

# SPECIAL EDITION!

## SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2024

### INSIDE!



Kennebec River, Augusta, by ETheberge/NRCM

# MAINE Environment

STAY INFORMED  
& READY FOR  
ACTION!



Follow us! @NRCMenvironment



## Reuniting the Kennebec

For more than 60 years, Mainers have led the movement to bring rivers back to life because clean water and healthy fish runs are so central to Maine's economy and way of life.

This legacy has proven that removal of obsolete dams to restore sea-run fish passage has been a win-win for wildlife, outdoor recreation, and local economies. NRCM has been leading these efforts, but success is the result of many people and groups working together.

### Maine's Legacy of Bringing Rivers Back to Life

In Maine, we know from experience that when we remove obsolete dams, native fish and wildlife return in record numbers, injecting new life into rivers that helps revive riverfront communities and supports commercial and recreational fisheries. Restoring healthy rivers also respects the original inhabitants of the place we call Maine. Wabanaki Nations have close connections to all of Maine's major waterways, and to the species these rivers support, especially endangered Atlantic salmon.

"As Wabanaki peoples, our own sustenance relies on the health of waterways and the fish that share them with us," said Odanak First Nation citizen Mali Obomsawin. "Our primary concern and responsibility is protecting aquatic life, not corporate profits."

The removal of the Edwards Dam in Augusta in 1999 has been one of Maine's biggest environmental success stories, with millions of river herring returning annually, along with shad, sturgeon, and other species. Communities along this section of the



Heleen Garrahan

"The Cobbosseecontee Stream sturgeon run of 2023 was a powerful reminder of the richness of the Kennebec fisheries and a glimpse of what the river could be if we continue to help it return to a more natural state." —Gardiner Mayor Patricia Hart

Story continued on page 2

## 2024 Report Card for Maine's Environment

After months of public hearings, negotiations, debates, and votes, the Legislature finally wrapped up its work for the year and adjourned on May 10. Although we are disappointed that several bills died due to lack of funding, we're pleased overall that lawmakers passed measures to invest in Maine trails, help communities respond to climate change, encourage reusable packaging, facilitate Maine-made sources of clean energy, and generally protect Maine's environment. As always, thank you for your support and engagement throughout the session. Your letters, emails, and testimony on priority bills were invaluable and helped deliver another successful year at the State House.

We are particularly excited that the Legislature passed the Maine Trails Bond, which will appear on the November ballot. If voters approve it, the bond will provide \$30 million over 4 years for the design, development, and maintenance of trails for walking, hiking, biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, off-road vehicles, and more. This first-ever Trails Bond was supported by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, and endorsed by a remarkably broad coalition of more than 520 organizations, businesses, and towns statewide.

A bill to allow businesses to sell products in reusable containers also received broad, bipartisan support. The new law will reduce waste by allowing businesses to safely provide reusable containers for food and non-food items and receive those

### Highlights from Our Legislative Work

Goal	Outcome
Invest in Maine Trails	++
Promote Reusable Containers	+
Fund Climate Action	+
Recognize Wabanaki Sovereignty	+
Support Offshore Wind Energy	+
Curb Natural Gas Expansion	-
Defeat Rollback Bills	+

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage PAID  
Newcastle, ME  
Permit No. 11



Story continued on page 4



## Kennebec - from Page 1

river have experienced tremendous benefits, including the City of Augusta, where a new riverfront park and river access have supported economic development.

In 2023, hundreds of visitors flocked to Gardiner to experience a truly spectacular natural event as scores of Atlantic sturgeon swam upstream from the Kennebec into Cobbosseecontee Stream. At times it seemed the stream was full of these prehistoric fish, a stunning display that was possible only because of the decades of progress that has been made thanks to the Clean Water Act and past dam removals.

“The Cobbosseecontee Stream sturgeon run of 2023 was a powerful reminder of the richness of the Kennebec fisheries and a glimpse of what the river could be if we continue to help it return to a more natural state,” says Gardiner Mayor Patricia Hart. “While much progress has been made, dams upstream from Gardiner continue to impact our native fisheries, restricting the river’s wildlife populations and limiting recreational and commercial fishing industries.”



