



Report Back

Report to the 2nd Session of the 132nd Joint Standing
Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

**On Resolve Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Establish a
Working Group to Facilitate Public Access and Resilience Planning for Swan Island**

Provided by: Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Maine’s network of Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), owned and managed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), provides wildlife habitat and public access opportunities throughout the state. These lands are managed primarily for high-quality wildlife habitats and secondarily for wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, including hunting, trapping, fishing and wildlife viewing.

The Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area, commonly referred to as Swan Island, is in the Kennebec River between the towns of Richmond and Dresden. It is an unorganized township and subject to the jurisdiction of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission, and includes Swan Island, Little Swan Island, and several hundred acres of tidal flats totaling about 1,755 acres. Swan Island is approximately four miles long and varies between one-half and three-quarters mile wide. In 1995, the United States Department of Interior placed the island on the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of the historic architectural homesteads and landscape of the island.

The WMA was originally acquired as a sanctuary for waterfowl, turkey and white-tailed deer. In the mid-1960s, the Department, with funding through the Land and Water Conservation fund, created a campground on the WMA and subsequently offered a ferry service to the public, which continued for more than 60 years.

In 2022, the United States Coast Guard (USCG), via a Captain of the Port Order (Attachment I), determined that the vessel the Department had been using to transport passengers to Swan Island lacked the proper inspections and certifications required of a passenger vessel, and also required a licensed captain and deckhands appropriate to the horsepower and tonnage of the vessel. This determination by USCG forced the Department to review its current funding, staff capacity, and the projected increased costs to inspect/certify the vessel and operate it in accordance with USCG regulations. After careful deliberation, and after meeting with USCG, MDIFW chose to terminate operation of the vessel for public transportation. The vessel continues to be used by MDIFW staff to transport equipment and supplies used to conduct habitat management and support public use of the island.

Concerns expressed by the public, local community members, and Friends of Swan Island over the cessation of Department-provided transportation led to the submission of legislation in the First Regular Session of the 132nd Legislative Session as [L.D. 976 – Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township](#). The resolve was subsequently amended [to Establish](#)

[a Working Group to Facilitate Public Access and Resilience Planning for Swan Island](#), which defined the duties of the working group as follows:

1. Identify barriers to public access to Swan Island and strategies for removing those barriers
2. Evaluate accessible transportation options for the public, including operation and maintenance of a ferry or alternative public transportation systems that may be conducted through public-private partnerships
3. Assess infrastructure needs, such as the creation and upkeep of docks, campgrounds, educational facilities and historic sites
4. Recommend roles and responsibilities among state and municipal partners for operations, maintenance and land stewardship
5. Explore funding sources, including, but not limited to, land and water conservation funds, tax increment financing allocations and public and private funds or resilience-related programs
6. Develop a coordinated implementation timeline and cost estimates
7. Identify any necessary changes to statute or rule
8. Produce a detailed Swan Island public access plan with supporting documentation and an implementation date on or before May 1, 2026

This report details the efforts of the working group and sets forth a proposal to address the concerns raised and support enhanced access to Swan Island.

Proposal Summary

After careful consideration of the challenges and opportunities at hand and significant discussion, five of the six working group members reached general agreement on a proposal for the Legislature to consider. One member of the working group was absent from the last meeting but provided a written statement of their position (Attachment III).

To address public transportation to the WMA, the working group recommends proposal Option 3, discussed in more detail in this report under Barriers to Public Access and Plan to Remove Barriers. It includes:

Provide a General Fund appropriation for MDIFW to contract for an appropriate small private vessel to be operated with an OUPV (Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessels), “six-pack”, licensed captain to operate on a limited schedule (Friday-Sunday) during seasonal operations of the WMA. The working group felt that a General Fund allocation would be the most sustainable means of funding annual operating costs.

Provide a General Fund appropriation to upgrade MDIFW’s vessel to be certified and inspected by USCG to allow contracting with a captain and deckhands qualified to pilot the vessel for larger groups, as needed. Seek Town of Richmond TIF funding to contract for a captain and deckhands, annually, to support large groups associated with educational/historic programming coordinated by MDIFW’s partners.

The working group recommends a phased approach, starting with contracting for the small vessel for the 2026 operating season, while concurrently working to upgrade MDIFW's vessel for future use to transport larger groups as needed. Completing updates to the larger vessel and contracting a qualified captain and deckhands would be a goal for 2027.

The working group proposes the Legislature consider an annual General Fund allocation of \$45,000 to provide a stable funding source for contacting transportation services for a small passenger vessel, and a one-time investment of \$50,000 to upgrade MDIFW's vessel to be certified and inspected to USCG standards. Funding from the Town of Richmond TIF program can be sought for contracting a captain and deckhands for larger groups associated with educational programming, estimated to cost \$35,000,

Funding Sources and Intended Use:

General Fund:

Annual allocation of \$45,000 - fund annual contract for transportation services (small vessel)

One-time allocation of \$50,000 – upgrade, inspect and certify MDIFW's vessel

Town of Richmond TIF:

Annual request of up to \$35,000 to fund annual contract for transportation services (MDIFW large vessel).

The working group also recommends continued engagement with the Friends of Swan Island, and other interested parties to address historic structure preservation on the WMA, with the state playing a consistently supportive role in efforts to secure appropriate funding and facilitate educational programming on the WMA.

Implementation Date:

The recommendation to address public transportation at Swan Island is proposed to be a phased approach, with contracting for the small ferry service as soon as funding becomes available and services can be procured as early as May 1, 2026. The working group proposes implementing upgrades to the ferry beginning July 1, 2026, or as soon as funding is available, with a goal of implementing the potential for large group transportation by May 1, 2027. Implementing large ferry service will be contingent upon Town of Richmond TIF funding allocations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the working group provides a recommendation to provide transportation to Swan Island by contracting with a private entity to provide the service to smaller groups, while updating the existing MDIFW vessel to meet USCG requirements and to contract for piloting the vessel by a qualified captain for larger groups.

The working group also recommends entering into a formal agreement (e.g. Memorandum of Understanding) by the Friends of Swan Island and focusing on historic structure preservation and educational and cultural programming.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife acquired the Steve Powell WMA using United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funding (Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration – WSFR) starting in the 1940s. The WMA system is intended to provide a statewide, ecologically based system of land holdings for the protection and enhancement of important wildlife habitats. WMAs also provide opportunities for public recreation, so long as those forms of recreation do not unduly impact wildlife resources or the purpose of conservation articulated in the Federal Aid grants used in acquisition.

In the mid-1960s, MDIFW used Land and Water Conservation funding to establish a campground on the WMA, and the Department began offering transportation to facilitate public use. For decades, the Department continued offering ferry service to the WMA, even as staff capacity declined from four full-time staff exclusively dedicated to the island to one staff person and two seasonal contractors. To help offset the cost of providing transportation and the seasonal positions, MDIFW historically collected day-use and overnight camping fees. When MDIFW ceased operating the ferry, it revised [09-137 Chapter 5 Rule](#) to remove fees charged for access to be consistent with all other WMAs

Access to the WMA is focused on two locations. The pier on Swan Island, directly across the river from an MDIFW-owned parking area and water access site in the Town of Richmond, was historically used to ferry the public to the WMA. From the pier, most visitors were shuttled 1.5 miles by Department staff to the campground. The other access location is near the campground on the east side of Swan Island, which is approximately 1.75 miles around the northern tip of the WMA from the MDIFW facility in the Town of Richmond. The image below depicts the parking area in Richmond and the access points onto the WMA.



