

Jackson introduces bill to protect loggers' jobs

AUGUSTA — Senate Democratic Leader Troy Jackson of Allagash introduced a bill March 20 before the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to protect Maine's logging industry and ensure that Maine land be used to employ Maine workers.

The bill — LD 1844, "An Act To Provide the State the Right of First Refusal for the Purchase of Certain Land on Which a Subsidy Has Been Paid" — stipulates that the owner of a parcel of land must give the state first refusal before selling their land to a foreign buyer.

The proposed law applies only to landowners who benefit from state tax benefits such as the Maine Tree Growth Tax Law program and whose tract of land amounts to at least 2,500 acres. The bill further states that, should the state not purchase the land, the owner may sell the parcel of land at no less than the price offered to the state.

"The purpose of this bill is to ensure that landowners who benefit from Maine's tax breaks give the state of Maine a fair shot at purchasing the land if

they choose to sell," said Jackson. "It is only fair. Our land should be used to benefit and employ Mainers. As a logger by trade, I am very concerned about property in our state being sold to foreign companies to benefit foreign workers."

Testifying in favor of the bill was Jason Brochu, owner of many lumber-related companies in Maine, including Pleasant River Lumber Company and Moose River Lumber Company. In his testimony, he stressed the need to level the playing field.

"Our employees and their families are dependent upon our having fair access to logs grown in Maine," wrote Mr. Brochu. "Ownership of Maine timberlands by foreign governments or entities supported and subsidized by foreign governments, whose stated goal is to provide below-market cost logs to sawmills in Quebec and New Brunswick, takes jobs away from Mainers."

LD 1844 was tabled during its first work session March 22. It faces further committee action before going to the Senate and House for a vote.

Scholarships to benefit County students

ELLSWORTH — Applications are currently being accepted at the Maine Community Foundation for the Sally Stetson Tongren Scholarship Fund for Aroostook County and the Aspire Scholarship Fund.

The Sally Stetson Tongren Scholarship Fund for Aroostook County is available to graduating seniors from Aroostook County high schools seeking post-secondary education. Eligible post-secondary education includes, but is not limited to, undergraduate education, trade and technical schools, and post-secondary remedial education. Graduate education may be considered for renewal candidates. Last year six students received \$5,000 scholarships.

The Aspire Scholarship supports students who have resided a substantial part of their formative years (K-12) in Presque Isle or Washburn and adult learners who have built a life in either town and are returning to school. This renewable scholarship is designed to support students who have successfully completed an alternative education program such as Presque Isle Alternative High School or The Carleton Project, or who would have benefited from such a program had one been available to them.

The deadline for applications for both scholarships is May 15, 2017. Applications are available at www.mainecef.org.

Headquartered in Ellsworth, with additional offices in Portland, Dover-Foxcroft, and Mars Hill, the Maine Community Foundation works with donors and other partners to improve the quality of life for all Maine people. To learn more about the foundation, visit www.mainecef.org.

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Allagash — (Continued from page 1)

port from the neighboring town of St. Francis.

Kelly-Dumond said that she got the idea a few years ago while reading a Friends of St. Francis Facebook post that was explaining the group's application for a CDBG grant to members of that community.

"I reached out to them and they guided me to the next step of finding out how we could apply," she said.

Kelly-Dumond is passionate about keeping the town of Allagash as well as Two Rivers Lunch alive.

"Allagash is the last outpost in the state of Maine. We're the gateway to 3.5 million acres of forestland and outdoor recreation," she said. "We're at the doorstep of that. We are the only restaurant here. Not only are we important in those industries, we're also like the hub for our little community."

Theriault noted in the grant application that the building which houses Two Rivers Lunch is not energy efficient and that utilities and heating costs consume about one third of the restaurant's revenues.

Kelly-Dumond hopes to use grant funds to increase energy efficiency at Two Rivers Lunch while making other improvements, including replacing a 30 year-old grill, updating the fire suppression system, and adding a handicapped accessible restroom.

The elder Kelly's built the restaurant from the ground up using donated building materials, according to Theriault.

"Allagash residents have always supported one another with the resources available to them without requesting assistance from outside agencies," she wrote in the application.

"That's always been the way, but as our community begins to age, it doesn't happen as much, but we still support one another," Kelly-Dumond said.

She added that the other two businesses on the grant application also are vital to the town of Allagash.

"They're just as instrumental in keeping us alive, both of them," she said.

Wade Kelly is owner of Tylor Kelly Camps, which offers year-round guided hunting and fishing trips, canoe rentals, riverfront lodging, and transportation and shuttles for people paddling the Allagash and St. John Rivers.

