



**Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Bureau of Parks and Lands**

Advisory Committee Meeting
Kennebec Highlands Public Land Management Plan
2nd Five-Year Plan Review

June 26, 2025, 5:30 to 8:00 pm
7 Lakes Alliance Office, Belgrade Lakes
(* participated via Teams videoconference)

Meeting Notes

Advisory Committee members participating:

Laura Rose Day	7 Lakes Alliance, Chief Conservation and Special Initiative Officer
Bill Swan *	7 Lakes Alliance board Member
Elizabeth Payne	Abutting landowner, York Hill
Rep. Sharon Frost	State Representative, District 58 (Vienna, Mt. Vernon, Rome)
Sue Burns	Vienna resident
Ann Gibbs *	Vienna Mountain resident
Julie Davenport *	Maine Forest Service
Brian Alexander	Central Maine Chapter of NEMBA
John Simoneau	Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Other members of the public participating:

Dan Woughter	7 Lakes Alliance, Land Steward
Noah Pollock	7 Lakes Alliance, Land Conservation Director
Roy Bouchard *	7 Lakes Alliance volunteer
Peter Kallin *	7 Lakes Alliance board member

BPL Staff participating:

Bill Patterson	Deputy Director
Jeff Bartley	Western Region Manager
Nicholas McDougal	Forester, Western Region
Nicole Lazure	Outdoor Recreation Planner
Bill Beeaker	Outdoor Recreation Specialist
Sarah Spencer	MDIFW Wildlife Biologist assigned to BPL
Jim Vogel	Sr. Planner, Management Plan Coordinator

Background

This meeting was convened to review and discuss with the Advisory Committee the Draft Management Plan for the 2022 Kennebec Highlands Acquisitions and Draft Kennebec Highlands Trail Plan. The draft plans were distributed to the Advisory Committee and contact list via email on May 15; hard copies were also mailed to the Advisory Committee members. Committee members were invited to submit written comments before the meeting; four members submitted

comments. The committee and members of the public on the contact list were provided the meeting agenda (see attachment 1) in advance, and paper copies were provided at the meeting.

Meeting Preliminaries

After a welcome and introductions, Jim informed the participants that the Teams meeting would be recorded and reviewed the prior steps in the plan review and update, in particular the first AC meeting held in March 2023 in which substantial input was provided to assist with the development of the two draft plans. He continued by outlining the objectives of the meeting, focused on review and discussion of key sections of the draft plans but also including a few other topics.

PowerPoint slides, visible to those present as well as those participating via Teams, were used to guide the discussion. Maps of the Kennebec Highlands (a recreation basemap and one featuring proposed “no additional development” zones with important wildlife habitats; see attachments 2 and 3), were posted in the meeting room and also shared via Teams, along with other plan maps reproduced in the slides.

Summarized comments from both BPL staff and AC members and other participants on the agenda topics are provided below.

DISCUSSION OF DRAFT PLAN FOR THE 2022 ACQUISITIONS (ALLEN PARCELS)

Dominant Allocations summary

Jim summarized the proposed dominant allocations, as follows:

Special Protection: 3 additional historic homestead sites with 200-foot buffer

Backcountry Recreation–Motorized: extends existing zones onto new parcels, mainly associated with motorized trails

Wildlife: upper blueberry field on Vienna Mtn., other small non-commercial fields, and New Sharon blueberry field; buffers along streams and around wetlands

Remote Recreation: lower blueberry field on Vienna Mtn, forested areas surrounding blueberry fields, and west slope of Round Top

Developed Recreation-Class I: small areas around structures and parking areas

Other: blueberry barrens identified as having the best potential for commercial production under lease

Management Recommendations summary

Access & Signage

Jim shared BPL’s management recommendations which include:

- Improved summer and winter parking areas along Vienna Mtn Road
- Continued implementation of Vienna Mtn Road improvements.
- Installing a yardarm entrance sign on Vienna Mountain – “Kennebec Highlands Public Lands”
- Installing an informational kiosk and other signage at new parking areas

- Updates to other kiosks' signage

BPL representatives shared additional information as part of a discussion. Updates included:

- BPL has been reaching out to commercial blueberry growers looking for someone to lease fields. They are finding that many larger growers are not interested in rockier fields that aren't able to handle equipment. Stephen Richardson, BPL has been managing this aspect and was not available to attend this meeting. BPL understands there is a needed action for field management.
- There is intent to lease production fields to a company that will then be available to contract management of BPL fields as well.