0 0.28 0.55 1.1 Miles

**Steve Powell (Swan Island) Wildlife Management Area
Swan Island Self Access Map**

MDIFW has tracked annual visitor days to the WMA since 1973. Annual total day use and overnight visitation to the WMA averaged 2,562 visitor days. This average includes large group trips subsidized by grant sources when MDIFW was actively conducting wildlife educational programming on the WMA. The subsidies were used to offset day-use fees charged at the time, without which many school groups and scout troops would not have been able to visit. Non-subsidized visitor days averaged approximately 1,230. For perspective, MDIFW estimates self-access visitor days for the 2023-2024 season, when the Department did not offer transportation or educational programming, at 1,000 visitor days, and 1,500 in 2025.

In 2022, the United States Coast Guard (USCG), via a Captain of the Port Order (2022-1304900), determined that the vessel transporting passengers was being operated as a small passenger vessel and as such, lacked the proper inspections and certifications and the associated licensure of the captain and deckhands appropriate to the horsepower and tonnage of the vessel. The USCG's determination forced the Department to review its current funding, staff capacity, and increased costs to inspect/certify the vessel and operate it with appropriate qualifications. After discussion with USCG personnel and careful

deliberation, MDIFW decided to cease offering public transportation to the island. MDIFW has continued to use the vessel as a barge to transport equipment and contractors engaged in management actions on the WMA.

MDIFW's decision to end the ferry service was made based on three primary considerations:

1. A determination by the United States Coast Guard that the vessel was being operated as a small passenger vessel and therefore needed proper inspections and certifications and associated licensure of the captain and deckhands appropriate to the horsepower and tonnage of the vessel.
2. The loss of seasonal housing on the WMA due to mold, lead paint and other unsafe conditions associated with the staff house. When providing public transportation to the WMA, MDIFW felt that having the ability to get the public off the WMA was important, particularly in the case of overnight camping. Loss of the staff house for use by seasonal staff required an alternative approach and significant investment.
3. Around 2015, MDIFW strategically shifted its educational programming to maximize engagement opportunities and reach as diverse an audience as possible, while at the same time focusing resources to be as efficient as possible. Conducting educational programming on an island inherently limited outreach efforts and emphasis was placed on programming at the Maine Wildlife Park, as well as other WMAs and venues. The Department also considered the fact that no other WMA or State Park provides transportation to the public, including to islands where camping is permitted and those featuring historic structures listed on the National Historic Register.

For these reasons, the Department worked to realign its operations with financial and staff capacity and to ensure that the island is being managed consistently with the purpose of the Department's WMA system. It worked to remove day use and overnight camping fees to be consistent with all other WMAs. The Department also believed it likely that the private sector would provide public transportation if there was sufficient demand, and private entities began offering transportation with small passenger vessels to Swan Island and the opportunity for visitors to rent paddle craft to access the WMA on their own.

L.D. 976, a Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township, was introduced in the first regular session of the 132nd Legislature. The Department testified against this resolve, citing its assessment that it did not have sufficient resources, appropriate qualifications of staff to meet USCG standards, or a robust educational programming focus on Swan Island to warrant such investments.

L.D. 976 was subsequently amended to become a Resolve to Establish a Working Group to Facilitate Public Access and Resilience Planning for Swan Island, which required the Commissioner to report back to the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than January 1, 2026.

The resolve directed the Working Group to consider barriers to public transportation, evaluate transportation options for the public, assess infrastructure needs, recommend roles and responsibilities

among partners, explore potential funding sources, develop an implementation timeline and budget and recommend any necessary statutory or rule changes.

As prescribed in the resolve, the stakeholder group was composed of the following representatives: staff from MDIFW; a staff person from Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; a staff person from the Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future; a staff person from the Department of Economic and Community Development; a municipal official from the Town of Richmond; and a member representing a local nonprofit organization. Members included:

1. **Ryan Robicheau**, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
2. **Jeff McCabe**, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation, Department of Economic and Community Development
3. **Brian Hubbell**, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future
4. **Andy Cutko**, Director of Parks and Lands, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
5. **Darryl Sterling**, Consultant, Town of Richmond, responsible for Tax Increment Financing programming
6. **Jeremy McDaniel**, President, Friends of Swan Island

MDIFW hired a professional facilitator to moderate three meetings of the working group, which occurred on October 6, October 15, and November 5, 2025, at MDIFW headquarters in Augusta. Each meeting was approximately three hours long. Public notice of each meeting was posted on MDIFW's website.

Barriers to Public Access and a Plan to Remove these barriers

The working group identified the following barriers to public access to Swan Island:

- The island is positioned approximately seven hundred feet from shore, requiring watercraft to access and the currents can be strong
- MDIFW's vessel, previously used to transport passengers, is not presently certified or inspected to carry members of the public
- MDIFW staff are not qualified to operate a vessel to transport passengers for pay
 - Current MDIFW job classifications are restrictive and exclude ferry operation
 - MDIFW does not have adequate resources to maintain and operate the ferry in light of the USCG determination
 - Dock space is limited
- The cost of accessing Swan Island via private boat service is prohibitive for some
- The small size of the vessels used by private operators in 2024 and 2025 inhibits access by large groups, e.g., school groups

There was consensus among the working group that the WMA provides great ecological, historical and recreational resources to the State of Maine, and members shared dedication to preserving public access to the WMA. MDIFW feels that preserving and providing public access opportunities to WMAs is a priority for all its lands, but that providing *transportation* to the public is a substantially different proposition.

The working group focused on three primary options as potentially feasible if the Legislature determines that funding should be used to support public transportation to the WMA:

1. **Large vessel.** Reestablishing large ferry service in a manner consistent with the capacity, frequency, and number of operational days prior to the USCG Port Order under contract with a private operator.
2. **Small vessel.** Contracting with a small private vessel operator with an OUPV (Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessels)
3. **Hybrid.** Contracting with a small private vessel operator with an OUPV license for regular operation and using MDIFW’s vessel (upgraded to meet USCG requirements) to transport large groups on an occasional basis with a contracted captain and necessary deckhands

Each option assessed the capacity of the vessel, operating season, number of days in operation per week, docking location on Swan Island, staffing requirements, and estimated costs, as outlined below.

Option	Vessel Type / Capacity	Operating Season	Days/Week	Route / Destination	Staffing Requirements	Estimated Annual Cost	Additional Costs / Notes
1. Large Ferry	~40-person private vessel	6 months (May–Oct)	5	To pier only	Master Captain + 2 Deckhands	\$250,000	Full-service, high capacity, long season; no transport to campground
2. Small Ferry	6-person private vessel	6 months (May–Oct)	3	To pier OR campground	6-pack Captain license (no deckhands)	\$45,000	Short season, limited capacity; flexible destination; can extend with more funding
3. Hybrid (Small Ferry + Upgraded MDIFW Vessel)	6-person private + upgraded MDIFW vessel (occasional large groups)	6 months (May–Oct)	3	Private vessel: pier OR campground; MDIFW vessel: pier only	Master Captain + 2 Deckhands	\$80,000 annual + \$50,000 one-time upgrade	Balances small and large group needs; moderate cost; limited season

The working group discussed each option and reached near-consensus that the hybrid option (small ferry and upgraded MDIFW vessel) was the most appropriate model for public transport to the WMA, pending necessary funding.

