

Great Northern Paper Company mills in the Katahdin Region have closed and the ripple effect is being felt by municipalities, local businesses, our award-winning hospital and the region's school systems; all struggling financially. The area's infrastructure is crumbling and families are hurting. The Katahdin Area Chamber of Commerce board of directors wants to help turn that around. Proudly serving 140 members in the surrounding communities as well as several businesses in outlying towns and unorganized territories, the chamber is an integral economic development vehicle in the region and is looking to the future.

Elliotsville Plantation Inc., a Maine-based foundation, wants to donate 75,000 acres of land to create a national park and up to 75,000 acres for a national recreation area, east of Baxter State Park along the East Branch of the Penobscot River, as well as create a substantial endowment for the permanent maintenance and operation of both.

The park would provide hiking, bicycling, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, camping, paddling, fishing, wildlife watching, horseback riding and scenic drives, as well as the preservation of natural, historic and cultural resources. The recreation area would provide all of that as well as snowmobiling and hunting.

Regarding a national park's impact on industry, since the establishment of the Clean Air Act there are no examples where air quality standards of a region have been made more stringent due to the establishment of a new national park. (The Congaree National Monument in South Carolina became a national park in 2003 and International Paper Company continues to operate nearby.)

The economic benefits of a national park and national recreation area for Penobscot and Piscataquis counties are outlined in comprehensive studies provided by Headwater Economics, an independent nonprofit research group, and are available at <http://bit.ly/katahdin-park>. The reports used independent data and conservative methodology, and were peer reviewed by leading Maine economists who verified that the studies' approach and findings were sound. They provide compelling evidence of

the value of national parks and national recreation areas to 16 communities similar to the two-county region in Maine.

The reports found that the impact on the timber industry of 150,000 acres of private land in this area would be extremely small. The land could produce, at most, 120,000 tons of green fiber per year, less than 1 percent of Maine's annual utilization. Sustainable forestry on this amount of acreage would employ approximately 21 people. At most, with indirect jobs, annual timber operations could potentially yield a total of 50 local jobs. However, this is irrelevant in that the current owners of this property do not plan to harvest the timber in the absence of a national park, except minimally for wildlife habitat maintenance.

With a declining population and loss of a great part of the primary industry in the Katahdin Region, this proposed national park and national recreation area, with its abundant and unique forestland, rivers, lakes, streams, ponds, wetlands, spectacular falls, rare plant species and interesting geological features (such as Haskell Rock and Grand Pitch), is a potential avenue for viable, long-term employment. The economic reports predict approximately 1,000 jobs in the private and public sectors.

Considering a broader economic strategy, the communities surrounding the national park and national recreation area would wisely optimize the benefits with improved educational facilities, services and municipal infrastructure, thereby creating jobs.

The proud heritage of the Katahdin Region can be sustained if we include conscientious tourism and recreation in the economic equation. The awe-inspiring natural resources here are a gift to be shared. EPI is offering a piece of this gift, preserved for generations to come. This substantial investment will strengthen the local economy, create jobs and help turn the tide on the declining population.

Our sons and daughters and others with love for the Katahdin Region need reasons and means to live and thrive here, growing their families and bringing businesses, industries, hope and prosperity to the central and northern Maine communities. The KACC believes this is a positive step toward that goal.

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Katahdin



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