Shawmut Dam on Kennebec in Fairfield, by JMonkman/NRCM

### Restoring the Kennebec Restores the Entire Gulf of Maine Ecosystem

The Kennebec was once the most productive river in Maine for sea-run fish, with Atlantic salmon runs in the hundreds of thousands. But now, Atlantic salmon are critically endangered and facing extinction unless decision-makers act to restore a healthy Kennebec.

Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fish species face a gauntlet of four dams that makes it impossible to reach the Sandy River, a tributary of the Kennebec that provides some of the best spawning and rearing habitat in the Northeast.

The harm these dams cause far outweighs the benefits from their small energy output. That’s why anglers, community leaders, and Mainers who care about the Kennebec and the Gulf of Maine have called for their removal.

The Natural Resources Council of Maine is working together with our partners in the Kennebec Coalition—Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Rivers, Trout Unlimited, and the Kennebec Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited—along with the Wabanaki Nations and Conservation Law Foundation to take advantage of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide future generations with a vibrant river, one that teems with fish and other wildlife that will support heritage industries and new recreational opportunities, and that will grow economic development in riverfront communities.

Restoring free-flowing access to the Sandy will give endangered Atlantic salmon a chance to survive and have a ripple effect across the Gulf of Maine, helping bring back millions more American shad, American eel, and river herring as well. Many of these fish species support Maine’s most iconic industries, including commercial fishing and lobstering.

“Rivers change and priorities change over time. We should start learning from things that haven’t worked in the past. These four dams provide very little power and do a lot of damage to an ecosystem that could be vibrant,” says Steve Brooke, lifelong fisherman, Farmingdale resident, and retired Senior Planner from the State Planning Office who is active in the Kennebec Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited. “We’ve already lost fisheries on all the big rivers south of us including the Connecticut and Merrimack because of failed fish passage proposals. Our Kennebec deserves better.”

### Shaping the Future of the Kennebec and Species that Depend on It

Right now, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is conducting a dam licensing and relicensing process for the Kennebec dams that only occurs every 30-50 years. It will include an extensive environmental analysis of the impact that all four Kennebec dams have on Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fish species.

This moment is our best chance to shape the future of the Kennebec.

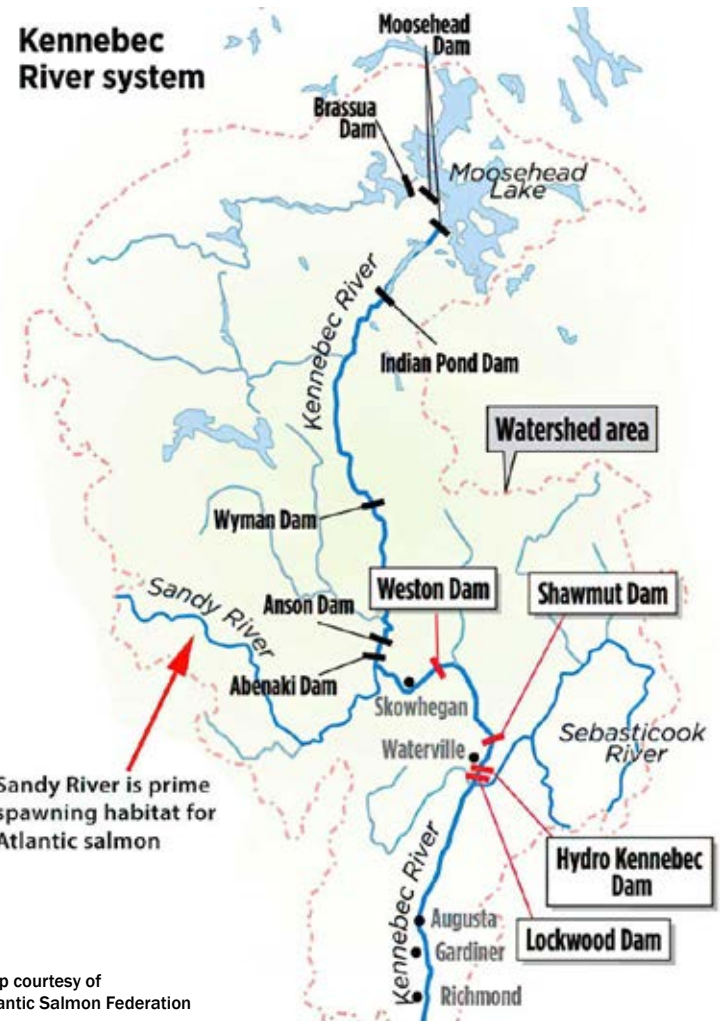
It is impossible to save Atlantic salmon—and to have any meaningful restoration of river herring, shad, and other sea-run fish in the Kennebec River above Waterville—if the four dams continue to operate.

