

Downtowns & Trails

Issues & Gateway Community Case Studies

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MDF Downtowns Conference



Downtowns & Trails Issues & Gateway Community Case Studies

- Crossroads
- Critical mass
- Collaboration
- Communications
- Components
- Cash
- Control
- Constraints
- Congress
- SCORP

Case Studies

- Fort Kent
- Machias
- Bethel
- Greenville



Overview of the Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands (BPL)

BPL owns state parks, public lands, boat access points, conservation easements, and more

BPL owns hundreds of miles of trail corridors

BPL awards state and federal funds to municipalities and trail groups

BPL plans & advocates for recreation and conservation statewide

BPL's Maine Conservation Corps



Crossroads

- Downtowns exist because of waterways, harbors, railroads, utility lines, transportation, culture, heritage, native American history. Today all those elements help create trails.
- People want to recreate near where they live, near where they work, near where they eat, near their hotel.
- Trail users want cafes, B&Bs, gift shops, restaurants
- Trails are amazing threads in the fabric of a community, a rallying point for cohesive optimism.



Components of a Trail

More than just a trail, instead imagine a linear park

- Picnics?
- Side trips?
- Interpretation?
- Destinations?
- Water access?
- Marketing?
- Programming?
- Itineraries?
- Branding?
- Public art?
- Bed-to-bed?
- Community agenda?
- Tourism agenda?
- Larger conservation agenda?



Trip planning & Itineraries

www.northernforestcanoetrail.org

- Downtown Rangeley, downtown Fort Kent, more.
- Economic impact beyond the trail itself
- Adding dimensions to tourism
- Bringing economic development money and measurements to trail development



Critical Mass

Is your goal a nice addition to quality of life, or a major new dynamic? Is your trail just a trail, or is it a multidimensional success? Is it just your downtown, or is it a network of downtowns.

- Portland Trails has critical mass. It's a major component of quality of life attractiveness. But maybe not yet critical mass for tourism.
- Will Portland become a hub to exploit full tourism potential: Eastern Trail, Mountain Division Trail, Island Trail all seamlessly linked to Portland Trails?
- Downeast Sunrise Trail (new!) is creating critical mass for Machias, Ellsworth.
- Pennsylvania's program: "Trail towns" (an economic development initiative) <http://www.trailtowns.org/>



Collaboration

Are you doing all of the work yourself, or are major partners invested? Who is the landowner? Who hires the lawyer?

- Land Trusts & trail groups aligned or merged: Lewiston-Auburn Trails. Portland Trails. Coastal Mountains Land Trust (downtown Belfast).
- Maine Winter Sports Center
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail & Maine Island Trail
- MDOT as major partner (landowner and engineer and legal)
- BPL as major partner (landowner and engineer and legal)
- Municipal public works & city staff as heavy hitters: Gardiner, Greenville, Augusta, Caribou





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Communications (Marketing & Collaboration)

- Resist five websites for five local trails
- Resist five brochures for five local trails
- Major partners (downtown groups?) easily enhance marketing efforts of trail groups
- Mega-partners (beyond one town) need to define and establish best practices.
- <http://www.downeastcoastalconservancy.org/the-cobscook-trails-project/>



www.mainetrailfinder.com (coming June 16)



Visit MaineTrailFinder.com to find local trails and places full of outdoor fun!

Search non-motorized trails by location, type of trail, and difficulty.

Adventure in your own backyard!

www.MaineTrailFinder.com



Cash

- Membership donations
- Private donations (banks, more)
- Private non-profits and private sector
- Municipal
- Municipal Tax Increment Financing (trails now eligible to use TIF revenues)
- Land for Maine’s Future program (acquiring trail corridors)
- BPL’s Recreational Trails Program
- <http://www.maine.gov/doc/parks/programs/community/trailsfund.html>
- BPL’s Land & Water Conservation Fund
- <http://www.maine.gov/doc/parks/programs/community/lwgrants.html>
- National Park Service: Rivers & Trails technical assistance
- <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/>
- Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
- DHHS: Healthy Communities & more
- MaineDOT
- DECD: CDBG and more



Control

- Railroad corridors
- Utility corridors
- Highway corridors
- Streets & sidewalks
- Abandoned rights of way
- River corridors & water access points
- Parcel-by-parcel negotiations
- Developer requirements
- Comprehensive plans
- Seldom eminent domain



Constraints

- Parking can not be ignored, especially downtown
- Good pavement & good shoulders & good sidewalks: can be essential
- Downtown water access can be innovative (or forgotten).
- Trail access points can shape potential: too much, too few
- Maintenance & operations & programming & law enforcement
- Connectivity
- Shoreland zoning & permits



Constraints (Litigation)

- City of Hallowell (Kennebec River Rail Trail) was sued over shoreland zoning permit approval
- Maine DOT was sued (Downeast Sunrise Trail): 1898 deed “to construct and maintain a fence on both sides of said (railroad)...or some other wire fencing of equal merit not dangerous to cattle.”
- BPL & MDOT were sued: Gaps in title between downtown Caribou and downtown Presque Isle
- Be prepared to go to court to defend your vision.



