

Isle au Haut Boat Services (IaHBS)

Contact Information

Provider: Isle au Haut Boat Services/IaH Mailboat
Contact person: George Cole, President
Address: 27 Seabreeze Avenue, P.O. Box 709, Stonington, Maine 04681
Telephone: 207-367-5193
Email: president@isleauhaut.com; themailboat@isleauhaut.com
Website: www.isleauhaut.com

Service Summary

Service area: Isle au Haut (Knox County) to Stonington (Hancock County)
Type of service: Ferry

Ferry Service

Isle au Haut Boat Services (IaHBS) provides year-round scheduled passenger, freight and mail service between Stonington and the Isle au Haut Town Landing and seasonal service to the Acadia National Park Landing at Duck Harbor.

Isle au Haut Boat Services owns two boats, *Otter* and *Mink*. The winter schedule uses one boat, from early October through early June and provides two round trips per day to the Isle au Haut Town Landing, Monday through Saturday, and an additional midday round trip on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The summer schedule provides four round trips per day, Monday through Saturday, and two round trips on Sunday. Two of the summer round trips provide service to the Acadia National Park Landing on Isle au Haut at Duck Harbor. (Isle au Haut is a remote area of the Park.) IaHBS is the only commercial operator authorized to land passengers at the Duck Harbor Landing.

Summary of Service Changes

The scheduled operations of Isle au Haut Boat Services remain the same as described in the previous plan. The service has able to add several weeks to the service schedule to the Duck Harbor Landing of Acadia National Park, which in 2018 provided additional day trip and camper fares during the later September and early October weather.

Summary of Accomplishments

In February of 2015 IaHBS began construction of a new fiberglass boat, a Wesmac 46 Super. She entered service in August of 2016, christened *Otter*. *Otter* is licensed for 79 passengers and two crew (compared with 52 for her predecessor *Miss Lizzie*). IaHBS filled her to capacity several times in her first three weeks of service. *Otter* can also cruise at more than twice the speed of the older boats. For

economy, *Otter* operates at a speed of only 10 knots on scheduled runs, but in an emergency the boat has 23 knots available.

The capital cost of *Otter* was about \$1 million. She has an expected life of 50 years in service. The funding of the project included \$100,000 from 5311 capital support, \$31,500 from the sale of *Miss Lizzie*, \$50,000 from cash reserves and a bank loan of \$125,000. The balance, about \$694,000, was raised in private donations from in and around the Isle au Haut community. Over 45 individual donors contributed.

In 2016, laHBS also purchased a new inflatable raft for the other boat, the *Mink*. During the fall of 2018 laHBS upgraded *Mink's* electronics and radar so they are up to date and the same as those in the *Otter*. The cost of the electronics upgrade was approximately \$25,000, funded from operations.

During the summer of 2018, work was completed to install stronger and higher railings around the edges of the Stonington wharf, and also to replace worn out portions of the plank decking on the wharf.

In June 2018, laHBS purchased the Stonington wharf and building for \$1.1 million. Acquiring this mainland facility was essential for the future operation of the service to Isle au Haut, as there is no other suitable operating base within many miles along the coast. Funding for the purchase included \$50,000 from the USDA, \$200,000 from the Town of Isle au Haut, \$300,000 in commercial bank funding and a variety of private donations. For the \$200,000 received from the Town of Isle au Haut laHBS sold to the Town an easement requiring that any present or future owner of the Stonington property provide space for the operation of a boat service to the island. The Town of Isle au Haut funded the \$200,000 cost with a loan from MaineDOT's State Infrastructure Bank.

Ownership of the facility will require laHBS to set aside additional reserves for capital maintenance needs for both the wharf and the building. The building is a large concrete and brick structure originally built in 1902 and operated as a fish packing plant for many years. Ownership of the facility also creates new revenue opportunities if a tenant can be found for unused space in the building.

laHBS has continued to expand its offering of sightseeing excursions and charters during the times when the boats are not operating scheduled trips. These are primarily scheduled on Sundays, when the summer Sunday schedule requires only one boat, leaving the second boat free. Puffin viewing trips and lighthouse viewing trips have proved very popular. During calendar year 2018, sightseeing trips and charters provided an additional \$64,000 in income with little additional operating cost apart from fuel.