Recreation

Hiking Trails

Jim noted these items will be more covered in the Trails Plan discussion, so they were just mentioned briefly.

- Plans to develop and mark walking paths on the Vienna Mtn blueberry fields, based primarily on existing tracks
- Plans to develop hiking trail connection between the Round Top trail and/or Sanders Hill trail and Vienna Mtn paths

Improved Access Trail on Vienna Mountain

Jim shared the objectives of a new improved access trail plan for Vienna Mountain. It would be accessible to mobility support devices and designed to meet or exceed the Architectural Barriers Act access standards or the US Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines for access. BPL secured funding for a concept design and a contract is in process. Design plan should be completed this summer and there's potential for the trail to be constructed next summer if funding is secured. Key features of the trail would be opportunities to access scenic vistas, parking lot to trail accessibility, and not located in highest value commercial blueberry fields.

Bear Bait Sites

Jim shared that a handful of bear bait sites are proposed to be established as part of a unit-wide review. Sites will be permitted for private use only (not commercial guiding) and will not allow for the use of hunting dogs. Background work with IF&W is underway, but locations are not yet specified. The management plan allows for the establishment of sites within these parameters.

AC Feedback on Bear Bait Sites

- There were AC questions related to the bear populations in Kennebec Highlands. Sarah Spencer responded that the populations numbers are monitored statewide and not specific to this exact location. Additional information might be available in the future once permits are allocated and monitored.
- A question related to private permits was asked. Sarah explained the difference between private and commercial use permits.
- AC shared information on bear season (late August-September) and when you can start baiting (a month before the start of the season).
- AC member shared there is a large amount of natural mast in Kennebec Highlands so there is likely to be low success rate for hunting bears.

- AC expressed concerns about safety/conflict with recreation visitors should bears become habituated. Sarah responded that they would follow IF&W established policy for nuisance bears.

Blueberry Barren Management

Jim provided detailed information regarding management plan recommendations for the blueberry barrens.

- Potential Resumed Commercial Production: Issue an RFP for a blueberry production lease on the most suitable fields (~50 acres), or larger acreage
- Seek to include provisions for management of non-commercial fields (e.g., control of invasive shrubs/trees, etc.) to support opportunities for public picking
- Management of Non-commercial Fields: Identify what portions will be managed for recreational picking; determine method and schedule for mowing or burning and develop a plan and take actions to retard/remove invading shrubs and trees on New Sharon summit field

AC Feedback on blueberry barren management

- AC members had strong concerns for the current condition of blueberry fields and the need for immediate management to maintain production and vistas. 7 Lakes and local residents are interested, available and ready to volunteer.
- BPL clarified the plan for a potential lease, which involves focusing on higher yield/production areas identified in Yarborough report. Outreach to commercial businesses has been unsuccessful to date. When a company is under contract to lease barrens, there is potential to contract the same grower to manage public use parcels as well in addition to the commercial areas. Recreational picking would be available for the public outside leased areas.