Option 1 considered contracting a large private vessel to handle large group (>40 passengers) transport for the duration of the operating season when seasonal staff are available and when docks and other public access facilities are operational (e.g. water and bathroom facilities). This option would provide transportation largely consistent with operations prior to the USCG Port Order and offer full service (5 days per week), the ability to handle large capacity groups, and be available for the entirety of the season. Given the dock space available at the campground and site restrictions, large ferry transport would be limited to access via the pier. Transportation on the WMA would be required, particularly for campers carrying gear, to travel one and a half miles from the pier to the campground. The estimated

cost to contract a large vessel is \$250,000 annually, which was developed based on operation by MDIFW staff but should be commensurate with contracting for a private vessel, including multiple captains and deckhands to ensure operation 5 days per week for the entirety of the season. Given the high annual cost and limitations on transportation only to the pier, the working group was not supportive of this option.

Option 2 considered contracting a small private vessel to operate three days a week between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Given the smaller vessel, the option would exist either to transport visitors to the pier or the campground. Estimated annual contractual costs are \$45,000. There are two items to note regarding the Options table above, which was provided to the working group during meeting #3. The budget estimate was developed based on the entire operating season (May-October) consisting of 3 days of operation over 20 weekends, for a total of 60 operational days, not the 16 weekends identified in the table. This holds true for operational days for the small vessel under Option 3. This small passenger vessel would meet typical weekend or daily use demands experienced on the WMA. The working group determined this option to be viable, but concern existed over the inability to handle larger groups. Option 2 does not dismiss the possibility where a private service could offer large group transportation on their own provided their vessel and staff meet USCG requirements.

Option 3 represents a hybrid approach, where contracting a small vessel three days a week as described in Option 2 would be augmented with outfitting, inspecting and certifying MDIFW's vessel to allow contracting a captain and deckhands on a limited basis to transport large groups for specific events or educational programming coordinated and planned by MDIFW or cooperating partners as set forth in a Memorandum of Agreement (see discussion below under Roles and Responsibilities). This option would require a one-time cost to upgrade, inspect, and certify MDIFW's vessel to USCG standards estimated to be \$50,000 and annual operating costs to hire for the small vessel and to hire a captain and deckhands to operate MDIFW's vessel of \$80,000 per year. The working group felt that this Option would be potentially viable and most responsive to the desire of community members to reinstate public transportation for large groups.

Infrastructure Needs

Identified infrastructure needs related to public access included the rehabilitation of the existing pier on Swan Island and consideration of space available for vessels at the campground docks.

Currently, the pier is closed to the public as the result of storm damage and deferred maintenance needs. MDIFW has contracted an engineering firm to design a reconstructed pier to facilitate public and management access to Swan Island. The Department was allocated \$150,000 of General Fund dollars to augment \$350,000 in USFWS Federal Aid funds to accomplish the reconstruction, and the improvements are expected to be completed in 2027, based on revised scheduling of the project.

The working group discussed the limited dock space at the campground as an impediment to public access. Given specific site constraints, little opportunity to add dock space to the campground location is available and docking a large ferry at this site would be infeasible.

Infrastructure needs related to historic preservation are extensive, and funding opportunities are limited. MDIFW's funding stems primarily from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration – WSFR) Act, which is restricted

to use for wildlife conservation and public use of those resources. Allocating WSFR funding toward historic building conservation is not permissible.

Historically, funding for the preservation of the historic structures on Swan Island has derived from private foundations. Typically, these funds were accessed through competitive grants and FOSI was the primary lead on grant applications and administration of those grants. As FOSI membership waned or changed, MDIFW attempted to assist with grant writing although many of those grant sources required a nonprofit entity to receive and administer funds. Without adequate funding, maintenance and restoration efforts have stalled and substantial upgrades are necessary to preserve the historic structures on the WMA and support public use. The most recent formal report on the structures' condition was completed in 2011. Working group members agreed that an updated comprehensive review of building conditions would be essential to determine the full scope of an infrastructure improvement plan, including costs. The group recognized the need for a coordinated plan and sustained effort to support historic building maintenance, drawing from grant sources traditionally accessed for such purposes as well as new funding opportunities through the Maine Historic Preservation Commission and other entities.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Resolve directed the working group to articulate roles and responsibilities among state and municipal partners for operations, maintenance and land stewardship. The working group discussed member organizations' respective strengths and limitations and agreed that a collaborative approach to operation and stewardship of the WMA would be critical for success.

Currently MDIFW manages wildlife habitat on the WMA according to its Wildlife Management Area plan. This plan includes management of several freshwater impoundments created to enhance waterfowl habitat, annual maintenance for a vast network of grassland habitats, limited tree harvesting to meet objectives, control of invasive terrestrial plant species, and maintenance of fruit and nut producing trees.

MDIFW also maintains the primary access/management road on the WMA as well as the campground, including Adirondak shelters, a picnic area, and bathroom/boathouse. It maintains the campground and associated public use developments using seasonal staffing contractors and an allocation of General Fund monies (which pays for both the contractors as well as minor annual maintenance needs for camping infrastructure).

Given the limitations on Department staff time, municipal partners and nonprofit organizations like FOSI can play a meaningful role in historic preservation and educational and cultural programming. Such had been the primary focus of FOSI historically, and the working group felt that this role would be ideally suited to the nonprofit's structure and strengths, particularly as several grant fund sources available for historic preservation require a nonprofit entity to apply and administer the grant funds. The Town of Richmond could also play a role in this effort, as well as potential educational programming referenced above.

Due to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's own challenges with funding and staff capacity, its role is seen as largely advisory.

The Department of Economic and Community Development, particularly with the potential to advance marketing initiatives, along with the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future can also be relied upon in an advisory capacity moving forward.

The working group recommends that MDIFW enter into an agreement with stakeholders to further articulate and agree to roles and responsibilities of each entity. A draft agreement, as an example, is appended to this report as Attachment II.

Funding Sources

Funding stewardship and operations at the WMA has historically come from USFWS WSFR funding and state general funds, which was initially used to conserve Swan Island and now continues to fund staff, operations, and management of the WMA consistent with the funding requirements. WSFR funding is restricted to activities used to conserve birds and mammals, wildlife habitat, and wildlife dependent recreational opportunities.

In administering funding for stewardship of the statewide WMA system and in consideration of limited staff capacity, renewed USCG obligations and limitations on the use of WSFR funding, MDIFW has worked to realign its operations with financial and staff capacity. Limitations of federal funding would require alternative funding if transportation were to be provided to the public.

Currently, seasonal facility operations are funded through an annual General Fund allocation of \$70,000, used for seasonal contractual staff to engage with public users, maintain the campground and associated facilities including mowing, bathroom cleaning and trash removal. Remaining funds are used to repair and maintain facilities, including minor repairs to historic structures.

Because WSFR funding cannot be used to fund preservation of historic structures on the WMA, MDIFW has relied on FOSI to lead efforts to secure adequate grant funding to preserve the historic structures on the island, supporting these efforts as appropriate.

The working group considered several possible funding sources, primarily focused on the issues of transportation and historic preservation, although there is some crossover with grant sources supporting educational programming.

Funding sources considered include:

1. State General Fund allocation
2. Town of Richmond TIF
3. DCED competitive grants for tourism marketing initiatives
4. Corporate support (e.g. LL Bean, Bath Iron Works, Sappi)
5. Economic Development Administration funding (federal)
6. Richmond Historical Society
7. Private foundations

The group determined that of available funding sources, an allocation of the state’s General Fund would be the most secure and sustainable source of funding for public transportation, and that to meet contractual obligations and ensure year-to-year operations, stable funding should be a priority.

