

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)

2007 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 20 to November 11 this year, and saw its best season ever in **calendar year** 2007, with over 108,000 visits and over \$592,000 in total revenue.

This represents a 12.9% increase in visitation and a 31.3% increase in total revenue over 2006. Good weather and a minor admissions fee increase (listed below) played a large part in our successful season. The park's special events, advertising and PR work, wildlife and conservation education programming for school children, and growing popularity with both Maine residents and out- of-state tourists all too play a role. Visitors from Germany, England, Bulgaria, Australia, Hungary and Japan were recorded, as well as from several Canadian provinces and dozens of US cities and states.

MWP Admissions Fees	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 11 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. Pay range changes were secured for the Superintendent and Gamekeeper positions; increasing them respectively from range 21 to 23 and range 11 to 14. These pay range changes reflect the increasing and changing job responsibilities for both these positions. 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 the number of buildings and exhibits has increased 9 fold. A future financial goal is to demonstrate that the wildlife park can support another, much needed, full time staff person.

New Staffing

There have been a number of full time staffing changes at the park this year. Curtis Johnson continues to do an excellent job as Superintendent. A relatively new Assistant Superintendent resigned in November 07, and the position is being advertised, but remains vacant at this time. A new Gamekeeper was hired in November 07. Many 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, and some new staffers were a great addition to the park's team. All 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 2007 season, which included weekly publicity in area event calendars and vacation guide pullouts, print and internet 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, 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. For a 2nd year, a brochure distribution contract was arranged that distributed 6500 brochures along travel routes pertinent to the park. The park's moose and deer were a part of NBC's national nightly news on January 2, 2008, in a story about New England's snowy winter.

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, the Halloween Night Walk; Brownie, Girl, and Cub Scout Days, Summer Wildlife Days, the Native American Powwow, etc.

Nature Store: Sherri Wilbur continued to do an excellent job managing the Nature Store this year, purchasing merchandise, stocking, record keeping, and the like. The Nature Store saw \$123,398 in total sales (a 29% increase), and realized \$57,956 in net revenue, while carrying \$10,682 worth of merchandise into 2008. 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, 20 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. Gate volunteers collected \$448,197 in admissions fees this year.

The popular **fish and wildlife education** programs for elementary, middle, high schools and homeschoolers continued, with 1326 participants in 23 programs this spring, and 647 in 18 programs during fall; for a total of 1973 students in 41 programs during the 2007 season, offered in May-June and Sept.-October. This represents a 17% increase in participation compared to 2006. With education about wildlife and conservation a major goal of the Park, we will continue to add new programs and solicit grant funding to try to attract new audiences for the 2008 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. Sarah Ogden, our new Summer Program Manager, was able to expand our volunteer corps and tour program offerings. She and her volunteers conducted 60 tours for 2351 people this year.

Scout Days have been continued, revised, administered and enhanced by the Summer Program Manager to assist area brownies, girl and cub scouts to get their wildlife badges. There were 7 scheduled scout days with over 860 participating in these special spring and fall day programs. Volunteers and summer staff assisted with these programs.

Our summer staffers and volunteers present **Daily summer Wildlife Programs** in June, July and August. These 15-20 minute, free wildlife programs are offered twice daily, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and are a very popular addition to visitors' park experience. Anywhere from 5-25 people attended programs about loons, skunks, fish, beavers, turtles, bears, hawks and owls in the amphitheater-style seating area under the pines, created for this purpose.

The **Saturday Summer Wildlife Days 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 3rd Native American "Honor the Animals' Powwow. Close to 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 2008 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 very successful Halloween hike that attracted almost 900 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. We also host a summer picnic for volunteers and their families; this year with the generous donation of food and preparations from a local business called “Party Time USA”, owned and operated by Glenn and Tammy Gisel. The Department recognizes and appreciates the dedicated efforts of volunteers at the wildlife park, many of whom have been volunteering steadily for years.

Improvements

- Phase 1 of the park’s **water line replacement** was completed this spring.
- A popular **Photographers Pass Program** was initiated
- A **new Saw-Whet Owl** exhibit was installed with assistance from an Eagle Scout
- The **new fox exhibit**, funded primarily by the Friends of the Wildlife Park (details below) was completed; with much in-kind site and finish work accomplished by IFW engineers and park staff.
- A new **cold water fish tank** was completed and installed in the Fish House Exhibit; funded by a state wildlife grant
- Work continued on a new, state of the art **bald eagle exhibit**, funded by the Grace Butnam Foundation. An **Outdoor Heritage Grant** was secured to complete the project by Spring 08.
- Conceptual designs are being engineered for several **new furbearer exhibits**
- Conceptual designs and engineering are being completed for a **new Catch and Release Fish Pond**
- The **Park Admissions Gatehouse** has been renovated to accommodate incoming visitors from windows on both sides of the building
- A new **Stroller and Wheelchair Rental Program** will be initiated in 2008
- We continue to follow a 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. This year’s biggest accomplishment was completion of the new Red and Gray Fox Exhibit. The Friends’ next goal is to fund some of the newly designed furbearer exhibits, starting with the porcupines.

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 wheelchairs and strollers for visitor use, sponsor the Saturday Summer Wildlife Days, provide a variety of wood and granite benches for seating around the park, provide funding for new wildlife exhibits, and often much more.

2007 Friends projects included:

The Friends generated \$38,104 in total income/donations during the 2007 season; a breakdown is listed below.

Penny Machine:	\$2053
Plant Sales:	\$7470
Donations:	\$5141
Snack Shack Net Sales:	\$24,259

Highlights of the projects their funds were used for this season are listed below:

1. Fox Exhibit: \$31,202 provided for completion of this exhibit
2. Overall Park Landscaping:
 - a. \$8700 for the cost of heat & materials for the greenhouse, planting and pruning throughout the Park and bedding plants

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

Phase 2 of Water line repair/replacement	Estimated Costs: \$50,000
Dismantle Existing Furbearer 'Row' and relocations	Estimated Costs: About 6 new exhibits @ roughly \$25,000 each
New Warm Water Fish Tank for Fish House:	State Wildlife Grants funded most; however additional work required Estimated costs: \$4000
New Fish Casting 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: \$200,000
Expand Nature Store	Estimated cost: \$3000.00
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** 2007 was \$525,049 which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 07 was \$522,690 (\$18,163 in dedicated account interest is included). \$2359 was used from the dedicated account to cover the short fall. The IFW general fund again did not cover any park costs.

FY 07 general operating expenses were \$275,702; capital improvement or equipment costs were \$16,312 and personal services cost \$233,035; for a total of \$525,049 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 2008 was \$304,568. Total revenue through December 2007 in FY 07 was \$389,930. Four full time permanent positions totaling \$101,523 and general operating expenses of \$196,578 in all other and \$6467 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, 2007 was \$312,943; of which \$7869 for outstanding contracts and \$193,933 for operating expenses is obligated for 1/1/08 to 6/30/08.

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 11 summer temporary employees.