

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2013 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 13 to November 11 in 2013, and saw its highest revenue-generating season ever this year with 110,312 visits and \$739,477.00 in total revenue for calendar year 2013. This represents about a 4% increase in attendance compared to 2012, even as the park faced the economic and weather-related challenges of high gas prices and many rainy days.

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 continuing popularity with both Maine residents and tourists alike, all helped the park meet its legislative mandate and stay 'in the black' for the 7th consecutive year.

Admission Fees

The wildlife park last raised admission fees in 2009. It is remarkable that with all of the continuing annual improvements to infrastructure and exhibits, the park was able to maintain its extremely affordable pricing structure for the 5th consecutive year. Park staff are currently analyzing the merits of a very modest admission increase in a few selected categories for 2014.

2009-2013

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 8th year 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. Assistant Superintendent Steve Oliveri retired in January, having brought many valuable skills and a new perspective to this important position. Gamekeeper Howie Powell was promoted to Assistant Superintendent after spending more than a year demonstrating his considerable skills to us all at the park. Current Gamekeeper Jon Bagley continues as an excellent caretaker of our wildlife and the park facility as a whole. The available gamekeeper position has been advertised and interviews should occur sometime in mid-February.

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 over 5 times the visitors and the number of building and exhibits have quadrupled.

Most of the park's seasonal part time workers returned, in some cases for up to the 10th consecutive year, 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 continued to reduce its print and paid advertising program in the 2013 season, while increasing our online presence via free web based event calendars and social media. We did continue our participation in free vacation guide pullouts, print and internet ads and coupons; and in fairs and festivals as exhibitors. A membership in the Portland Convention and Visitors Bureau and cooperative marketing efforts with the Maine Office of Tourism offer additional and valuable advertising and marketing opportunities.

The Wildlife Park is fortunate to be featured in a variety of television and newspaper stories year 'round on local Channels 6, 8 and 13; via MPBN, the Discovery Channel, Animal Planet and various Time Warner and other cable channels. The park is also a popular feature story source for local media. MPBN's 'Incredible Maine' again ran a ½ hour Park feature on its popular Saturday morning time slot. Channel 13 did 2 live remote early morning broadcasts. The Bangor Daily covered a variety of events and stories at the park this year, using its popular short video feature. A variety of print, TV and radio media did stories about the park throughout the open season, including a feature in DownEast Magazine, an interview on Bob Duchesne's 'Wild Maine Radio' and a Sun Journal newspaper article. When media need wildlife photos or footage for a story, they usually approach the wildlife park to accommodate them.

For the 8th year, a brochure distribution contract was hired to distribute over 7500 brochures along state tourist travel routes within range of the park. The Park's Facebook page has become quite popular and continues to grow, with over 12,300 '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' continued to collaborate with additional promotional advertising and package deals to bring visitors to the western interior of the state.

Important facility improvements this year included first and foremost -- new rest-rooms! A brand new facility broke ground in early April and was completed in June. To accommodate visitors directly at the admissions gatehouse, an ATM was installed – a very popular and well used new feature. The popular turtle ponds, initially constructed in the early 1990s, were irreparably leaking and subject to loss of turtles through predation. Deconstructed this fall and replaced with a new design created to address these 2 serious problems, the new, improved exhibit should be ready to go later this spring. A 2nd small shelter, popular with visitors, was constructed by Windham Correctional inmates. An additional 30 white pine trees were obtained through a Davis Foundation grant, and were planted as replacements for our aging white pine grove. The Dry Mills Hatchery completed a reconstruction of the popular Round Pond and added a very nice timber framed interpretive building and



additional fish viewing tanks. A new lynx exhibit has been designed and the project put out to bid this winter. The Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park were able to raise the funds to accomplish this project. In addition, the Friends funded the entire replacement of the moose enclosure fencing, making it much more sturdy and much more attractive.

On a sad note, the Park has lost some additional animals to very old age, including our last mountain lion, fisher, and one lynx. All of our wildlife far out live their wild counterparts, but it is always hard to lose an animal we have had for so many years. We are on a nationwide search to replace these animals by the time we open in April.

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 \$144,185.00 in total sales, and realized a net of \$78,290.00 - while carrying \$11,800.00 of remaining merchandise into 2014. This is a 14% increase in net revenue for the store compared to 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 jumped up again this year; while the Winter Photography Pass 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 saw 2266 children participating in 36 classes offered in May-June and September-October. **Guided Tours** continue to be well attended, with over 1800 children in 54 tours. Because of dramatic cut backs in school field trip budgets, the park is making every effort to ensure that a

school visit is both worthwhile and affordable.

Our summer staff 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 5-30 people at a time attend programs about wildlife at special locations throughout the park, or in the amphitheater-style seating area under the pines. A Story Hour for children is offered on Thursdays during this same time period, with a crafts session afterward; again at no charge.