Other funding sources should be pursued and used to augment state-allocated funding, as is considered under this proposal to use Town of Richmond TIF funding to support periodic transportation of large groups.

Funding for historic preservation largely will be reliant on competitive grant applications. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), given Swan Island’s status on the National Historic Register, has always been a resource for partners to engage, seek input, and assistance related to historic preservation. MHPC has several grant opportunities available and assists with administering several others on behalf of the National Park Service.

For many years, FOSI and MDIFW worked collaboratively on sourcing other grant funds for historic preservation and visitation to Swan Island including the following grant sources:

Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
Davis Family Foundation
Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation
Elsie & William Viles Foundation
Davis Family Foundation
Belvedere Historic Preservation & Energy Efficiency Grant Program-MCF
Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund
DEW Foundation
Davis Family Foundation
Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust
Stephen & Tabitha King Foundation
Davis Family Foundation
Ausolus Trust
Maine Historic Preservation Commission

An important consideration is that many of the privately funded grant opportunities for historic preservation require a qualified nonprofit be the applicant. Historically, FOSI played that role in collaboration with MDIFW, and the importance of the nonprofit’s leadership in that capacity is enhanced with the WSFR funding restrictions preventing staff funded by federal aid dollars from allocating time towards grant writing and project administration.

Implementation timeline and cost estimates

As discussed above, the working group recommends a phased approach to resolving transportation to the WMA, starting with contracting a small passenger vessel while simultaneously working to upgrade, certify and inspect MDIFW’s ferry, then introducing the upgraded ferry as an option for occasional large-group transportation at a later time.

Implementing transportation provisions under the recommended proposal would depend on securing General Fund allocations to contract for the small passenger vessel and could likely be implemented within three months of funding availability (depending on the time of year funding is available).

The large ferry upgrades are proposed to be funded through a one-time General Fund allocation. Depending on funding availability, upgrades could occur within 8 months. Timing for contracting to operate MDIFW's ferry would be dependent upon funding upgrades via the General Fund and availability from the Town of Richmond TIF program allocations, with anticipated use beginning in the 2027 operating season.

The anticipated annual contractual costs for the fully implemented phased recommendation would be \$80,000, which would allow contracting for the small passenger vessel as well as contracting with qualified captain and crew to pilot MDIFW's large vessel.

The one-time cost to upgrade the existing MDIFW vessel is estimated at \$50,000

Funding Sources and Intended Use:

General Fund:

Annual allocation of \$45,000 - fund annual contract for transportation services (small vessel)

One-time allocation of \$50,000 – upgrade, inspect and certify MDIFW's vessel

Town of Richmond TIF:

Annual request of up to \$35,000 to fund annual contract for transportation services (MDIFW large vessel).

Implementation Date:

This recommendation to address public transportation at Swan Island is proposed to be a phased approach, with contracting for the small ferry service as soon as funding becomes available and services can be procured as early as May 1, 2026. The working group proposes implementing upgrades to the ferry beginning July 1, 2026, or as soon as funding is available, with a goal of implementing the potential for large group transportation by May 1, 2027. Implementing large ferry service will be contingent upon Town of Richmond TIF funding allocations.

Necessary changes to statute or rule

There are no necessary changes to statute or rule associated with the working group proposal.

DIRECTIVE TO INLAND FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

[L.D. 976 – Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township](#)
(Effective: September 24, 2025)

Department shall convene a working group to develop a comprehensive plan to enhance public access to Swan Island in Perkins Township in Sagadahoc County.

1. Working group. Resolved: The working group must include, but is not limited to:

1. The Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife or the Commissioner’s designee;
2. The Commissioner of Economic and Community Development or the commissioner’s designee;
3. The Director of the Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future or the director’s designee;
4. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry or the commissioner’s designee;
5. A municipal official from the Town of Richmond responsible for the tax increment financing allocations; and
6. A representative from a local nonprofit organization with an interest in outdoor recreation access, conservation, or community development related to Swan Island.

The working group shall provide public notice of its meetings.

Report. Resolved: That the department shall submit a report that includes the finalized Swan Island public access plan produced pursuant to Section 2, along with any recommended legislation from the working group convened pursuant to Section 1, to the Joint Standing Committee of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than January 1, 2026. The committee may submit a bill to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature based on the report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment I - USCG CAPTAIN OF THE PORT ORDER



Commander
United States Coast Guard
Sector Northern New England

259 High Street
South Portland, ME 04106
Staff Symbol: s
Phone: (207) 767-0333
Fax: (207) 767-0308

16600
May 27, 2022

ME24GAZ
IFW Swan Island
c/o: Scott Sawtelle
284 State St.
Augusta, ME 11020

CAPTAIN OF THE PORT ORDER 2022-1304900, Vessel ME24GAZ

On May 27, 2022 the Coast Guard conducted a boarding of your state registered vessel, *ME24GAZ*, in the vicinity of Swan Island, Richmond, ME. Subsequently after the boarding, the *ME24GAZ*, was deemed to be operating with passengers for hire as a ferry.

The Coast Guard currently has no record of your vessel being inspected as a small passenger vessel. Pursuant to Title 46, United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 3301(8), small passenger vessels are subject to inspection. Additionally, 46 CFR Subchapter S requires that vessels subject to inspection meet stability requirements as to provide for the safety of all passengers. Furthermore, 46 CFR § 16 requires that marine employers comply with chemical testing requirements for employees, under prescribed regulations.

In my capacity as Captain of the Port (COTP) Northern New England, I have determined that operation of your vessel with passengers for hire represents a significant unsafe boating condition and environmental threat to the port and navigable waterways of the United States. Therefore, I hereby order you to immediately cease operations as a Passenger Vessel until such time as it can be shown to the satisfaction of the Coast Guard that your vessel is being operated in compliance with all applicable federal laws and regulations.

Prior to operating with passengers on navigable waters of the United States, you must provide the following to Sector Northern New England for verification:

- (a) Provide evidence to the Coast Guard of a detailed operations plan and crew training plan attesting to safe operations.
- (b) Obtain a valid Certificate of Inspection in accordance with 46 CFR § 175-187 along with evidence of an established drug and alcohol program provided by your employer including proof of enrollment for all crewmembers.
- (c) Master of vessel must be the holder of a Merchant Mariner Credential of appropriate horsepower and tonnage while operating the vessel.

This order is issued pursuant to my authority as COTP Northern New England, as contained in Title 46, Chapter 700 - Ports and Waterways Safety Act, 46 U.S.C. 70004 *et seq.*, and the regulations issued thereunder in 33 CFR § 160.111.

PENALTY FOR VIOLATING THIS ORDER

CAPTAIN OF THE PORT ORDER 2022-1304900,
Vessel ME24GAZ

16600
May 27, 2022

In accordance with 46 U.S.C. 70036, failure to comply with this Captain of the Port Order is punishable by a civil penalty of not more than \$103,050 for each day the vessel is in violation. Willful and knowing violation of this order is a class D felony, punishable by up to six years in prison (18 U.S.C. 3581) or fines of no more than \$250,000 for an individual or \$500,000 for an organization (18 U.S.C. 3571).

