

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**2008 Legislative Status Report**  
**Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**  
**Maine Wildlife Park**  
**Route 26, Gray, Maine**

The Maine Wildlife Park was open to the public from April 24 to November 11 this year, and saw its second best revenue-generating season ever in 2008, with over 94,000 visits and over \$526,000 in total revenue for **calendar year** 2008.

This represents a 13% decrease in visitation and a 12.5% decrease in total revenue compared to our record season in 2007. Unreliable and rainy summer weather, a late spring opening due to deep and unmelted snow cover, high gas prices, an overall decline in the economy and Maine tourism in general, were all reflected in our attendance. The park's special events, advertising and PR work, wildlife and conservation education programming for school children, and popularity with both Maine residents all helped generate solid visitation despite these concerns.

**2009 Fee Increase:**

The wildlife park last raised fees in 2007. In order to keep up with ever increasing personal services and operational expenses, the park must again raise its fees for the 09-10 seasons. Projections were calculated in each category to meet anticipated budget requirements. The table below illustrates our proposed new fee structure.

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2009</u>
Community Pass	\$200	\$225
Mountain Lion Pass	\$120	\$120
Family Pass	\$60	\$70
Individual Pass	\$35	\$35
Adult	\$6.00	\$7.00
Senior	\$4.50	\$5.00
Child	\$4.00	\$5.00
Group (15 or more)	\$3.00	\$3.50
Guided Tours	\$1.00	\$1.50
Child Under 3	Free	Free

**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 12 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. 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, the park sees 5 times the visitors and the number of building and wxhibits have quadrupled.

**New Staff**

Former Gamekeeper Nate Gould was hired in April as the new Assistant Superintendent, and has jumped right into his new role. Curtis Johnson continues to do an excellent job as Superintendent, and the two current Gamekeepers, Jon Bagley and Mark Jordan, are excellent caretakers of our wildlife. Most 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.

## **Operations Overview**

With our usual limited operating funds, the Wildlife Park maintained and again expanded its **advertising program** in the 2008 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. A joint effort between the park and 4 other Gray area businesses resulted in a large ad in the CVB Visitor Guide with an accompanying story about the Gray area as a destination. In addition, a new area organization, '**The Gems of Route 26**', (<http://www.gemsof26.com/>) was formed to collaborate to bring visitors to the western interior of the state. 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 3rd year, a brochure distribution contract was arranged that distributed 6500 brochures along tourist travel routes pertinent to the park.

Several new **Special events** were added to our busy summer program schedule, including a Rick Charette concert and a juried Maine Wildlife Arts and Crafts Show. Other popular programs that continue to draw large crowds included the Fish and Wildlife Open House, again held in September 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:** The Nature Store continues to be a popular stop with our visitors.

The Nature Store saw \$111,120 in total sales and realized \$59,595 (showing a 3% increase in profit despite a drop in gross sales over 2007) in net revenue, while carrying \$9191.00 worth of merchandise into 2009. 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.

The popular **Summer Photography Pass** Program was expanded to the first ever **Winter Photography Pass** Program. This new opportunity was highlighted on WGME Doug's Discovery and WSCH, generating over 100 inquiries and several reservations. We hope to see this program generate additional revenues for the park during our 'off' season. As has been the case for years, the entrance gate continued to be staffed solely by **volunteers** throughout the season, 15-20 of whom donated over 1400 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 \$396,051 in admissions fees this year.

The popular **fish and wildlife education** programs for elementary, middle, high schools and homeschoolers continued, with 1475 participants in 17 programs this spring, and 578 in 11 programs during fall; for a total of 2053 students in 28 programs during the 2008 season, offered in May-June and Sept.-October. With education about wildlife, habitats 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 2009 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. Our returning Summer Program Manager was able to expand our volunteer corps and tour program offerings. She and her volunteers conducted 55 tours for 1362 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 9 scheduled scout days with about 170 scouts 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 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 **21 consecutive Saturdays** during May, June, July and August. This format has proved to be popular with visitors. One of the most successful weekend programs was the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Native American "Honor the Animals" Powwow. Over 3500 people attended this 2 day event. The annual free Open House, which features MDIFW staff and programs, attracted close to 1500 visitors. And a 1<sup>st</sup> time

Rick Charette concert in early May brought in over 1200 visitors. New programs and events have already been scheduled for specific dates to be listed in 2009 summer event calendars from Boston to Bangor.

**Night Visits** are a great way to expand Park programming by offering a different experience in the same venue. 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 Night Visit that attracted almost 900 visitors for just a 3-hour event.

### Volunteers

This pie chart clearly shows how much the wildlife park utilizes volunteers and their services within the framework of overall annual operations. Volunteers include Gatehouse attendants, gardening and landscaping workers, Friends group administration and fundraising, Snack Shack, tours and education; Nature Store and Community Service

The Wildlife Park hosts an annual **Volunteer Banquet** each March to recognize and “thank” our close to 150 volunteers for giving their time to the park in so many ways. We also host a summer picnic for volunteers and their families; and for the 2nd year with a 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

- The popular **Summer Photographers Pass Program** was expanded to include a new **Winter Photography Pass**; the 1<sup>st</sup> ever effort to open the park on a limited basis during the winter months.
- The new, state of the art **Bald Eagle exhibit**, funded by the Grace Butnam Foundation and an **Outdoor Heritage Grant** opened in Spring 08.
- Funding is being explored for a **new Catch and Release Fish Pond**
- The 1<sup>st</sup> of 6 new **Furbearer exhibits** has been completed with funding from the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park.
- The **Fish House** will reopen in spring 09 after a variety of modifications and repairs by Park Staff.
- The **Nature Store** expanded its retail space to be able to offer more merchandise.
- The new **Stroller and Wheelchair Rental Program** was successfully launched this spring, bringing in new income
- 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 former ‘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 the funding for and completion of the first of the newly designed furbearer exhibits.

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 fund the cost of heat & materials for their greenhouse, 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, 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.

The Friends generated roughly \$60,000 in total income/donations during the 2008 season; with revenues from the Snack Shack, Penny Smashing Machine, Greenhouse Plant Sales, and general Donations.

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

Phase 2 of <b>Water line</b> repair/replacement	Estimated Costs: \$50,000
<b>Dismantle Existing Furbearer 'Row'</b> and relocations	Estimated Costs: About 6 new exhibits @ roughly \$20,000 each
<b>New Fish Casting Pool</b> in the old deer release fishing \$200,000	Excavate and enlarge a natural, spring fed pool yard large enough to be able to offer catch and opportunities to visitors. Estimated Costs:
Update <b>Master Plan</b>	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. As stated in the opening paragraph, the park generated \$526,000 in total revenue for **calendar year** 2008.

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for **fiscal year** 2008 was \$516,480.85 which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 08 was \$634,406.20; (\$12,917.28 in dedicated account interest is included). The IFW Information and Education general fund covered \$5000.00 in wages for the Summer Program Manager's Educational Outreach component.

FY 08 general operating expenses were \$306,554.92; capital improvement or equipment costs were \$6467.22 and personal services cost \$203,458.71; for a total of \$516,480.85 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 2009 was \$258,682.24. Total revenue through December 2008 in FY 09 was \$328,863.92. Four full time permanent positions totaling \$112,526.11 and general operating expenses of \$142,181.13 in all other and \$3975.00 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, 2008 was \$415,702.99; of which \$17,056.90 for outstanding contracts and \$284,334.20 for personal services and general operating expenses is obligated for 1/1/08 to 6/30/08.

Section 10254 - 1 and 2 of Chapter 903 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; and annual 'all other' and 'capital' expenditures.