

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2009 Legislative Status Report

Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
Maine Wildlife Park
Route 26, Gray, Maine



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The Maine Wildlife Park, owned and operated by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, was open to the public from April 15 to November 11 in 2009, and saw its highest revenue-generating season ever this year, with over 104,000 visits and over \$652,000 in total revenue for **calendar year** 2009.

This represents a 10% increase in visitation and a 24% increase in total revenue as compared to 2008. Despite an unreliable and rainy summer, this year's trend of visiting 'stay-cationers' was very beneficial to the park. Local visitors accounted for about 50% of attendance, with as many as 45% from out of state and 5% from out of the country! The park's special events, advertising and PR work, wildlife and conservation education programming for school children, and popularity with both Maine residents and tourists 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 raised its fees for the 09-10 seasons. Projections were calculated in each admissions category to meet anticipated budget requirements. While still a very affordable family attraction, the new fee structure certainly was a large factor in this year's increased revenue.

	<u>2008</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



Maine Wildlife Park Staffing

The facility is staffed by four full-time employees who care for over 30 wildlife species on exhibit and the 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.

Curtis Johnson continues to do an outstanding job as Park Superintendent in his 4 years in the position, and has pulled staff and volunteers together and focused their talents and energies. Under his daily leadership, the park has achieved many of its current goals. Nate Gould is dedicated and innovative as Assistant Superintendent, and the two current Gamekeepers, Jon Bagley and Mark Jordan, are excellent caretakers of our wildlife. The same 4 full time positions have operated this 7 day a week, 365 day a year facility as a wildlife park since 1982. Up to 12 seasonal staff are hired through a temporary services agency during the open season. All of the park's seasonal part time workers returned to fill positions at the gatehouse, nature store, groundskeeping, assistant gamekeeping and education coordination and provided dedicated, innovative and invaluable help in caring for our wildlife, while providing quality experiences to our visitors. To date, the park sees 5 times the visitors and the number of building and exhibits have quadrupled as compared to years past.

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Operations Overview

With tight operating funds, the Wildlife Park maintained and again expanded its **advertising program** in the 2009 season, which included weekly publicity in area online and media 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. In addition, the 5 area businesses that make up **'The Gems of Route 26'**, (www.gemsof26.com/) continued to collaborate with advertising and package deals 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, the Discovery Channel, Maine Outdoors and various Time Warner and other cable channels. FOX 23's "Your Hometown" aired throughout the summer courtesy of financial help from the Friends. For the 4th year, a brochure distribution contract was arranged that distributed over 8000 brochures along state tourist travel routes within range of the park.

The park was recognized as a **2009 Editors' Choice** in **Yankee Magazine's Travel Guide to New England**. The Editors' Choice recommendation designates *Yankee* editors' and writers' favorite restaurants, lodgings, attractions, and bargains across New England.

Several new **Special events** were added to our busy summer program schedule, including an "All About Bats' night visit, a Maine Woodsman Day and a Maine Bowhunters Association Youth Archery Day. Other popular programs that continue to draw large crowds included Fish and Wildlife Day, held in June this year; the 2nd annual Rick Charette concert, the 'HalloweenFest'; and the Native American Pow Wow.



Nature Store

The Nature Store continues to be a popular stop with our visitors. The store saw \$112,304 in total sales and realized a net of \$52,542, while carrying \$17,839 worth of merchandise into 2010. 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.

Other Special Programming

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, WCSH, and on the Maine Outdoors show several times, generating over 100 inquiries and several reservations. We hope to see this program continue to generate additional revenues for the park during our 'off' season.

The popular **fish and wildlife education** programs for elementary, middle, high schools and homeschoolers continued, with 1161 participants in 17 programs this spring, and 746 in 15 programs during fall; for a total of 1907 students in 32 programs during the 2009 season, offered in May-June and September-October. An 'early-bird special', \$1/pp price break was offered to schools and home school groups that reserved a program prior to April 17th. Because of dramatic cut backs in school field trip budgets, the park is making every effort to make a school visit affordable and worthwhile. 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 2010 season.

There continues to be a steady 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 maintain our

volunteer corps of tour guides and tour program offerings. She and her volunteers conducted 54 tours for 1404 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 13 scout groups with about 293 scouts participating in these special spring and fall day programs. Volunteers and summer staff also assisted with these programs.

Our summer staffers and volunteers present **Daily Summer Wildlife Programs** in July and August. These 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 throughout the park and 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. This format has proved to be popular with visitors. Programs occurred on **21 consecutive Saturdays** during May through October.

A record-breaking weekend event was the 5th annual Native American "Honor the Animals' Pow Wow. Nearly 5000 people attended this 2 day event. The annual Fish & Wildlife Day, featuring MDIFW staff program displays for 1/2 price admission, attracted over 800 visitors in early June. And the 2nd annual Rick Charette Concert in mid September brought in close to 1200 visitors. New programs and events have already been scheduled for specific dates to be listed in 2010 summer event calendars from Boston to Bangor.

Night Visits continue to help 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 2-3 hour night visit. Three themed night visits were again offered this year – an 'All About Bats' visit, a 'Wear Your PJs' night hike and the very successful Halloween Fest, that grows each year and attracted over 1200 visitors for just a 3-hour event.