APPEAL OF THIS ORDER

In accordance with 33 CFR § 160.7(a), you may request reconsideration of this order either orally or in writing to me directly. Should you be further aggrieved, you may appeal this order orally or in writing to the Commander, First Coast Guard District, 408 Atlantic Avenue, Boston, MA 02110, under the procedures prescribed in 33 CFR § 160.7(b)-(e). However, if the initial appeal is made orally, a written submission is required within five days of the oral presentation. The condition of this order shall remain in effect pending any such appeal, unless specially stated otherwise by Commander, First Coast Guard District.

COAST GUARD POINT OF CONTACT FOR THIS ORDER

If you have any questions or comments, you can contact the Sector Northern New England Command Center at (207) 741-5465.

Sincerely,

FLORENTINO.AM Digitally signed by
FLORENTINO.AM#E.1013804369
Y.E.1013804369 Date: 2022.05.27 22:09:41 -0400

A. E. FLORENTINO
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Captain of the Port
Sector Northern New England

Received by: _____ Position: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Copy: Marine Safety Detachment Belfast
Commander, First Coast Guard District
Governor's Office, State of Maine

Attachment II

DRAFT MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

AND

THE FRIENDS OF SWAN ISLAND

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This agreement made the ____ day of ____, 2025, between the State of Maine, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Bureau of Resource Management, hereinafter called the BUREAU, and the Friends of Swan Island, Inc., hereinafter called the FRIENDS.

WITNESSETH

WHEREAS the BUREAU is vested with jurisdiction (Title 12, Chapter 702, Section 7013) over and control of wildlife management areas in the State of Maine and is responsible for the acquisition, management, operation and maintenance of such areas for the purpose of providing wildlife management use, conservation, preservation and/or recreation and

WHEREAS, the FRIENDS desire to provide support to the Bureau of Resource Management, as a Citizen Support Organization for the Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area (Swan Island), hereinafter called SWAN ISLAND, County of Sagadahoc, State of Maine, and hereinafter described, the BUREAU desires to enter into an agreement with the FRIENDS for the mutual benefit of both parties to promote responsible use of the Swan Island consistent with the purpose of acquisition and to promote the preservation of the historic structures.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the premises and the mutual covenants and conditions herein contained, it is agreed by the parties hereto as follows:

1. The FRIENDS shall serve as a Citizen Support Organization for SWAN ISLAND for the purpose of exploring access and educational opportunities to the island in order to garner public support for historic building preservation of the historic homestead buildings (Tubbs Reed, Priest, Gardiner Dumaresq, boat house, Robinson Powell, Lily-Wade, and other structures) for the period stated herein, and subject to all terms and conditions set forth in this agreement and the purpose as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of the FRIENDS, which constitute Exhibit "A" to this agreement.
 - a. That the FRIENDS establish a corporation exempt from federal income tax and described in section 501 (3) (c) of the code.
 - b. This agreement shall take effect upon execution and shall continue until December 31, 2025, and may be renewed thereafter as noted in Par. 10 below, or until terminated pursuant to the provisions hereof.

- c. The BUREAU hereby provides to the FRIENDS use of the public facilities at SWAN ISLAND as approved in advance, in writing, by the SWAN ISLAND wildlife biologist/manager and /or the Regional Wildlife Biologist
 - d. The FRIENDS are hereby authorized to conduct the following activities, projects and events on Swan Island and to provide the following kinds of service: official meetings of the FRIENDS membership, volunteer activities and projects, public educational and interpretive activities or events or any other activities outlined in the purposes of the organization as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of the FRIENDS and with written approval of the Swan Island biologist / manager and / or the Regional Wildlife Biologist
2. All notices and orders given to the FRIENDS by the BUREAU may be served by mail to the Secretary of the FRIENDS.

Friends of Swan Island

*

Jeremy McDaniel
157 Pleasant Street
Richmond, ME 04357

All notices given to the BUREAU may be served by mail at the following address: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Connor White
Wildlife Division Region B
270 Lyons Road
Sidney, Maine 04330

3. The wildlife biologist/manager of SWAN ISLAND is hereby designated as the BUREAU'S agreement manager and shall be responsible for insuring performance of the terms and conditions of this agreement.
4. The BUREAU may allow appropriate use of the property and facilities by the FRIENDS subject to the provisions of this MOU. Such use must be directly in keeping with the approved purposes of the FRIENDS as outlined in Exhibit "A" of this agreement and may not be made at times or places that would unreasonably interfere with wildlife management/conservation efforts or opportunities for the general public to use SWAN ISLAND for established recreational purposes. In keeping with the purpose for which SWAN ISLAND was conserved, formalized group tours and events will be restricted to the northern portion of SWAN ISLAND, from the campground to the pier. In order to use property or facilities of SWAN ISLAND, the FRIENDS must:
 - a. Comply with all SWAN ISLAND policies, rules and regulations.
 - b. Develop and submit to the agreement manager for review and prior written approval, on an annual basis, a program or schedule of all projects, activities and events it plans to carry out on SWAN ISLAND property, including the designation of a specific location and time for such use.

To facilitate and ensure coordination between the FRIENDS and BUREAU, an annual meeting will be scheduled to occur between December and January to review prior year

operations and management and to plan for the subsequent operating season. Additional meetings will be scheduled as needed.

- c. Develop, as needed, reports addressing the condition of and ongoing efforts to protect the historic properties on Swan Island, along with all other projects, activities and events it plans to carry out on SWAN ISLAND property. These reports, as well as the Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area Plan (or other inventories such as the 2011 Master Building Condition Assessment) will be used by the FRIENDS and the BUREAU to establish work plans that will guide all restoration, preservation, or rehabilitation efforts on Swan Island. The BUREAU will have the final say in all aspects of repair work done. The Director of the Engineering and Realty Division for Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (or a representative) will represent the BUREAU in these discussions. Maine Historic Preservation Commission and the Bureau of General Services will be consulted by the BUREAU's representative to ensure all work is carried out in an acceptable manner.
 - d. Be responsible for maintaining the property or facilities assigned in a clean and orderly state; and
 - e. Obtain advance approval in writing from the agreement manager for any activities not covered specifically in this agreement.
 - f. Submit to the BUREAU a report annually that includes a complete financial record of all FRIENDS activities and events.
5. The FRIENDS agree that all funds generated by the FRIENDS through use of SWAN ISLAND facilities or SWAN ISLAND'S name or identity will be used for the direct benefit of SWAN ISLAND in support of the FRIENDS stated purposes as outlined in Exhibit "A" of this agreement.
 6. Dedication of assets. No part of the net earnings or assets of the corporation on dissolution or otherwise, shall inure to the benefit of any private individual, including any director of the corporation. On liquidation or dissolution of the corporation, all its assets shall be distributed and paid over to the State of Maine, Bureau of Resource Management.
 7. Indemnification. FRIENDS, for itself, it's staff, members and individuals who participate in the activities conducted pursuant to this Memorandum of Understanding and Work Plan shall indemnify the BUREAU and save it harmless from and against any and all claims, damages, liability and expense in connection with loss of life, personal injury, and/or damage to property arising from or out of any occurrence in, upon or at the premises, or occupancy of use by FRIENDS of the premises or any part thereof occasioned wholly or in part by any act or omission of FRIENDS, it's individual staff, members, invitees or guests and/or resulting from FRIENDS use of the Premises of failure to observe or comply with any of FRIENDS obligations pursuant to this Agreement. In case the BUREAU shall, without fault on its part, be party to litigation commenced by or against FRIENDS, then FRIENDS shall protect and hold the BUREAU harmless and shall pay all costs, expenses and reasonable attorney's fees incurred or paid by the BUREAU in connection with such litigation.