Future Priorities

Unused space in Stonington building. For future years, laHBS plans to invest significant effort in finding ways to generate further revenue from unused space in the Stonington building. The second floor of the building is empty and unused. Unfortunately, commercial uses of the space are limited because laHBS cannot offer significant summer parking for users who are not Mailboat passengers. Parking capacity of up to 90 cars on the wharf is often filled to maximum capacity in the summer. Although the building is structurally sound, a complete renovation of the building to address identified

engineering issues is estimated to cost about \$1.5 million. IaHBS will not be able to get a mortgage to help finance renovations because the required flood insurance would be cost-prohibitive.

The Mink. Two upgrades are planned for *Mink's* spring 2019 haul-out. Both were requested by the Coast Guard at *Mink's* autumn inspection. Leaking watertight doors on both sides of the pilot house are to be replaced, and the electrical wiring is to be replaced with a new breaker panel, more circuits, and improved monitoring. Together these upgrades are estimated to cost more than \$20,000 over and above normal maintenance. An engine rebuild for *Mink* will be performed based on engine condition, at an estimated cost of \$35,000, and is to be expected within 3 to 4 years.

Ridership

Ridership remains roughly even, as the community of Isle au Haut has not grown appreciably since the last report, although there was an increase in ridership during FY 2017.

Isle au Haut Boat Services Flex Route Trips					
	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
General Public	19,264	18,177	19,284	19,649	21,996

Fares

Riders 12 and over: one-way \$20, round trip \$40

Riders under 12: one-way \$10, round trip \$20

Adult resident: one-way \$10, round trip \$20

Ticket Book (20 one-way trips): \$380

Resident Ticket Book: \$180

School fare: \$3

Round trip cruise to Isle au Haut and return on same trip: \$24

Family fares: four or more family members, purchase of three full fare tickets and receive one child's fare at no charge

Extra charges for kayaks and canoes

Ferries/Facilities

- A new ferry, *Otter*, was placed in service in 2016
- A new inflatable raft was purchased for the Isle au Haut Boat Services other boat, the *Mink*
- IaHBS purchased the Stonington wharf and building in 2018. The wharf is in good condition, but the unused portion of the building would need substantial renovation prior to being suitable for rental purposes

Major Challenges

- Completing necessary renovations to Mink
- Generating revenue from the unused portions of the Stonington wharf building and financing the required renovations to support future uses
- Continuing effort to ensure that Isle au Haut is served by a viable ferry service

Public Participation Summary

The principal public appearance of IaHBS is at the Isle au Haut Town Meeting. The President and the Treasurer of Boat Services attend the Town Meeting in connection with the request for operating funding from the Town, which has recently been \$50,000 annually. The President and Treasurer give a brief presentation and answer questions. There have been several occasions when requests for changes in the service to the island were raised, and IaHBS normally has been able to comply with these requests.

IaHBS also meets annually with Acadia Park management in Bar Harbor to plan for each coming season in terms of scheduling, information sharing, and Park Service outreach to campers and hikers.

Isle au Haut Boat Services (IaHBS) is a nonprofit Maine corporation with IRS 501 (c)(3) certification. The Boat Services Board consists of more than three and not more than 15 directors elected for three-year terms. The Board currently has ten members, five of whom are seasonal residents of Isle au Haut, and five of whom are current year-round residents of the island.

The Boat Services Board meets four times yearly and decides policy issues; examples would be the process for purchasing a new ferry boat, approval for employment policies such as health insurance and other benefits, approval of applications for loans or grants, and the design of annual private fund-raising activities. The President of Boat Services currently also acts as the General Manager of the operation, and makes most ordinary operational decisions in consultation with the Stonington based Senior Captain/Operations Manager.

To remain a viable operation in support of the Town's needs, IaHBS needs to maintain a high level of summer activity and to operate two boats. Owing to the highly seasonal nature of Maine coast life, July and August are the only two profitable months for IaHBS. The cash generated in the summer is essential for the operation to navigate the other ten months of the year.