

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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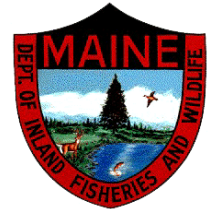


2011 Legislative Status Report

Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Maine Wildlife Park

Route 26, Gray, Maine



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 2011, and saw its second highest revenue-generating season ever this year with 96,500 visits and over \$650,000 in total revenue for calendar year 2011. This represents about an 8% drop in attendance compared to 2010, as the park faced both economic and weather-related challenges in 2011. Weather anomalies included Hurricane Irene - shutting the park down for 1.5 days, with the Superintendent able to organize and achieve enough clean up to re-open, without power, for another 3.5 days. October saw a heavy snowfall that again shut the park down for 2 days. Steep fuel prices most certainly kept more customers at home; and the overall slow economy impacted park attendance.

Despite these challenges, 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 alike, all helped the park meet its legislative mandate and stay 'in the black' for the 5th consecutive year.

Admission Fees:

The wildlife park last raised admission fees in 2009. 2013 will see another price increase; however it is remarkable that with all of the annual improvements to infrastructure and exhibits, the park has been able to maintain its extremely affordable pricing structure for 4 consecutive years.

| | <u>2009-2012</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 much of the orphaned or injured wildlife brought in by the public and Department staff. Park employees maintain buildings and grounds; construct new exhibits and displays; and staff the facility seven days a week year 'round.

Curtis Johnson continues to do an outstanding job as Park Superintendent. In his 6 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. A new Assistant Superintendent, Steve Oliveri, was hired in October, bringing many valuable skills and a new perspective to this important position. 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. To date, the park now sees 5 times the visitors and the number of building and exhibits have quadrupled.

All of the park's seasonal part time workers returned, in some cases for up to the 8th year running, to fill positions at the gatehouse, nature store, grounds-keeping, assistant game-



keeping and education coordination. 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 maintained its overall advertising program in the 2011 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 co-operative marketing efforts with the Maine Office of Tourism.

The Wildlife Park is fortunate to be featured in a variety of television and newspaper stories year 'round, in Public Service Announcements, 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", a very effective television advertising promotion, aired throughout a 3rd summer with complete sponsorship from Brookfield Power. For the 6th year, a brochure distribution contract was arranged that distributed over 9000 brochures along state tourist travel routes within range of the park. The Park's Facebook page has become quite popular, with over 4600 'fans' reached with weekly event updates and photos of our wildlife. In addition, the 7 area businesses that make up 'The Gems of Route 26', (www.gemsof26.com/) continued to collaborate with additional promotional advertising and package deals to bring visitors to the western interior of the state.

The park is also a popular feature story source for local media. The Lewiston Sun Journal ran a 'what does our wildlife do in winter' feature in early January. MPBN's Incredible Maine will run a ½ hour Park feature shot last summer on March 31, 2012. The BBC will be shooting lynx footage at the park for a feature this winter. The TV show 'Boston Chronicle' ran a ½ hour feature about Rangeley, and made a stop at and included the wildlife park, using footage of our wildlife and interviews with IFW wildlife biologists. A recent MPBN special about mountain lions shot and used extensive footage of our cats. A variety of print and TV media did stories about the park throughout the open season. When media need wildlife footage for a story, they usually approach the wildlife park to accommodate.

Several new Special events were added to our busy summer program schedule. A Bear Bonanza kicked off the summer event season, with new programs featuring the Ancient Ones, The Final Charge locked moose exhibit, ATV Maine, Maine Guides, Maine Bow Hunters, Wild About Whitetails and more. The 2 night Halloween-Fest broke another record this year with over 1400 people attending, most wearing their costumes. Maine musician Rick Charette is a popular draw, and the Honor the Animals Native American Pow Wow continues to draw large crowds over 2 days.

Nature Store

The Nature Store continues to be a popular stop with our visitors. Nature Store staff continue to improve the store's visual and purchase appeal with new merchandise and attractive displays. The store saw \$112,323.34 in total sales, and realized a net of \$46,169.44 - while carrying \$15,926.90 worth of merchandise into 2012. 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 received a big boost this year with a generous bequest from a local resident - to be used solely for Maine children's admissions - which would fund over 1700 children attending a school program or tour. Over 2100 children participated in 33 programs offered in May-June and September-October. Guided Tours were included in this offer, and these too saw a big jump in participation, with over 1900 children in 60 tours. Because of dramatic cut backs in school field trip budgets, the park is making every effort to make a school visit both worthwhile and affordable.



