

# “The Baskahegan Valley”

## The Region’s Historic, Cultural, Business, Education, Medical and Entrepreneurial Center

For the GEGR, the **Town of Danforth** owes its continued legacy as the largest community and regional service center to the early settlers who strategically chose a place downstream from the expansive forests of the **Baskahegan River Watershed**.



From the early days of settlement the Community of Danforth was endowed with sawmills, an east-west railroad, retail businesses, on-site electrical generation, doctors and lawyer offices, entertainment facilities, and a financial and farming supply center. Although much quieter and less populated now, the Town is striving to remake the downtown, invigorate community and to economically strengthen the entire Region. Local efforts include removal of blight, working independently and alongside the GEGR and its partners to sustain local education, health services, and banking. The Town is actively encouraging community service and support for all ages, and expanding cultural, historic and recreational offerings. Specific actions in the area include educational, community, non-profit, individual,

landowner and business partnerships to help fund and develop place-and project-based natural resource pathways education, outdoor learning, use of technology, an expanded 15 year-old outdoor educational program, workforce training and entrepreneurship with a focus on small business development and succession, keying on area related youth.

The benefits of rural life may be no more apparent than with the recent onset of a world-wide pandemic. Wide open spaces, social distancing, remote communication describe normal life, and travel between residences are sometimes measured in miles not feet. It may seem as a paradox that this remote and rural way of life for all is also home to broadband and tele-commuting for some. While broadband access is currently available and in use in the more settled areas of the Baskahegan Valley, along US Route 1 and the border communities of Orient and Forest City, recent efforts are underway to expand broadband to all communities and households within the Region.



Shortages in labor are no more acute than in the logging businesses. It is common for a logging firm to have 50's to near 60 year-old average age woods workers. Strategic moves by contractors to encourage and support independent owner-operators of equipment to augment employees, has brought a greater degree of entrepreneurship to the logging end of the forest products business. Much needs to be done to foster interest and involvement of area youth in job opportunities at home, including the woods. Landowners are not exempt in this effort as

some highly support a working-circle concept and hire as much as possible local contractors and workers in the management of the millions of acres of surrounding working forests.

The **Town of Danforth** is nearly twice the size, geographically, as a standard township. **Greenland Cove**, a populated East Grand - St. Croix Lakes and Highlands neighborhood, is located in the eastern part of the Town, while Lower and Upper **Hot Brook Lakes** neighborhood lies near the western boundary in-common with **T8R4 NBPP**. These lake neighborhoods are critical to the Town's recreational, sporting camp, and real estate tax base as well as a welcomed source of volunteers to augment the local base. Much work is left to be done to accomplish the goals of the Town of Danforth and the GEGR economic development effort. The Danforth Town Hall, once the place of vaudeville and community plays now listed on the national historic register, houses a restored town clock. That clock continues, as it has for over 75 years, to toll every hour on the hour as a reminder of the theme of the efforts of the GEGR, "A Heritage Reclaimed".

Perhaps nowhere in the State of Maine has the combination of water, land and land ownership played such a prominent role in community than within the **Baskahegan River** watershed. One example of such influence was in the early days of Danforth when an entrepreneur associated with the timberlands now owned by the Baskahegan Company considered Danforth a site for a paper mill; a mill which was ultimately located on the Penobscot River in Millinocket. Some of the earliest evidence of human influence was the **ancient Maliseet Trail**, a Native American and First Nation portage of 3 miles in length connecting the waters, lands and peoples of the Penobscot with those of the St. Croix and St. John Rivers. It was this same Trail that early settlers and entrepreneurs used to come into the country, to carve out homesteads, build communities, and to tap the unspoiled natural resources of the Region. The kiosks found at the southern Scenic Turnout along US Route 1 in Weston display the history and story of the Maliseet Trail which is actually situated in the Baskahegan Watershed. **Crooked Brook Flowage**, a flat-water section of the Baskahegan River Water Trail, is one of the best examples of waterfowl and riparian habitat in the State of Maine.

Today, the influence of landownership and land use on the community of Danforth remains strong. Examples include the restored farmlands of west Danforth and the home of an active family farm which plays a significant role in local food and with the farmer's market. There are also a number of family entities and trusts who collectively own thousands of acres of timberlands in the Baskahegan Valley. These landowners not only provide a flow of timber and jobs for area loggers, allow free public use of their lands for traditional recreation, but also grant permission for commercial bear baiting, recreational trails including hiking, x-country skiing, snowmobiling, ATV, water trails, and related infrastructure of campsites and vehicle access points. The landowner influence also goes beyond recreation to helping support local community projects, TIF funding from UT generated tax assessments of leased wind power sites to global issues such as 100 year-long commitments of thousands of acres of timber to carbon sequestration.

Any narrative of the Baskahegan Valley must include the **Village of Brookton**, the only community within the thousands of acres of the wildlands of northern Washington County. Brookton, once called Jackson Brook during the tannery days, encompasses the lake neighborhoods of **Jackson Brook and Drake Lakes**. It is at the Brookton Corner Store where an old county road leading westerly from the Village to Baskahegan Landing enables access to the otherwise inaccessible, undeveloped and expansive Baskahegan Lake. This Lake is a premier bass and white perch fishery used extensively by guides and residents. Thanks to the long-standing tradition of the surrounding lands, Baskahegan Company, the Lake has several

well-established and maintained primitive campsites along its shores and islands. The Lake's flat waters set apart the Upper and Middle segments of the Baskahegan River Water Trail.

An easterly turn at the Corner Store onto the Forest City Road leads past the once populated mill and railroad town of **Forest Station**, and the former Eaton Brothers Sawmill. The mill, 100 years ago was one of the Region's largest. Today, nature has reclaimed all but the mill pond which lies adjacent to the north edge of the Forest City Road, beyond the tracks. Continuing easterly past an old logging road leading to **Little Tomah** and **Greenland Lakes**, soon reveals the **Arm of East Grand Lake**, a dirt road to a rare boat landing on Spednic Lake, the "main street" of the picturesque **Village of Forest City**, Maine. It is here the US and Canadian Customs straddle the St. Croix River and the International Boundary of Forest City, New Brunswick.