The Saturday **Summer Wildlife Days** Program series is sponsored by, with financial stipends provided to presenters, by the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park. In addition, many local businesses sponsor special events that require special presenter fees, reinforcing the excellent relationship the park has with the town and local companies. weekly programs cover a wide range of fish, wildlife and conservation topics. We continue to schedule a mix of new and returning events and presenters for weekends and special programming. Events occurred on 24 Saturdays from May through October.

Some event highlights included the Dry Mills Hatchery new education building Grand Opening, noted with a parkwide, free Open House in June with close to 1800 people attending. The annual Pow Wow and Rick Charette concert both saw increases in attendance, and the Halloween Night Visits broke all records with nearly 2000 visitors! The 2nd season of North Woods Law, the popular Animal Planet TV show featuring Maine Game Wardens, was again spotlighted at a park in late September, drawing in over 1200 visitors to visit with and get autographs from their favorite game warden stars.

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 and Community Service workers.

As has been the case for years, the Admissions 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 \$558,018.00 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 total annual labor contributions, 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 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 winter clean up and facility shut down, siding and/or painting buildings and park furniture, exhibit construction and repair, site work, the renovation and repair of numerous signs, park furniture, buildings and fences, and assisting with countless other projects.

All of this support is what 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 great example of 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. The Department recognizes and appreciates the dedicated efforts of all wildlife park volunteers, many that have been volunteering steadily for years.

Improvements *(random order)*

- Park-wide waterline replacements and improvements
- NEW restrooms
- New park 'wildlife tree' sculpture and eagle pond sculpture
- Moose Fence Replacement with funding from the Friends
- Park-wide paving improvements
- Turtle pond redesign/replacement
- Lynx exhibit designed and put out to bid, funded by the Friends
- 30 conifer trees were planted in the pine picnic grove as replacement trees through a grant from the Davis Foundation
- The Dry Mills Show Fish Round Pond has been rebuilt by the Hatchery and Engineering Divisions with MOHF grant funds; and had a grand opening in June 2013.
- Facebook 'fans' more grew in 2013 to over 12,300.
- Addition of 2nd small shelter
- Addition of ATM and small log building to accommodate it
- Groundbird exhibit was revamped to create 2 compartments
- Two gardens were rebuilt/replaced with new landscape timbers
- A variety of fencing, signage and 'furniture', like picnic tables and benches, were replaced and/or repaired



Awards/Recognition

The **Governor's Award for Service and Volunteerism** Selection Committee selected the Friends of the Maine Wildlife Park as the top honoree in the 'Outstanding Nonprofit Volunteer Program' category. The Friends President Ray Clark and past President Joe Jones accepted the award at the awards ceremony in the Hall of Flags in Augusta on April 24th. Thanks to all Friends and volunteers that support the Maine Wildlife Park!

Yankee Magazine's Travel Guide to New England once again included the Park in its Editors' Choice, Best of New England awards in the category of 'Best Guaranteed Wildlife Sightings' for 2013.



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.

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 arborist 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 \$65,710 in income and donations during the 2013 season; with revenues coming from the Snack Shack, Penny Smashing Machine, Greenhouse Plant Sales and general Donations. They also maintain an attractive web site, www.wildlifeparkfriends.org, that benefits their mission as fundraisers for the Maine Wildlife Park.

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

- Phase 3 of Water line repair/replacement Estimated Costs: \$50,000
- Renovation of Visitor's Center
- for new Snake & other Exhibits Estimated Costs: \$25,000
- Design/Construction of a Wildlife-Themed
- Playground Estimated Costs: \$200,000
- Construction of Fish Casting Pool
- Excavate and enlarge a natural, spring fed pool in the old deer yard large enough to offer catch and release fishing opportunities to visitors. Estimated Costs: \$200,000
- State of Maine OIT Connect/Install Estimated Costs: now a monthly OIT fee
- Caribou Exhibit Estimated cost: \$35,000
- Wolf Exhibit Estimated cost: \$20,000
- Update Master Plan Estimated cost: \$10,000

2013 MWP 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 \$739,477 in total revenue for Calendar Year 2013.

The total cost of operating the Maine Wildlife Park for Fiscal Year 2013 was \$725,180, which includes all salaries and operations. Total revenue for FY 13 was \$740,356, (\$2,321 in dedicated account interest earned is included).

FY 13 general operating expenses were \$337,869; there were \$148,253 in capital improvement or equipment costs, and personal services cost \$239,058 for a total of \$725,180 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 2014 was \$375,247. Total revenue through December 2013 in FY 13 was \$478,545. Four full time permanent positions costing \$134,490, general operating expenses of \$172,683 in all other and \$68,074 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, 2013 was \$813,646; of which \$34,631 for outstanding contracts and \$268,670 for personal services and general operating expenses is obligated for 1/1/14 to 6/30/14.

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.

