

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**2010 Legislative Status Report**  
*Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*  
**Maine Wildlife Park**  
Route 26, Gray, Maine

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The Maine Wildlife Park is owned and operated by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. The park was open to the public from April 15 to November 11 in 2010, and saw its highest revenue-generating season ever this year, with over 104,600 visits and over \$667,000 in total revenue for calendar year 2010.

This represents a modest increase in total visitation and revenue compared to 2009. With the first 'normal' summer weather-wise in 2 years, 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 during peak season! 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 record revenues and broke several attendance records for special events.

**Admission Fees:**

The wildlife park last raised admission fees in 2009. In order to keep up with regularly 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. We do not feel that a 2011 fee increase is necessary; but we will re-evaluate for the 2012 season.

	<u>2010</u>
Community Pass	\$225
Mountain Lion Pass	\$120
Family Pass	\$70
Individual Pass	\$35
Adult	\$7.00
Senior	\$5.00
Child	\$5.00
Group (15 or more)	\$3.50
Guided Tours	\$1.50
Child under 3	Free



**Maine Wildlife Park Staffing**

The facility is staffed by four full-time employees who care for over 30 wildlife species on exhibit, as well as the orphaned and injured wildlife brought in by the public and Department staff. Park 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 5 years in the position, he continues to pull staff and volunteers together to focus their talents and energies on a multitude of projects. 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. 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. 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 exhibits have quadrupled.

Up to 12 seasonal staff are hired through a temporary services agency during the open season. Most of these part time staffers return year after year and have provided dedicated, innovative and invaluable help by contributing towards the park's smooth operation, while providing quality experiences for our visitors.

**Operations Overview**

The Wildlife Park again expanded its advertising program in the 2010 season, which included weekly publicity in area online and media event calendars, 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 6 area businesses that make up 'The Gems of Route 26', ([www.gemsof26.com/](http://www.gemsof26.com/)) continued to collaborate with additional promotional advertising and package deals to bring visitors to the western interior of the state. The Wildlife Park is fortunate to be featured in a variety of television and newspaper stories year 'round, in Public Service Announcements 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", very effective television advertising, aired throughout a 2nd summer with financial contributions from the 'Friends'. Local business Cole Farms ran a TV ad featuring

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the park as a destination and the restaurant for lunch. For the 5th year, a brochure distribution contract was arranged that distributed over 7500 brochures along state tourist travel routes within range of the park.

The park is also a popular winter feature story source for local media. The Lewiston Sun Journal has run features on our Gray fox, wintering turtles and moose this year. Representative Anne Haskell's 'Haskell from the House' cable show will feature the park in mid February. When media need wildlife footage for a story, they often approach the wildlife park to accommodate.

The Maine Office of Tourism is assisting the wildlife park this winter by using the state contracted advertising firm, Swardlick Marketing, to develop a new 4-color brochure for us.

Several new **Special events** were added to our busy summer program schedule. Moose Madness Day, our first event of the season on May 1<sup>st</sup>, brought in over 1000 people and was one of our busiest days of the year. An Endangered Species Day, a Learn about Falconry Day and a Maine Bowhunters Association Youth Archery Day also saw great attendance. Other popular programs that continue to draw large crowds included Fish and Wildlife Day, held in June this year; the 3rd annual Rick Charette concert, a 2-day 'HalloweenFest'; and the Native American Pow Wow.



### Nature Store

The Nature Store continues to be a popular stop with our visitors. The store saw \$118,100 in total sales, an increase of 5%; and realized a net of \$62,540 - an increase of 19%; while carrying \$18,250 worth of merchandise into 2011. All nature store revenues are deposited into the park's 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**, expanded to include the **Winter Photography Pass Program** in 2009, continues to generate additional revenues for the park during our 'off' season.

The **fish and wildlife education** programs for elementary, middle, high schools and homeschoolers continued, with close to 1400 total participants in 25 programs offered in May-June and September-October. An 'early-bird special', a \$1/pp price break, was offered to schools and home school groups that reserved a program prior to April 17<sup>th</sup>. Because of dramatic cut backs in school field trip budgets, the park is making every effort to make a school visit affordable and worthwhile.

We are currently looking into finding grant funding to offer stipends to schools that book a conservation education program or tour at the park. With education about wildlife, habitats and conservation a major goal of the Park and the Department, we will continue to add new programs and solicit grant funding to try to attract new audiences for the 2011 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 43 tours for 1279 people this year.

Our summer staffers and volunteers present **Daily summer Wildlife Programs** in July and August. The 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, foxes, hawks and owls at special locations throughout the park, and in the amphitheater-style seating area under the pines.