“This moment is the opportunity for people of the Kennebec Valley to be a part

of a powerful international success story in the restoration of the Kennebec River as the preeminent biological hotspot for diadromous fish on earth,” says Waterville City Councilor Thomas Klepach.

Hundreds of Mainers have already begun to speak out for a new future for the Kennebec River. Join us today by visiting [nrcm.org](http://nrcm.org).

—Colin Durrant, NRCM Strategic Communications Director



Map courtesy of Atlantic Salmon Federation



Wolfden rally in Bangor, by Story Silo Media

## REJECTED:

### Katahdin Region Mine

When people stand up for Maine’s environment, it makes a difference! In February 2024, the dangerous zinc mine proposed for the Katahdin region was rejected after facing overwhelming statewide opposition. NRCM, along with opponents of the mine near and far, are breathing a sigh of relief for clean water, wildlife, forests, and Maine’s outdoor recreation economy after the Land Use Planning Commission officially voted to reject Wolfden Resources’ proposal to rezone the area around Pickett Mountain, stopping this disastrous project.

This victory is a testament to the power of community. More than a thousand Maine people stood up and spoke out against this threat, alongside NRCM, the Penobscot Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Conservation Law Foundation, Maine Audubon, Earthjustice, and countless other local businesses and organizations. NRCM will always stand up to companies that would damage and pollute Maine’s environment for profit. Taking on Wolfden was an organizational effort that required technical expertise, extraordinary communications and outreach, and collaboration with many partners. This work has always been about working collectively to build the future Mainers want, a future with clean air, clean water, and healthy communities. Thank you for standing alongside us. —CD



## Spring 2024 Tribute Gifts

Among gifts received from November 1, 2023-April 30, 2024

### IN HONOR OF:

Nicholas Bennett from Oren Helbok  
 The Denoncourt family from Rachel Putnam  
 Sarah T. Farrand from David C. and Tyler H. Farrand  
 Duane Huff from John Klemek  
 Mike and Barbara Kasabian from James Kaplan and Suzanne Meeker  
 Bill McKibben from Mr. and Mrs. Roger Bowen  
 Kevin G. Miller from Richard Bernstein  
 Nancy Prince from John and M.L. Connor McCall  
 Claire Raffel's birthday from Claire Oppenheim  
 Victoria A. Simon from Sharon Polk-Sadownik  
 Cary Slocum and Glenn Montgomery from Elena Brandt  
 Cathleen A. Staehli from Maine Elder Law Attorneys, P.A.  
 The dedicated contributions of the NRCM Board from Ellen T. Asherman  
 My father who brought our family to Maine 40 years ago from Sara Soens

### IN MEMORY OF:

Robert J. Carson Jr. from Bob and Clare Carson  
 Lori Dombek from Anonymous  
 Florence Graham from Thomas Graham  
**Bart Hague from:**  
 Kathy Copson  
 Dr. William S. Holt and Mrs. Mary Jean Holt  
 Peter M. and Kathleen Leslie  
 Larry Hardman from Carolyn Hardman  
 Lois Hinckley from Edward McCarthy  
 Dennis E. Kordish, Esq. from Victor A. Kordish  
 Susan Lynn Miller from Allison Miller  
 Diane J. Schroeder from David N. Kiefner  
 Carroll E. Taylor from William J. and Carolyn A. McGuckin  
 My parents who taught me to love and respect Maine's outdoors from Ann Hobart