Disposition of Structures

Jim provided an overview of the management plan recommendations related to the disposition of structures:

- Evaluate the condition of the house and barn, with contracted assistance if needed
- Identify annual and longer-term maintenance needs and associated costs
- Based on the results of the above, determine the range of intended and permissible uses for the structures, and implications for operation and maintenance
- Evaluate safety and security concerns associated with retaining the structures, and any actions needed to address those concerns if structures are retained

AC Feedback on Disposition of Structures

- AC members were concerned that the lack of maintenance is causing decline, especially in the newer addition section of house.
- BPL shared that renovation costs are not within the BPL budget and outside funding sources would be needed to fix and/or stabilize the house. The possibility to remove the kitchen addition was discussed as a way to simplify and reduce cost of renovation.
- AC member noted there is local historical significance to the house as a former woman's artist/Shakespeare theater community.
- BPL noted it would likely cost a minimum of \$10,000 just to stabilize the structure.

- AC member suggested to have plans detailed out in final plan; BPL noted that management plans document opportunities, and regional manager operational plans would be the place to document detailed plans as they prioritize projects in their regions. There is not currently a plan related to this house project. BPL is undergoing a reorganization of regions, and a new manager will be in place soon. This project would be taken into consideration.

DISCUSSION OF DRAFT KENNEBEC HIGHLANDS TRAILS PLAN

Jim provided highlights of the draft Trails Plan. Highlights included:

- Overall Kennebec Highlands Vision (2011 Plan) is to provide a “...unique, semi-remote backwoods recreational experiences...”
- Trails Plan Vision based on identification of zones 1) appropriate for carefully reviewed development in line with identified priorities and 2) areas to be left relatively undeveloped
- Two proposed “No New Development” Zones; these two zones total 55% of the unit
 - Zone 1: northwest half of unit; area west of Roxy Rand and Vienna Mtn roads and area north of Sanders Hill Loop trail
 - Zone 2: smaller area surrounding Round Pond and Beaver Pond, including a mapped Deer Wintering Area
- Areas of Focus for New Non-Motorized Trail Development:
 - Vienna Mtn and Blueberry Fields: would provide unique, easily accessed recreational opportunities for walking and berry picking, with long-distance views and help create a network of existing tracks providing a good option for routes, with little new construction. Focus is on fields allocated Remote Recreation (generally, south of the house and barn).
 - A trail connecting Sanders Hill Loop to Vienna Mtn: provides trail access to middle of unit from east side which would combine woods hike with blueberry field experience; could traverse entire unit via these trails and management roads.

AC Feedback on Draft Trails Plan

- AC had concerns about the proposed trail between Sander Hill trail and Vienna Mtn. Suggestion to follow contour lines rather than switch backs suggested in draft plan. 7 Lakes offered to assist in location selection when the trail plans are ready to be fully developed.
- AC suggested the incorporation of Sanders and Roundtop trails and Vienna Mountains into a loop trail design.
- AC discussed the proposed “No Development Zones”- there was a request from 7 Lakes to adjust Zone 1 to allow for the potential of connectivity to 7 Lakes properties east of Rt. 27. 7 Lakes shared maps depicting their nearby fee and easement properties and a potential trail that could connect several of those properties and link to the northeast part of the Kennebec Highlands. BPL supports regional trail connections where they align with management of public lands but was unaware of the 7 lakes easements and the potential trail and will consider revising the zone in light of the new information.
- AC requested additional information on why winter fat bike trails were not planned to be “adopted” by BPL as suggested in written comments. BPL shared concerns which included the trailhead access and initial part of the trail network located on private property, the nature of fat bike trails which require consistent and sometimes more intense maintenance/grooming, and implications to hunting areas were noted (see bullet below). It was noted that the seasonal

fat biking trails and off-season trail maintenance are managed by volunteers. AC members noted the fat bike trails have been popular and are viewed as some of the best in Maine.

- AC expressed concerns about unmarked fat bike trails and hunting seasons. (Note: BPL rule that does not allow loaded firearms on marked hiking trails or discharge of firearms within 300 feet of marked trails does not apply to the fat bike trails.) This could potentially create visitor conflicts if trails are not on map and hunters are within trail corridors. Signage at trailhead for bikers to be aware of the possibility of hunting and recommendations to wear orange were recommended as a possible management options. It was noted that the seasons may overlap with muzzleloaders or other winter small game hunting. AC member mentioned Bradbury Mountain deals with similar management issues and can be contacted for information on their management approach.
- AC shared that the boulders used to minimize motorized access to non-motorized areas have been moved and there is a need for clearer signage of motorized and non-motorized rules through the public land.