Volunteers

Over 150 Park Volunteers include Gatehouse attendants, gardening and landscaping workers, Friends group administration and fundraising, Snack Shack administration and operations, tours and education, help at the Nature Store and a variety of Community Service projects.

As has been the case for years, the entrance gate continued to be **staffed solely** by volunteers and the volunteer gate coordinator throughout the season, 15-20 of whom donated over 1400 hours staffing the front entrance, collecting admissions fees, directing visitors and answering questions. The seasonal temporary Volunteer Gate Coordinator administers the volunteers in this essential service. Gate volunteers collected \$520,783 in admissions fees this year.

The park is very fortunate to have such a talented group of volunteers and Friends, many returning year after year to help keep us in operation. Comprising nearly 40% of our total annual labor contribution, there are few facets of the park's operation in which volunteers are not directly involved.

In addition, during much of the summer and all winter, the park staff is joined by workers from the Maine Correctional Center in Windham. They are of tremendous assistance in completing many projects that would otherwise be impossible to accomplish. Examples for this winter include siding one of our large maintenance buildings on the back lot, assisting with the new small mammal exhibits, renovation of the ground bird display and assisting with countless other projects.

All of this support is what makes the park's existence possible. In addition to being an essential relationship for the park, the partnership between IF&W and volunteers serves as a model to other agencies, institutions and communities throughout the State, and beyond. It is a testament to what motivated citizens can do for their communities, their government and the 'quality of place' in their very own towns.

The Wildlife Park hosts an annual **Volunteer Banquet** each March to recognize and "thank" our 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 3rd year with a generous donation of food and preparations from local catering experts 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 **Summer & Winter Photographers Pass Program** is a successful revenue-generating new program
- The 6 newly completed and naturalized **small mammal exhibits** will be open for the 2010 season; replacing the outdated and ½ century old chain-link and cement furbearer row. This will be remodeled into a staff only building for animal care and maintenance.
- The aging ground bird display, former pheasant pens, was dismantled
- Several buildings were repainted or resided; and there were improvements to buildings, fence lines and other infrastructure.
- **Oncell**, a new audio tour program available to visitors via their personal cell phones, will be operational in 2010. Free to visitors, a short audio description of most of the wildlife, fish, nature trails and exhibits will be available on demand, just a phone call away. This will also give us the opportunity to provide more in-depth information about MDIFW programs and projects as they relate to each species.
- New interpretive signage will be installed in several locations in the park
- Funding is being explored for a **new Catch and Release Fish Pond**
- The **Nature Store** expanded its retail space to be able to offer more merchandise.
- We continue to follow a **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.



Awards

The Wildlife Park was recognized in January, 2010 by the Department of Tourism with a Governors Tourism Award in the Category of **Commitment to Tourism Growth**. This organization not only strives to grow its own business, but also works with others within the industry to grow tourism in Maine. It is manifested as leadership roles in local, regional and statewide tourism initiatives, volunteer work with tourism related organizations, involvement with grassroots efforts, facilitation of tourism networks/tourism development, business expansions, product development or marketing programs that reach beyond the scope of the single business. Commitment to buying locally and contributing to the local economy was also considered within this category.

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 wildlife exhibit improvements and additional programs 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 financial accomplishment was the funding for and completion of the newly designed furbearer exhibits, contributing \$74,146 total dollars towards this much needed project.



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 \$51,000 in income and donations during the 2009 season; with revenues coming from the Snack Shack, Penny Smashing Machine, Greenhouse Plant Sales and general Donations.

Future needed Wildlife Park capital improvements/expenditures

(Not in order of priority)

Phase 2 of Water line repair/replacement

Estimated Costs: \$50,000

Construction of New/Expanded **Restroom Facilities**

Estimated Costs: \$150,000

Construction of New/Enlarged **Mountain Lion** Exhibit:

Estimated Costs: \$60,000

Relocation of **Bobcat** Exhibit:

Estimated Costs: \$0

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

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. As stated in the opening paragraph, the park generated \$652,689.03 in total revenue for **calendar year** 2009.

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for **fiscal year** 2009 was \$524,643.40 which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 09 was \$557,955.57 (\$9,164.7 in dedicated account interest is included).

FY 09 general operating expenses were \$288,521.49; capital improvement or equipment costs were \$3,975.00 and personal services cost \$232,146.91; for a total of \$524,643.40 borne solely 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 2010 was \$283,660.51. Total revenue through December 2009 in FY 10 was \$410,429.95. Four full time permanent positions totaling \$117,002.20 and general operating expenses of \$166,667.31 in all other and \$0 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, 2009 was \$505,593.92; of which \$20,626.61 for outstanding contracts and \$277,039 for personal services and general operating expenses is obligated for 1/1/10 to 6/30/10.

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, **all** of the operating expenses of the Maine Wildlife Park. The park continues to receive "in-kind" administrative services from DAFS and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. To compensate state government for these services, Sta-Cap and Di-Cap percentages are withdrawn from the park's account based upon annual expenditures. In combination with the park's volunteer support, this arrangement has allowed the park to demonstrate sustained self-sufficiency during the past two years, while slowly building the park's dedicated carrying account.