Tourists from all over the country visit Allagash and enlist the services of Tylor Kelly Camps, according to Kelly.

"Sometimes people just want to sit by a campfire on the bank and watch the river flow by," he said.

He added that he enjoys witnessing that expression of joy on people's faces when his clients see their first moose or catch their first brook trout.

Sue Underhill-Kelly operates Tylor Kelly camps along with her husband.

"Allagash is more of a destination. It's not just for hunting and fishing and camping, sometimes people just want to come see the wildlife and unwind and unplug."

If the grant is approved, the couple hopes to acquire additional canoes and kayaks to rent out and to complete construction on a new lodge on the river's edge that will sleep 20 when done.

"The guide service's clients bring critical revenue to the surrounding area by spending money on food, gas, sporting equipment, licenses, etc. This not only helps the local community but the entire region," Theriault wrote in the grant application.

"We want to expand on and improve what we have," Wade Kelly said.

Underhill-Kelly pointed out that tourists from out of state who travel to Allagash often do so by way of driving across the entire state of Maine.

"We are way up at the top of the state so they spend money all the way up," she said.

"They start spending money as soon as they cross the bridge in Kittery and all the way to where the road ends in Allagash."

The businesses are interdependent in terms of serving the community. Tourists who use the guide service often eat at the restaurant, and sometimes they even develop vehicle trouble.

This is where Moosetown Auto Repair owner Toby Hafford comes in. The business offers routine car maintenance, detailing and general repairs.

"During hunting season, hunters stop in with flat tires," Hafford said. "This year I went and helped a guy out and changed the tire in the woods for him."

The nearest automotive re-

pair business is 30 miles away in Fort Kent, which also makes it difficult for locals in need of service.

"There are a lot of elderly people up here who don't want to run to Fort Kent to have their car fixed," Hafford said.

Many of Hafford's customers come from the nearby towns of St. Francis and St. John.

"It feels great to do a job that provides a service for the people. They appreciate it and it's kind of why I'm passionate about it," he said. "I'm honest, hardworking and fair and people see that in me and respect me for that."

Hafford built his garage using lumber he acquired while helping to tear down an old saw mill in town. He repurposed the lumber and built the garage next to his home about a mile past the restaurant.

"I got a lot of blood, sweat and tears in this place," he said. The tools he currently owns he picked up along the way piece by piece.

"I buy it a little as I go," he said.

Hafford hopes to use the grant money to buy more advanced equipment, including an alignment machine so that he can expand his services and become certified to perform vehicle inspections. The Moosetown Auto Repair garage also needs an overhead door and electrical work, and he hopes to buy a waste oil furnace.

"The grant would help us a lot," Hafford said, pointing out that while \$50,000 may not seem like much to a business in a big city like Portland, that is not the case in Allagash.

"Money goes a long way for our community up here," he said.

Residents who attended the annual Allagash town meeting on Saturday, March 24, voted unanimously in favor of an article in the town warrant requesting approval of the grant application.

Support for the grant application by voters in the town came as no surprise to Kelly-Dumond.

"The Allagash is where we live, it's a brand in its own right and we all work together really hard to bring people here," she said. "We've just got to keep giving them a reason to come."

The business owners will learn on or about July 1 whether they won the grant.

Trail — (Continued from page 1)

sources that include \$360,000 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, \$250,000 from the Northern Border Regional Commission, \$100,000 from the Maine Community Development Block Grant Program and \$150,000 in local reserve money.

"We're hoping those funds will cover the costs," Pelletier said. "Work would need to happen this summer, because a good portion of the funding we have has a deadline for usage this year."

In other construction work this summer, a crew with J R Boucher & Son's Construction will start replacing the timber beams and decking of a trestle bridge on the St. John Valley Heritage Trail.

Pelletier said the town has been eyeing a fix to the aging wood on the trestle for sever-

al years and secured a \$65,000 grant from the Maine Recreation Trail Program to pay for the fix on the bridge in Fort Kent.

The 20-mile multi-use Heritage Trail runs along an old railroad bed from Fort Kent to St. Francis.

"The timbers on the trestle are rotting more and more every year," Pelletier said, adding that the trestle dates back to the 1950s. "It has become unsafe to cross."

The J R Boucher crew, which won the bid for the project, will be removing all the trestle's wood down to the metal girders and replacing the beams and decking, Pelletier said.

"We hope to start as soon as snowmobile season is done," he said, "and we'd like to have the job completed by May 15, the target date for the start of ATV season."

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