

**Greater East Grand Region Economic Planning Project
Recreational Water Trails meeting
March 5, 2020 - Weston Town Office**

Attending

- Elbridge Cleaves – remotely
- Sue Szwed, Water Trails point person for GEGR planning
- Dwayne Young, Weston Town Manager
- Colin Brown, Executive Director, Woodie Wheaton Land Trust
- Steve Mine, Director, Maine Family Resource Center; Maine Guide
- Sarah Strickland, Project Consultant
- Doug Beck, Outdoor Recreation Supervisor, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lakes
- Noah Pollock, Stewardship Director, Northern Forest Canoe Trail

Highlights from Meeting

1. Doug and Noah provided detailed information about funding opportunities, and what additional information is needed to help us prioritize the opportunities we have.
2. They both commented about the comprehensiveness of the plan to date and said this will be very helpful when seeking funds.
3. There are available funds through RPT and Land & Water that should be a part of our planning.
4. Deciding what makes this region distinctive and appealing to which customer groups is a critical step and needs to be community-informed.
5. Determining the water trail development phases and the priorities in each phase is a critical next step in order to complete a short and long-term funding plan.
6. Each funding source has different rules about what is and is not allowable. Planning should be done with these rules in mind.

Agenda Notes

GEGR Planning Overview - Sarah introduced the bigger picture of economic development that Greater East Grand Economic Development is pursuing.

Recreational Trails Overview – See attached slide presentation

- The current size of the region is 389,000 acres. We are considering adding more acreage in the northwest corner and to the east, making sure that the Canadian side of the St. Croix River is part of the planning map. This would change the region to a 500,000 area.
- St Croix and Mattawamkeag watersheds w/200 miles, (Colin Brown WWLT mentioned the southern reaches could possibly include connection to Narraguagus and Machias Rivers)
- The East Grand hiking trail system is the ONLY hiking system south of Houlton and north of Grand Lake Stream.
 - The Woodie Wheaton Land Trust purchase of 9 miles along Monument Stream, and surrounding conservation easements will open this area up especially for nature tourism (birding) and is an international waterway.
 - Ongoing efforts w/The Conservation Fund to develop hiking trails on East Grand Lake and a proposed public waterfront project for the town of Weston on East Grand Lake.

- Overview of Highlands trail present status and proposed continuation of trails around Sucker Lake (Steve Mines talked about work on that project and need for help w/volunteers.)
- The 3-mile Harlow bog trail and EGS educational opportunities there
- Ongoing work with ATV and snowmobile clubs to work together with the state agencies to improve and maintain trails

Proposed Water Trails

1. Baskahegan Stream discussion

- Reviewed the status of infrastructure on Baskahegan Stream w/campsites in place because of support from Baskahegan Co. and outdoor ed program
- Stetson Mt. fund, First Wind helped finance the improvement and establishment of campsites (Dave Conley and the outdoor ed. students/volunteers)
- Priorities include: need for parking and landing site improvement
- Build out a portage trail and historic site at confluence of Baskahegan and Mattawamkeag – there is the need for further exploration and work.
- Colin Brown mentioned interest in and challenges with establishing Maliseet trail from Baskahegan Stream to East Grand lake. Private land obstacles to be explored. Oldest evidence of humans in North America. Possible Abby Museum connection.
- Further conversation desired with Native American groups about preservation of and development of sites of unique significance historically.
- There was also discussion about how building blight near river in Danforth impacts the community and the most visible and central part of the Baskahegan Stream. There was more conversation on how to remove blight and transform blighted areas to public space and enhance river and town experience.
- Need to evaluate landing sites and work needed for improvement, estimate costs, and build satisfactory agreements with landowners.

2. Mattawamkeag River discussion

- The present public ownership in key areas was reviewed.
- Island falls boat landing at top of West Branch, BPL ownership at bottom of Drew deadwater, and IF&W interest in buying boat landing sites for public ownership in Haynesville and Reed.
- BPL easements on upper West Branch w/campsites allowed.
- Historic Teddy Roosevelt site at Bible Point on upper W. Br. Mattawamkeag
- Priority - need for group to do ground truthing of campsites and other landing sites not mentioned above.
- Need for group to do cost estimation for work on sites, find funding, communication and agreements w/landowners, find work and maintenance crews etc.
- Baskahegan Co. land south of river in Bancroft with possible site/s available for camping
- The Conservation Fund lands in Reed open to licensing to an organization for public sites
- Private boat landing site open to public in Drew bridge