Congress

- Highway reauthorization – MDOT and Recreational Trails
- Obama’s Great Outdoors Initiative (includes urban focus)
- Land & Water Conservation Fund budget & reauthorization
- Northern Border Commission, more
- Special funding requests
- Talk to (and thank) Maine’s delegation



SCORP

- Maine's new 2009-2014 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
- <http://www.maine.gov/doc/parks/programs/SCORP/index.html>
- Outdoor recreation trends & data
- Outdoor recreation supply & demand
- Implementation strategies
- Great document to cite when applying for any grants from any agency: How is your proposal consistent with statewide plans?



New SCORP Priorities

- Support infrastructure development that links parks, natural areas, and open space within and between communities.
- Minimize barriers to connectivity and recreation arising from poor policies or design.
- Recognize that many small towns, lacking public works or parks departments, struggle with the maintenance of facilities and could use support to better maintain outdoor recreation infrastructure.
- Facilitate access to trails and open space; local access not requiring driving is especially of interest. However, parking is still a need in many destinations. Additionally, winter access (plowed parking) was mentioned in the public process as a barrier needing attention in many places.
- Barriers to access include those affecting bikers and pedestrians. Improved bike or pedestrian access to parks and outdoor recreation areas, especially in more urban areas, would benefit health and quality of place objectives while potentially opening up more areas to those without motorized transportation.
- Encourage initiatives through which communities improve their ability to serve as outdoor recreation information hubs. The development of regional visitor centers in key outdoor recreation areas of statewide significance is one potential action.
- Foster community/regional efforts to fully understand the economic impact of outdoor recreation and to integrate recreation into economic development planning.”



Case Studies: Gateway Communities

In addition to gateways:

- Destinations, or
- Crossroads, or
- Downtowns linked by trails

Challenges: small towns with massive potential but limited resources, enormous regional partners and dynamics, goal of partners increasingly invested in the gateway

Challenges: evolving role of land trusts and municipalities and chambers and state. Who owns title? Who writes grants? Who maintains? Who convenes partners?



Bethel

- Androscoggin River Canoe Trail linked to other towns, economic focus on angling & drift boats
- Bethel Recreational Pathway (riverfront): Route 2 MDOT bridge, skateboard park, links to town, links to schools, four season (snowmobile, XCS, bike, walk)
- Downtown historic walking tour
- Gateway to Mahoosucs & National Forest
- Driving loops, gateway to scenic byway
- Gateway to resorts & downtown resorts
- Major highway work 2 & 26 (shoulders for bikes)
- Land trust, regional collaborations
- Challenges: welcome center – multiple partners -- regional signage



Greenville

- Snowmobile & ATV networks in town
- Moosehead Lake access in town
- Old rail corridors
- Plum Creek trail easements & funding
- Plum Creek traffic permit & bike conditions
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail; Thoreau-Wabanaki; more
- Gateway to AMC's Maine Woods & Maine North Woods & Resorts & More
- Strong regional & county economic development and tourism focus
- Challenges: no local land trust, welcome center coming soon, limited MDOT shoulders for bikes between downtown & destinations, limited elbow room downtown.



Fort Kent

St John Valley Heritage Rail Trail + club networks
Maine Winter Sports Center & Biathlon
Northern Forest Canoe Trail
National Park Service Acadian Heritage
Gateway to the Allagash Wilderness Waterway + St. John
State Historic Site
CanAm Sled Dog Races
more



Machias

- Downeast Sunrise Trail open 2009 & 2010; downtown multi-town opportunities; adjacent to downtown public spaces.
- “Amazing economic impact” (Helen’s Restaurant)
- Waterfront walkway scoping
- Maine Island Trail; gateway to Machias River; gateway to Bold Coast; nearby state parks; downtown park improvements; more
- Branding & marketing challenge: East Coast Greenway?





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