8. Safety Considerations. It is the FRIENDS' sole responsibility to assure the safety of its staff, membership, agents, volunteers, guests and invitees. FRIENDS agrees to implement such measures as will ensure the safety of the above-described persons while they are on the premises.
9. Any violation of, or failure to comply with, the terms of this agreement shall, at the option of the BUREAU, terminate this agreement after thirty days from receipt of notice in writing delivered or mailed to the FRIENDS address as set forth in this agreement.
10. This agreement may be renewed for an additional year (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025, and thereafter on an annual basis) under the following conditions:
 - a. The BUREAU is satisfied that the FRIENDS' performance has been and is sufficiently good to warrant such renewal.

FRIENDS' activities continue to be in the order of the annually proposed objectives and outcomes approved by the BUREAU.
 - c. Both the BUREAU and FRIENDS mutually agree to renewal of this agreement.

For:

Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

_____ Commissioner

_____ Date

For:

Friends of Swan Island

_____ President

_____ Date

Attachment III

EMAIL FROM FOSI TO WORKING GROUP

Sent by Friends of Swan Island President, Jeremy McDaniel on November 4, 2025, at 7:00 PM

Hi all,

Unfortunately, I will not be able to be at tomorrow's meeting. However, I have prepared a statement that is intended for all to see.

When the bill was initially proposed "to restore public transportation" we had hope. When the bill was then amended in May to have the Bureau of Parks and Land have more responsibility for Swan Island we had more hope. But, as soon as our bill morphed to a working group because "that is easiest" and, yes, that was actually said at the LD976 hearing, we knew our hopes were over.

You see, when the very people who have run Swan Island into the ground over the past 5 years are the ones responsible for any change, there will be no change. Status Quo was their goal once they aligned Swan Island with all other Wildlife Management Areas. Once IF&W washed their hands of the staff houses and didn't remedy the problem, once they washed their hands of the ferry service, once this bill turned into a working group that they have complete control over the topics and predetermined outcome, and once the public sat through the 1st two meetings, we all knew Swan Island's fate was sealed. It will never again be the resource it was because instead of solving the problem, a working group was created that in the public's mind had a predetermined conclusion.

There was no good faith effort by IF&W to solve the problem because, in their minds, it was already solved through a private/public partnership, even though there is actually no partnership from them. They were so happy to end involvement with public transportation to Swan Island. It's so disappointing to put forth the time and effort for this farce to play out exactly as we knew it would.

It's truly sad to realize that Swan Island is going to be completely lost to the public. It's already mostly gone but, this outcome is sealing it's fate.

IF&W erased 60 plus years of the public's trust with Swan Island and didn't truly try to solve this issue with LD976. Their interest has been explicitly said over and over; Swan Island is nothing more than a Wildlife Management Area. If that doesn't prove that any other stewardship/manager would be better at serving the public's interest....well, unfortunately, their opinion is the only one that has mattered. After all, they own Swan Island and no matter the historical, architectural, cultural, and recreational importance, it's a Wildlife Management Area. To hell with anything else.

The disappointment and sadness in this outcome is real, but, expected. It played out exactly as we all knew it would, which is what happens when there is no real interest in solving the problem. It really is as simple as use the existing vessel, don't charge a fee to take people to Swan Island and make it a limited schedule that fits in with the schedule IF&W seemed comfortable with (a few times a day on Fri/Sat/Sun)....LD976 is resolved. Instead, Swan Island is dying.

Attachment IV

MEETING MINUTES

SWAN ISLAND ACCESS AND RESILIENCE WORKING GROUP

Meeting #1 MINUTES

Date/Time: Monday, October 6, 2:30-5:00 pm

Location: MDIFW Headquarters, 353 Water Street, Augusta

Participants

- Ryan Robicheau, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW)
- Jeff McCabe, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation
- Brian Hubbell, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future
- Andy Cutko, Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF)
- Darryl Sterling, Consultant, Town of Richmond
- Jeremy McDaniel, President, Friends of Swan Island

Other Attendees

- Maine State Representative William Bridgeo
- Maine State Representative Stephen Wood
- Maine State Representative Sally Cluchey connected virtually
- Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director, DIFW
- Connor White, Resource Biologist (Swan Island), DIFW
- Kendall Marden, Resource Biologist (Swan Island), DIFW
- 1 member of the public in person
- 8 members of the public connected virtually

Facilitator

Mary Budd, Starboard Leadership Consulting

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Opening

The meeting opened with a brief welcome and introductions of working group members and others in attendance. Mary presented the working group's duties as established in LD 976, the responsibilities of group members, meeting norms, and the anticipated timeline as follows

Working Group's Duties

1. Identify barriers to public access to Swan Island and strategies for removing those barriers
2. Evaluate accessible transportation options for the public, including operation and maintenance of a ferry or alternative public transportation systems that may be conducted through public-private partnerships
3. Assess infrastructure needs, such as the creation and upkeep of docks, campgrounds, educational facilities and historic sites
4. Recommend roles and responsibilities among state and municipal partners for operations, maintenance and land stewardship
5. Explore funding sources, including, but not limited to, land and water conservation funds, tax increment financing allocations and public and private funds or resilience-related programs
6. Develop a coordinated implementation timeline and cost estimates
7. Identify any necessary changes to statute or rule
8. Produce a detailed Swan Island public access plan with supporting documentation and an implementation date on or before May 1, 2026

Responsibilities of Working Group Members

- Make all reasonable efforts to attend all meetings that are scheduled with adequate notice
- In meetings, speak on behalf of your organization and related constituents, explaining interests openly and fully, and look for mutually beneficial solutions.
- Follow through on commitments, such as reading provided background documents in advance of meetings
- Report back to your members and constituents and bring their feedback or unresolved issues to the working group

Working Group Meeting Norms

- Engage in dialogue rather than debate
- Treat others with respect
- Be concise and aim to add, not echo
- Avoid interrupting and side conversations
- Listen with curiosity and an openness to learning and understanding
- Focus on issues and interests, not on positions or personalities
- When in doubt, ask for clarification
- Adopt a creative problem-solving orientation

Process Timeline

- Meeting #1: October 6
- Meeting #2: Wednesday, October 15, 2:00-5:00 pm
- Meeting #3: TBD
- Draft Plan: December 1-15
- Working Group Review/Feedback by December 22, 2025
- Final Plan Submitted to Legislature: January 5, 2026
- Implementation Deadline: May 1, 2026

Background

To frame the group's discussion and promote shared understanding, Ryan presented a summary of information concerning:

- Swan Island's status as one of 74 Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) statewide under DIFW's jurisdiction and one of 26 WMAs in Region B
- Swan Island's distinctive features, including its use as a wildlife sanctuary, campground and designation as a National Historic District
- Staffing variations during the period of state ownership
- DIFW's operations on Swan Island
- Options for public transportation to Swan Island
- Visitor data
- Funding

Facilitated Discussion

Participants actively engaged in discussion in response to three questions. Following is a summary of participants' remarks.

Question 1: Considering the history and distinctive features of Swan Island, what do you consider its greatest value to the public at large?

- Wildlife conservation and habitats
- Integrity of the historic structures
- Special cultural features
 - Native artifacts must be identified and plans made for stewardship
 - Maine Historic Preservation has looked closely
 - Is further consultation with the tribes needed?
- Infrastructure for classroom education
- Survey data indicates users' primary interests (Note: Self-access parties are probably underrepresented.)
- Positive economic impact on Richmond and the region (Richmond would like to measure and currently does not have reliable data regarding the residence of Island visitors)

Question 2: What barriers exist or could emerge with the current array of options for public access (transportation) to Swan Island?