The **Saturday Summer Wildlife Days Program** series, sponsored by and with financial stipends provided to presenters by the **Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park**, continued to attract new presenters and audiences. These weekly special programs 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 **22 consecutive Saturdays** from May through October.



The park's opening date on April 15 is dictated by the weather and snow cover. We try to open in time for April school vacation and were able to this year. Close to 6400 people flocked to the park during vacation week. This year, we tried to start our Summer Events with a 'bang' with Moose Madness Day May 1<sup>st</sup>, bringing in over 1000 folks for all kinds of moose-related exhibits and events. A record-breaking weekend event was the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Native American "Honor the Animals' Pow Wow. Over 5000 people attended this 2 day event. The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Rick Charette Concert in mid September brought in over 1400 visitors, and in a new partnership was sponsored by 3 local business supporters. New programs and events have already been scheduled for specific dates to be listed in 2011 summer event calendars from Boston to Bangor.



## 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 \$527,611 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.

The park is also fortunate to receive assistant gamekeeping help from several student interns throughout the season.

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 of their work this winter include siding one of our large maintenance buildings, assisting with relocating the cat exhibits, site preparation for construction of the new mountain lion exhibit, the renovation and repair of numerous signs, park furniture, and buildings, winter clean up and facility shut down, 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 a formal annual **Volunteer Banquet** every March to recognize and thank our volunteers for giving their time to the park in so many ways. We also host a very casual **Summer Picnic** for volunteers and their families; and for the 4<sup>th</sup> year there was a generous donation of food and all the 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 6 newly completed and naturalized **small mammal exhibits** were opened for the 2010 season; replacing the outdated and ½ century old chain-link and cement furbearer row which was remodeled into a 'staff only' building for winter animal care and maintenance.
- The **Joe Jones Woodland Path** was formally dedicated along the small mammal exhibits in May.
- **Oncell**, a new audio tour program available to visitors via their personal cell phones, was operational in 2010. Free to visitors, a short audio description of most of the wildlife, fish, nature trails and exhibits was available on demand, just a phone call away. We provided more in-depth information about MDIFW programs and projects as they relate to each species. Over 7100 calls were logged into the system for a total of 186 hours of listening. The most popular animals were the raccoon and fisher!
- Jumping on the social networking bandwagon, the park initiated a **Facebook** page that now reaches over 3000 (and counting) 'fans'.
- 7 large new **interpretive signs** featuring information about MDIFW fishery and wildlife management programs were installed in several locations in the park
- The aquatic display in front of the eagle's exhibit was completely refurbished and planted by volunteer Marianne Tufts.
- The **Maine Warden Museum** was completely overhauled and updated
- Work has begun to relocate the cat exhibits in preparation for construction of a **new mountain lion exhibit** that will be primarily funded by the Friends and ready for occupancy by the end of 2011.
- Phase II of the waterline replacement and upgrade will go hand in hand with the lion exhibit construction.
- The **Summer & Winter Photographers Pass Program** continues as a successful revenue-generating program
- Funding continues to be explored for a **new Catch and Release Fish Pond**

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**. The Wildlife Park 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 and 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 \$68,521 in income and donations during the 2010 season; with revenues coming from the Snack Shack, Penny Smashing Machine, Greenhouse Plant Sales and general Donations. The Friends were also able to create an attractive new web site, [www.wildlifeparkfriends.org](http://www.wildlifeparkfriends.org), that will benefit their mission as fundraisers for the Maine Wildlife Park.

## Future Wildlife Park needed capital improvements/expenditures

Phase 3 of **Water line** repair/replacement

Estimated Costs: \$50,000

Construction of New/Expanded **Restroom Facilities**

Estimated Costs: \$150,000

Construction of **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. Thus a distinction must be made between Fiscal Year revenue vs. Calendar Year revenue. As stated in the opening paragraph, the park generated **\$667,474.00** in total revenue for **Calendar Year 2010**.

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for **Fiscal Year 2010** was **\$549,119.70**, which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 10 was **\$647,047.49** (\$2751.74 in dedicated account interest is included).

FY 10 general operating expenses were \$315,283.84; there were no capital improvement or equipment costs, and personal services cost \$233,835.86 for a total of \$549,119.70 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 2011 was \$274,869.80. Total revenue through December 2010 in FY 11 was \$448,068.24. Four full time permanent positions costing \$115,517.44, general operating expenses of \$159,352.36 in all other and \$0 of capital were borne entirely by the park's 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, 2010 was \$649,959.71; of which \$24,767.91 for outstanding contracts and \$292,271.00 for personal services and general operating expenses is obligated for 1/1/11 to 6/30/11.



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; plus all annual 'all other' and 'capital' expenditures.