We will continue to try to find 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 this type of funding to attract new audiences for the 2012 season.

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 at a time attend 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. A Story Hour and craft hour for younger children is offered on Thursdays during this same time period; again at no charge.

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 23 Saturdays from May through October.

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 continues 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 seasonal Gate Coordinator administers the volunteers in this essential service. Gate volunteers collected \$487,534 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 game-keeping help each summer from several college student interns majoring in wildlife ecology, zoology, or veterinary medicine throughout the season.

In addition, during much of the summer and all

winter, the park staff is joined by inmates from the Maine Correctional Center in Windham. This talented crew is of tremendous assistance in completing many projects that would otherwise be impossible to complete. Examples of their work this winter include siding and/or painting our large maintenance buildings, assisting with exhibits, site preparation for new exhibits, 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 makes the park's ability to operate possible. In addition to being an essential relationship for the park, the partnership between IF&W and volunteers should be 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 over 100 volunteers for giving their time to the park in so many ways. We also host a very casual Summer Picnic for up to 100 volunteers and their families; and for the 5th year there was a generous donation of food service from local catering experts Glenn and Tammy Gisel. The Department recognizes and appreciates the dedicated efforts of all wildlife park volunteers, many that have been volunteering steadily for years.

Improvements

- New interactive, educational "flip" signs
- Phase II Waterline installation
- A new state of the art mountain lion exhibit, funded in large part by the Friends, is essentially completed and ready for the April 2012 opening.
- Lynx exhibit relocated to make room for the new mountain lion exhibit and maintain the 'big cat' exhibits adjacent to one another.
- Bobcats moved to a more spacious and dynamic display
- A dramatic new chain sawed black bear was carved out of a 12' white pine stump left after a take down in the picnic area.
- A timber harvest was conducted on park property in cooperation with the Department's Land Manager, generating over \$37,000 in income, which helped offset this year's lower attendance and admissions revenue.
- 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 provide more in-depth information about MDIFW programs and projects as they relate to each species. This year, calls increased from 7100 to over 8100 calls logged into the system. The raccoon and fisher comprised 18% of all calls! This fall, over 100 calls were logged from the Chicago area.
- 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
- The Dry Mills Show Fish Round Pond is scheduled to be rebuilt with MOHF grant funds. Additional interpretation will add to this popular fisheries exhibit adjacent to the wildlife park.
- 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

Curt Johnson, Park Superintendent, was recognized as a Manager of the Year for the Department, and received the William Twarog Manager of the Year Award presented by Governor LePage at a ceremony at the Blaine House in mid December.

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 and state of the art mountain lion exhibit, contributing \$110,800.00 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 \$60,692.60 in income and donations during the 2011 season; with revenues coming from the Snack Shack, Penny Smashing Machine, Greenhouse Plant Sales, BBQ Fundraiser, and general Donations. The Friends were also able to create an attractive new web site, www.wildlifeparkfriends.org, that will benefit their mission as fundraisers for the Maine Wildlife Park.

Future Wildlife Park Capital improvements/expenditures

(Not in order of priority)

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| Phase 3 of Water line repair/replacement | Estimated Costs: \$50,000 |
| Construction of New/ Expanded Restroom Facilities | Estimated Costs: \$200,000 |
| Renovation of Visitor's Center | Estimated Costs: \$25,000 |
| Design/Construction of a Wildlife-Themed Playground | Estimated Costs: \$200,000 |
| Construction of new Lynx Enclosure | Estimated Costs: \$50,000 |
| 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 |
| State of Maine OIT Connect/Install | Estimated Costs: unknown |
| 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 \$654,299.32 total revenue for Calendar Year 2011.

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for Fiscal Year 2011 was \$533,307.06 which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 11 was \$669,528.68 (\$1,239.69 in dedicated account interest is included).

FY 11 general operating expenses were \$301,775.50; there were no capital improvement or equipment costs, and personal services cost \$231,531.56 for a total of \$533,307.06 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 2012 was \$297,141.32. Total revenue through December 2011 in FY 11 was \$432,838.88. Four full time permanent positions costing \$119,337.67, general operating expenses of \$177,803.65 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, 2011 was \$748,680.45; of which \$24,946.67 for outstanding contracts and \$247,219.34 for personal services and general operating expenses is obligated for 1/1/12 to 6/30/12.

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.