- DIFW cannot absorb the cost of ferry operations given its current allocation
- The cost of ferry service is prohibitive for some
 - Currently \$20 per person, roundtrip
 - DIFW previously charged \$10 per person to be on Swan Island but that charge has been removed
 - Swan Island used to assess camping fees
- Limited ferry operations, no weekday service
- Limited ferry capacity, 6 people maximum per trip, which excludes use by school and other groups
- Funding for historic preservation is scarce
- DIFW has limited capacity to manage increased visitors
- The dock needs to be upgraded (plans to complete construction in 2026) and potentially expanded
- WMAs are not state parks so care must be taken in considering uses
- Strong currents present dangers for paddlers

Question 3: How could identified barriers potentially be overcome?

- Secure funding beyond the legislative budget allocation
- Explore public/private partnerships
- Friends of Swan Island has been successful in raising money for the renovation/maintenance of historic structures
- \$10 million bond to support historic sites has been approved, but that money won't go far enough to address Swan Island's needs
- Richmond is interested in getting the old ferry up and running, but DIFW is using it for other mission-aligned purposes
- Friends of Swan Island is willing to support historic site management and operations beyond DIFW's scope, e.g., operating a hay wagon to transport visitors from the dock to the campground
- Funding through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act could support transportation, but no new PR funding is expected
- Could a recent graduate of Maine Maritime Academy with the necessary licensure and certification be engaged to pilot a ferry?
- Could a vessel be operated through the Maine Ferry Service? Need MDOT advice.
- Richmond's TIF may offer an avenue for funding
- DACF is prepared to manage the campground but not boats and funding would be needed to support campground personnel

- Consider partnerships with successfully maintained historic homes nearby
- Would a rope or cable ferry be feasible?
- Should there be a separate group to address historic preservation issues?

**SWAN ISLAND ACCESS AND RESILIENCE WORKING GROUP
Meeting #2**

MINUTES

Date/Time: Wednesday, October 15, 2:00-5:00 pm

Location: MDIFW Headquarters, 353 Water Street, Augusta

Participants

- Ryan Robicheau, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW)
- Jeff McCabe, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation
- Brian Hubbell, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (connected virtually)
- Andy Cutko, Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF)
- Darryl Sterling, Consultant, Town of Richmond
- Jeremy McDaniel, President, Friends of Swan Island

Other Attendees

- Maine State Representative William Bridgeo
- Maine State Representative Sally Cluchey
- Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director, DIFW
- Connor White, Resource Biologist (Swan Island), DIFW
- Kendall Marden, Resource Biologist (Swan Island), DIFW
- Keel Kemper Resource Supervisor (Swan Island), DIFW
- 1 member of the public in person
- Meghan Russo, Director of Government Affairs, Maine DOT connected virtually
- Annina Breen, Policy Advisor for Speaker of the House, Maine State Legislature
- 5 members of the public connected virtually

Facilitator

Mary Budd, Starboard Leadership Consulting

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Discussion centered around the working group's goals concerning public access to Swan Island and transportation options. Following is a summary of responses to questions framing the conversation.

Question #1: What level of public access to Swan Island is acceptable?

Visitor capacity

- DCAF considers the following in assessing "carrying capacity"
 - Impact on resources
 - Visitor experience
 - Staff capacity
- Need to consider available dock space (current and future)
- Restroom and campsite facilities (currently there are 10 Adirondack shelters)
- The 2010 Master Plan for Swan Island documented 2,000-3,000 visitors per year (approximately 60 days per year) and set a goal of increasing by 50% to range of 5,000-10,000 visitors per year; such an increase would require increased staffing and additional resources including facility expansion
- The campground is rarely at capacity
- The biggest challenge is dock space

Operating season (e.g. Memorial Day-Labor Day)

- The length of the season depends on weather and storm damage incurred over the winter, but it typically extends from mid-May to mid-October, approximately 22 weeks
- The island is accessible all year, but the facilities are only open seasonally
- The current season is consistent with state parks and aligned with public expectations

Number of days per week

- The current ferry runs three days per week
- Ferry service 3-4 days per week (Thursday-Sunday) would be preferable
 - Would allow for visitation by school groups
 - Would permit DIFW staff to balance other responsibilities

Scheduled service, on demand, both

- Non-scheduled service is unpredictable and potentially wasteful
- Scheduled service makes the most sense
- Captain Dave operates based on reservations only

Destination point(s), i.e. pier, campground

- 70% of self-access users use the campground docks
- IFW would like to preserve both points of access but does not want to be responsible for on-island transportation

- Richmond and the Friends of Swan Island (FOSI) like the “hay wagon” option and would be willing to support operation
- The campground dock offers the best landing experience for the public
- Upgrades should consider ADA compliance (making state parks accessible is a work in progress but gradual improvements are moving facilities toward compliance)

Cost or fee for service

- The current cost of ferry service, \$20 per person, should be considered the top of the range of affordability, and for some it is prohibitive
- \$10 per person seems more reasonable
- Self-access is now free and should remain so (with donations encouraged)

Question #2: Considering the transportation options currently available to Swan Island (self-access by boat, paddle craft rental, private ferry service), are additional options or enhancements necessary to achieve the group’s goals?

- FOSI: Greater access is needed and the state should support expanded access
- DIFW: The current array of options is consistent with the Department’s use and federal aid obligations
- Guided tours would enhance the visitor experience
- Voluntary campground “hosts” might enhance the visitor experience, though volunteer engagement has been challenging
- Improvements to the docks and bulkheads are needed

Question #3: If ferry service is deemed necessary, what size/capacity would be optimal, which entity would be best positioned to own and operate it, and what are the possible implications, both initially and long-term, concerning funding, staffing/volunteers, and infrastructure?

Ferry size

- A ferry that could transport up to 40 people would be optimal
- Ferry size is dependent on the captain’s certification, e.g., Captain Dave is limited to six passengers
- The cost of annual inspection and maintenance also varies based on vessel size
- Programming on the island should be a factor in determining ferry size
- May need different-sized options to accommodate different uses

Ownership and operation

- Richmond: Several entities could work collaboratively to own and operate a ferry
- DIFW: It would be most practical for a private entity to own and operate the ferry
 - The state would not bear the burden of maintenance
 - Could be a contracted service
- Other WMAs are accessed via service by private entities, e.g. [Kineo](#)
- A state allocation would require a cost analysis
- Consider issuing an RFP for prospective private operators to gauge interest and costs
- A state contract would likely be more complex and less efficient than a municipal contract

- IFW’s challenge in redeploying the old ferry is the cost of staffing and maintenance

Staffing/volunteers

- IFW has transitioned away from providing educational programming, though other groups could assume that responsibility, e.g., FOSI
- Logistics and attendant risks/liability must be considered

Infrastructure

- Upgrades to the pier are planned for 2026
- The campground dock needs upgrading but the ability to augment is limited
- Staff housing would be necessary if DIFW were operating the ferry
- Increased visitation would require upgrades to facilities and septic system

The working group’s discussion closed with the following sentiments:

- FOSI: The state has an obligation to solve the current problem with public access
- DACF is willing to help with land management on Swan Island
- A memorandum of understanding would be useful in defining appropriate roles and responsibilities for various interested parties, including DIFW, DACF, the Town of Richmond, and FOSI