3. Local and state website presence and promotion is necessary to benefit the area economically.

Doug Beck - Bureau of Public Lands Recreational Trails Program

- Doug made the strong comment that the GEGR planning effort is head and shoulders above other efforts he's seen in the state. The fact that GEGR is looking at a wide range of assets and factors that affect economic well-being is a plus. GEGR efforts to support a variety of recreational projects that could connect and complement each other and the whole region is also a plus.
- Doug talked about the types of projects that lie within the funding goals. A list is available on their website. He mentioned that two key elements that make a project desirable are
 1. the potential for significant public use near population centers or
 2. projects that would create a compelling destination.
- Developing plans for a network of noteworthy, coordinated recreational opportunities could be key to access state and federal funds.
- Doug encouraged people to contact their congressmen to support increased funding for RTP. Legislation could lead to doubling of funding to state.
- RTP funds are available for parking lots, acquisition and development, trail heads, enhancing or repairing existing sites, campsites, kiosks, engineering and design for up to 18 months before project. RTP can provide funding up to 80% of costs. Local 20% could be a mixture of cash, work or materials.
 - Important to designate this as a water trail
 - Have to show a corridor exists
 - You are either proposing to make it a viable water trail, or, enhancing an existing water trail
 - Have to have an entity/people who will take care of the water trail – like an ATV club
 - Why is the trail going to be used?
 - Is it close to people? Why is it exceptional or unique?
- Doug also mentioned that testimonies of use, or need for a project are important additions for applications.
- Grant readers are trail builders and trail maintenance folks – a large frame/vision with specifics about the request; B#@S^*T is seen quickly.
- There was also mention of possible use of the Maine Conservation Corps for projects.
- Northern Maine Woods is also a possible group to contract with for recreational management.
- Colin shared the conversation he is having with Dean Preston about leveraging TIFF funds for maintaining roads in the UT to landings at Spednic Lake, etc.
- Land & Water Funding – only can be used for municipal and public owned lands – can be used for lots of infrastructure – good for Town of Danforth landing and rebuilding town center. (Waterville example) – larger pool of funds. Check with Ardis on school tennis court and bball court – updates on these could be packaged together in large funding request.
- Both RTP & Land/Water Funding should be part of our funding plan.

Noah Pollock - Northern Forest Canoe Trail

- Noah was impressed by the amount of broad thinking and amount of work done already.
- He noted the need for the water trails segment to develop priorities and clear vision of projects.
- He thought that a “road show” was important specifically to present to different communities to recruit involvement, and volunteers, for ongoing energy and support.
- Noah noted that campsite construction was relatively inexpensive and could be easily accomplished but decisions need to be made about what those sites will look like and who will maintain them.

- He said that he was happy to work with groups to help with a whole array of activities from using his summer interns for campsite building, to map making, website development, and general consultation.
- He has a lot of experience in getting this sort of thing done and has a pretty clear idea about time and cost needed to accomplish services if they are purchased or accomplished with volunteers.
- Noah also talked about different models of use like Maine Huts and Trails system, which has different infrastructure; and North Maine Woods where there are fees for use with check points set up on roads.
- There was also mention of the possibility of developing regional environmental stewardship groups to care for segments of waterways.

What is the Premier Experience in the region? Who is it for? What is the “suite” of services and amenities needed to support the customer groups we want to attract?

- Recreational customer trends – urban folks want shorter excursions; day trips; rent equipment with suite of services easily reserved and available.
- Suite of Services – shuttles, lodging, equipment rental, kayaks, guides, history and nature guides
- Remote back country experiences – Greenland Lake, other smaller lakes with limited access
- How to sell – **solitude, remote, unplugged**
- A destination to what? **WATER** – all different types of water experiences – spring water, rapids, flat, big and small lakes, streams, old growth, limited access
- Website marketing expertise to promote to specific customer demographics
- Note that there are many areas in Maine and other states that are looking to recreational development for an economic boost. How to distinguish this area as a unique and compelling place to visit, own property, or live?

Other topics briefly discussed

- Reed Dead Water is beautiful area of ecological significance that may be an area to consider for some level of conservation.
- Tomah and Greenland lakes are spots to think about including as points of interest or conservation.
- Colin Brown mentioned his interest in the Eastern Maine Canoe trail and its connection to water trails here.
- Need to explore foundation prospects for large grants that would embrace a broad vision for regional trails and economic development.
- Check in with Penobscot Paddlers about their work with Northern Forest Canoe Trail.