \$100,000 to the Friends of the MWP park specifically for this project. This project still requires additional work to complete. Periodically, the park conducts a **Timber harvest** to manage our woodlands and generate revenue. Over \$12,000 in income was realized from this year’s harvest.
- 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 accommodating 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, provide funding for new wildlife exhibits and often much more.

2006 Friends projects included:

The Snack Shack generated \$31,000 in income for the Friends during the 2006 season. Friends will continue to fund work on the Fox Exhibit during 2007.

The Friends supplied funds for the following projects:

1. Fox Exhibit:
 - a. \$12,300.00 for footing & frost walls
 - b. \$2,429.00 for a viewing platform.
2. Broad Wing Hawks & Owl habitats:
 - a. \$2922.00 for materials & screening
3. Landscaping:

- a. \$9,400.00 for the cost of heat & materials for the greenhouse, pruning throughout the Park and bedding plants
- 4. Safe Capture and Immobilization Program:
 - a. \$1,200.00 for part time staff to attend training

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

New Red/Gray Fox Exhibit	Estimated Costs: \$70,000
Continuing Water line repair/replacement	Estimated Costs: \$100,000
Dismantle Existing Furbearer exhibit and relocations	Estimated Costs: About 7-8 new exhibits @ roughly \$25,000 each
New Fish Tanks for Fish House:	State Wildlife Grants funded most; however additional work required Estimated costs: \$4000
New Fish Pool Excavate and enlarge a natural, spring fed pool in the old deer yard large enough to be able to offer catch and release fishing opportunities to visitors.	Estimated Costs: \$100,000
Update Master Plan	Estimated cost: \$10,000

Annual Operating Costs

Because the Wildlife Park's 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 2006 was \$476,231.18, which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 06 was \$456,507 (\$15,673.68 in dedicated account interest is included). \$19,723.88 was used from the dedicated account to cover the short fall. The IFW general fund again did not cover any park costs.

FY 06 general operating expenses were \$233,927.27; capital improvement or equipment costs were \$20,030.24 and personal services cost \$222,273.67; for a total of \$476,231.18 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 2007 was \$299,164.12. Total revenue through December 2006 in FY 07 was \$306,633.03. Four full time permanent positions totaling \$136,419.16 and general operating expenses of \$160,109.96 in all other and \$2,635 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, 2006 was \$313,437.40 of which \$259,270 is obligated for outstanding contracts and operating expenses for 1/1/07 to 6/30/07.

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 12 summer temporary employees.