Public Comment

- Representative Cluchey underscored the goal of the resolve, getting people on Swan Island, and emphasized the importance of accessibility, saying the ferry should be ADA-compliant. She noted that the Maine Department of Transportation handles “big boats,” very different than the “pontoon boat” used for Swan Island. She urged DIFW to make a good faith effort to accommodate.
- The state pier offers a safer point of access than the Richmond docks.
- Pontoon boats are unsafe.
- The qualifications of the ferry pilot are paramount.
- Could Richmond sponsor a race or similar event to raise funds in support of Swan Island access?
- Swan island offers unique value beyond the WMA; it is a treasure

SWAN ISLAND ACCESS AND RESILIENCE WORKING GROUP
Meeting #3

MINUTES

Date/Time: Wednesday, November 5, 2:00-5:00 pm

Location: MDIFW Headquarters, 353 Water Street, Augusta

Participants

- Ryan Robicheau, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW)
- Jeff McCabe, Director, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation
- Brian Hubbell, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (connected virtually)
- Andy Cutko, Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF)
- Darryl Sterling, Consultant, Town of Richmond

Other Attendees

- Judy Camuso, Commissioner, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Nate Webb, Wildlife Division Director, DIFW
- Connor White, Resource Biologist (Swan Island), DIFW
- Keel Kemper Resource Supervisor (Swan Island), DIFW
- Megan Russo, Director of Government Affairs, MaineDOT
- Bill Geary, Multimodal Director, MaineDOT
- EJ Dupont, Director, Maine State Ferry Service, MaineDOT
- 1 member of the public in person
- Maine State Representative Sally Cluchey (connected virtually)
- Annina Breen, Policy Advisor for Speaker of the House, Maine State Legislature (connected virtually)
- 1 member of the public connected virtually

Facilitator

Mary Budd, Starboard Leadership Consulting

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Introduction

The facilitator opened the meeting with a review of the working group's duties as defined in LD 976:

1. Identify barriers to public access to Swan Island and strategies for removing those barriers
2. Evaluate accessible transportation options for the public, including operation and maintenance of a ferry or alternative public transportation systems that may be conducted through public-private partnerships
3. Assess infrastructure needs, such as the creation and upkeep of docks, campgrounds, educational facilities and historic sites
4. Recommend roles and responsibilities among state and municipal partners for operations, maintenance and land stewardship
5. Explore funding sources, including, but not limited to, land and water conservation funds, tax increment financing allocations and public and private funds or resilience-related programs
6. Develop a coordinated implementation timeline and cost estimates
7. Identify any necessary changes to statute or rule
8. Produce a detailed Swan Island public access plan with supporting documentation and an implementation date on or before May 1, 2026

The facilitator then confirmed that all members of the working group had received the meeting materials in advance, along with an email message from Jeremy McDaniel, President, Friends of Swan Island. In his message, McDaniel notified working group members that he would be unable to attend the meeting and expressed disappointment with the process and the outcome he anticipated.

Ryan Robicheau restated the Department's limits in meeting needs beyond its legal obligations and underscored his team's ongoing commitment to acting in good faith toward a workable solution that would ensure wildlife protection and support public access.

Commissioner Judy Camuso recapped the process and the key factors that led to her decision to discontinue public ferry to Swan Island, and credited Department staff for their management.

Other participants echoed the desire to continue working respectfully in partnership.

Transportation Options

The working group addressed three potential transportation options, presented by DIFW prior to the meeting as a starting point for discussion, as follows.

Option	Vessel Type/ Capacity	Operating Season	Days/ Week	Route/ Destination	Staffing Requirements	Estimated Annual Cost	Additional Costs/ Notes
1. Large Ferry	~40-person private vessel	6 months (May–Oct)	5	To pier only	Master Captain + 2 Deck-hands	\$250,000	Full-service, high capacity, long season; no transport to campground
2. Small Ferry	6-person private vessel	2.5 months (Memorial Day–Labor Day)	3	To pier OR campground	6-pack Captain license (no deck-hands)	\$45,000	Short season, limited capacity; flexible destination; can extend with more funding
3. Hybrid (Small Ferry + Upgraded MDIFW Vessel)	6-person private + upgraded MDIFW vessel (occasional large groups)	2.5 months (Memorial Day–Labor Day)	3	Private vessel: pier OR campground; MDIFW vessel: pier only	Master Captain + 2 Deck-hands	\$80,000 annual + \$50,000 one-time upgrade	Balances small and large group needs; moderate cost; limited season

Nate Webb emphasized that costs were provided as estimates and Connor White clarified that the estimate of the small ferry cost was based on 60 days of service, May to October. Following are points made during the discussion that followed, which involved the DIFW staff and Maine DOT representatives present:

- DIFW would contract with a licensed captain under the hybrid option.

- US Coast Guard regulations dictate requirements for ferry service.
- Maine Ferry Service funds ferry operations through the Highway Fund because its vessels carry vehicles and are therefore considered extensions of the highway.
- Maine Ferry Service engages back-up crew, and Swan Island would be wise to do likewise to account for regularly scheduled crew who are unavailable or other emergencies, which would increase personnel expense.
- The cost of staff housing should be added to Option 1 (one-time development cost + annual operating expenses).
- MaineDOT works with the RL Gott boat for service to Frenchboro.
- Could contractors pilot a state vessel? Yes, with the right conditions.
- Should we consider a designated day or two for large boat service as part of Option 3? Need/demand is questionable, and the limited on-demand service proposed mitigates the cost.
- Issuing an RFP and contracting with a small ferry operator would ensure reliable service and permit use of the dock space.
- Licensed pilots willing to work on the specified days will be needed, which could present challenges with attraction and retention.
- Richmond could operate the ferry under contract, funded through a combination of TIF, state funding, and business sponsorships.
- Consider scheduled returns as visitors' leave times will vary and may present vessel capacity problems.
- Consider maintenance costs.

The group agreed that a phased approach would be best: to work toward implementing small ferry service by May 2026, while securing funding and readying the large ferry at a later date (TBD).

Historic Buildings, Infrastructure

Participants agreed that a new assessment is required as a first step in determining the condition and needs of the historic buildings on Swan Island, and such an assessment would be useful in developing a comprehensive capital improvement plan. While DIFW would need to be consulted and the Town of Richmond is eager to support, Friends of Swan Island and/or another nonprofit group would be best suited to lead such efforts, including fundraising and coordination. Other comments included:

- Engage Maine Historic Preservation Commission, which will be administering a sizeable but highly competitive new grant.
- Reference New Hampshire Preservation Alliance and Craftworks.
- Swan Island is part of Perkins Township, not Richmond.
- Previous estimate for operationalizing staff housing was \$150K+ and annual maintenance costs would apply.
- Account for increased use of septic.
- More staff would be needed, including time required to handle ferry reservation system.
- DACF can offer expertise regarding historic preservation and funding sources.
- Consider engaging in a strategic planning process.

Potential Funding Sources

- State funding through the general appropriation process
- Town of Richmond TIF (available before and after 6/30/26)
- DCED has a competitive grant for tourism marketing initiatives
- Corporate support, e.g., LL Bean, Bath Iron Works, Sappi
- Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding (federal)
- Richmond Historical Society
- Private foundations

Public Comment

- Patricia Barber expressed interest in continuing to support efforts to preserve the historic buildings on Swan Island and felt the cause would resonate among many community members.
- Consider a water taxi rather than a pontoon boat as a safer and possibly more cost-effective option.