Concept for Improved Access Trail

Jim and Nicole shared information on the management plan proposal to “build an improved access trail on Vienna Mountain, offering a unique and spectacular trail for people with limited mobility”. The trail concept would:

- Meet or exceed the Architectural Barriers Act access standards or USFS Trail Accessibility Guidelines
- Incorporate signs and trail descriptions that will provide information about the design to allow visitors to determine if the trail meets their mobility requirements
- Consult with the Travis Mills Foundation and other experts on concept design
- Be contracted out to professional trail builders specializing in these types of trails

Updates include:

- A contract for concept design is almost complete; expect to have design plan for August 2025 and possible construction for summer of 2026.

AC Feedback on Improved Access Trail

- AC noted that improved access trails are difficult to maintain and that area has high exposure to wind, rain, sun, and will be susceptible to grass growth, etc. AC suggested that a maintenance plan/contract should be considered in financial planning/construction contract.
- AC expressed additional concerns for an improved access trail near commercial blueberry operations and the exposure to potential impacts/conflicts such as machinery noise, spraying, and connectivity. BPL shared that the designer has information regarding high yield locations and considerations to avoid those areas will be made.

Other Topics

Proposed water trail campsite on Dolley parcel (Paddlers’ Campsite)

Jim shared information regarding 7 Lakes’ proposed new campsite:

- 1 campsite, 3 tent pads, 8 people max proposed for Long Pond access
- Site appears physically suitable, with good buffer from neighbors to north
- BPL has been on site visits and supports campsite location, design, concept and management plan compliance.

- The site will connect with two other proposed sites to form a 3-site canoe trail that is easily accessible and provides for backcountry canoe trip experience without needing to travel to more remote parts of the state.
- 7 Lakes noted that no fires will be permitted, and they will manage the site through a reservation system which will include 2 other sites on 7 Lakes properties. They may explore leasing area- since reservation fees will be collected or modifications to existing MOU will need to be made.

Potential seasonal gates on roads and signage

Jim facilitated a discussion on the need for seasonal gates on road and improved signage. He mentioned the concern about mud-season use of Cross Road and Berry Hill Road; BPL will need to consider ROWs before making decision on gates. There is also concern about unauthorized snowmobile, ATV and other vehicle use on blueberry fields.

- BPL staff, including ORV program, have field day scheduled in July to discuss these issues

AC Feedback on Seasonal Gates and Signage

- The need for more permanent gates at certain areas, particularly around mud season, was reiterated.
- Kidder Pond access has been problematic, non-permanent attempts to block vehicle access have been unsuccessful.
- Season damage has been impacting the road condition on Vienna Mtn.
- Better signage suggested for all non-motorized areas.
- Pull-offs or turnaround spots near any new gates are needed. There have been conflicts with local landowners around gates.

AC Feedback General

- AC requested a narrative of the 5-year Management Plan Review table (distributed in Oct. 2022 at the start of the 2nd plan review) to help get AC and other stakeholders up to speed.

Next Steps

Jim reviewed the next steps in the management plan review process. Which included:

- An additional opportunity for the AC to submit written comments over the next month.
- Draft meeting notes and post-meeting comments will be shared with the AC for review.
- The Draft Plans will be revised over the summer, based on this review and feedback.
- A Public Meeting will be held to Present Final Draft Plans and is required with an opportunity for comment before the Plan for the 2022 acquisitions can be adopted. The aim is for late summer/early fall.
- After the public meeting the plans will be finalized and adopted to close out the 2nd Five Year Review.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Attachments:

1. Meeting agenda
2. Kennebec Highlands basemap with Recreation Features
3. "No Additional Development" Zones map