

**DRAFT
MEMORANDUM**

Date: January 28, 2020

To: GEGR Economic Planning Group

By: Elbridge – Member of Planning Team

Re: Initial Strategic Review of Recreational Trails in the GEGR

Attending: Sarah Strickland, Sue Szwed, David Conley, Dwayne Young, Judy Cleaves, Elbridge Cleaves – (Sue and David are recreation guides- David is owner of “Canoe the Wild”)

A meeting was held at the Weston Town Office to review draft map depictions, resource information and recently acquired knowledge about recreational trails and implications for the GEGR. The primary objectives were to flesh out strategic uses, potential benefits including personal and economic, and to identify key issues for further deliberation.

A home-grown 35 page slide show focused the group’s attention on water trails, but included placeholder information about hiking, snowmobiling, ATV, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing within and around the GEGR. (Slide Show in PDF available by email upon request--Potential road biking trails have been mapped but not part of presentation)

The show highlighted eleven (11) major water trail segments totaling nearly 190 miles of flowing and flat water along with the capture of basic access and campsite information. (See attached map and water trails summary and characterizations) The Baskahegan, Mattawamkeag and St. Croix Rivers are the primarily river drainages with Reed Deadwater (Macwahoc Stream) and Monument Brook added for potential in nature-based tourism.

Observations for paddling/fishing:

- Initial inventory of waters and existing and potential locations for access and campsites seems generally comprehensive but not exhaustive. (Does not include second order streams such as Skagrock and Wytovitlock)
- Significant variations exists in the nature, type, volume of water and availability by drainage and by segment. The St. Croix with large lakes and a tail water has fairly consistent water flows/availability; caveat during loon nesting when may have low water below Vanceboro until July 15th. The flat to gently flowing water on the lower sections of the Mattawamkeag and Baskahegan are likely to have water most of the year, but need monitoring. While the Branches and Upper and Middle Sections of the Baskahegan are the most wild and remote they are (with exception of the lakes) highly prone to dewatering during the summer. Of the foregoing the West Branch of the Mattamkeag is most dependable during low flows. The East Branch is a highly scenic and fast moving freestone stream. Reed Deadwater and Monument are flat water and are most always navigable regardless of water flow. Monument is impacted by the dam at Forest City on East Grand Lake.
- Notoriety, status of infrastructure and market exposure are as diverse as the waters themselves. The Mattawamkeag River lags far behind the Baskahegan and St. Croix in existing infrastructure (access and campsites...albeit the St. Croix is one-Country Camping). The Baskahegan and Mattawamkeag are also infants compared to the St. Croix in notoriety, use and marketing. Of note, much of the infrastructure is in-place on the Baskahegan, thanks to the generous permissive use granted by the Baskahegan Company and successive years of campsite funding and improvement thru the Stetson MT fund at the Forest Society of Maine and the Outdoor Education students at East Grand School.

- (Of Note, Diano Circo (IF&W) recently confirmed interest in exploring the establishment of formal public boat/fishing access in the Ferry Bridge and Reed-Drew Lowlands sections of the Mattawamkeag River.
- Continue with the development of boat access/canoe/kayak put-ins, potential campsites and other infrastructure as funding, landowner permission, volunteers and time allows.
- All waters are fishable. As flowing waters warm, lower sections revert to warm water species. The Branches and tributaries excel in brook trout and to a lesser degree landlocked salmon. Flat waters, other than East Grand, tend toward bass, perch and warm water species. Baskahegan Lake and Crooked Brook Flowage are standouts.
- Public ownership generally non-existent. Exception being Big Island and Long Point on Mattawamkeag Lake and the Page Farm within the Mattawamkeag River WMA.

Economic Observations

- All waters have a history of a high level of Native American and early European settler usage including connectivity to NB tribes, establishment of settlements and lumbering. The cultural and historic nature of these waters should be an important consideration in promotion, marketing and in development of themes and narratives.
- With proper marketing these waters may have potential to attract “new tourism” but the most critical element may be in helping to provide recreational diversity to an existing, but changing customer base at area sporting camps and lodges.
- Development of nature based tourism will require training and education of existing and/or new guides, and/or importation of coastal guides, all to be as proficient with geography as they are with ecology.
- Traditional marketing of site specific “trips” by filling the roster with customers well in advance of departure may be problematic with all of the uncertainty in water levels. Much flexibility will be required. Day trips that are pre-engineered and packaged and offered on demand at area sporting camps and lodges may be more practical, if not more predictable but less lucrative.
- Used Future IQ vision of tourism in the northwoods to help brainstorm economic considerations
- Development of an outdoor recreational outfitter and equipment provider is a necessity. Consider expansion/diversification of an existing business and/or developing a new entrepreneur.

Outstanding Issues/Observations/Questions

- A lot to assimilate, process and prioritize. Need expert advice as to all: process, timeline, funding and development.
- Assume must have caretaker organization(s). Structure, role, area of responsibility (probably separated by major drainage)??
- Need to further explore and increase nexus to economic development including linkage to workforce training, diversification of existing businesses, entrepreneurship and marketing.
- Sue Szwed to continue as point person with BPL, NPS, Island Falls planner and others
- Refine all to finite recommendations in the forthcoming economic plan
- Other?