**Would you like to honor or memorialize someone with your next gift? Include "In honor of" or "In memory of" alongside their name in the check memo line or online gift notes.**



## Now Accepting Nominations for NRCM's 18th Annual People's Choice Award

Help us honor an individual or group who has volunteered their time to protect Maine's environment. Someone who has gone above and beyond to protect a special place, or helped pass an environmental safeguard, or worked to stop polluting companies from contaminating our state. Someone who has devoted their time and effort to making sure future generations will be able to enjoy the kind of Maine we know and love today.

We're accepting nominations for our People's Choice Award through **Thursday, August 8**, so get your nomination in today! NRCM will compile the nominees and post finalists on our website, where, from **Monday, August 19** through noon on **Monday, September 9**, you, your friends, and your family can vote for the person you think most deserves this year's People's Choice Award. (**Please note:** This award honors volunteers, so we cannot consider someone who currently sits on a regulatory board, is in the Legislature, or if they are or were serving in a paid position while carrying out the work for which you feel they should be nominated.)

Please fill out this form or visit our website ([www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org)) to nominate someone today. The winner will be presented with the award at NRCM's Conservation Leadership Awards special event this fall. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Beth Comeau at [beth@nrcm.org](mailto:beth@nrcm.org) or (207) 430-0106.

Your name, phone number, & email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe why you believe this person deserves the 2024 People's Choice Award (include any of the nominee's organizational affiliations related to the work). Please be as specific as possible and use a separate sheet if needed. Mail to the attention of Beth Comeau, NRCM, 3 Wade St, Augusta, ME 04330. You can also email your nomination to [beth@nrcm.org](mailto:beth@nrcm.org) or nominate online at [www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



David Small

### MY MAINE THIS WEEK

NRCM member **David Small of Old Town, Maine**, never disappoints with his beautiful Maine wildlife photos. He recently shared this photo of a Yellow Warbler enjoying the sunshine in the Essex Street Woods in Bangor.

**Do you have a photograph of Maine you'd like to share? Send your submissions to [beth@nrcm.org](mailto:beth@nrcm.org). Visit "My Maine This Week" online at [www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org) for guidelines and more photos.**

**EDITOR** / Allison Childs Wells, Senior Director, Communications

**DESIGN** / brightredbicycle design

**CONTRIBUTORS** / Dot Avery, Senator Rick Bennett, Josh Caldwell, Beth Comeau, Lee Dassler, Pete Didisheim, Colleen Donohoe, Colin Durrant, Marc Edwards, Ellerie Ezekiel, Stephanie Griffin, Betty Hartley, Toby Kilgore, Codi Riley-Havu, Mike Smith, Sierra Toomey, Allison Childs Wells, Ben Wyman

**EDITORIAL BOARD** / Beth Comeau, Colin Durrant, Allison Childs Wells

**BANNER IMAGE** / Kennebec River by ETheberge/NRCM

**SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM** /  
 Pete Didisheim, Senior Director, Advocacy  
 Allison Wells, Senior Director, Communications

**NRCM BOARD OF DIRECTORS** /

**Chair**, Norton H. (Buzz) Lamb, Jr.

**Vice Chair**, Amy Scott

**Treasurer**, Kevin Kobel

**Secretary**, Marcia Harrington

Lucy Abbott

Sarah Cotton

Sam Day

Anthony Eames

Maria Gallace

Francesca Galluccio-Steele

Al Manville

Diana McDowell

Peter Millard

Kathryn Olmstead

Liz Rettenmaier

David Schylling



3 Wade Street,  
 Augusta, ME 04330  
 (207) 622-3101  
 (800) 287-2345

[nrcm.org](http://nrcm.org)





State House, Augusta NRCM file photo

## Report Card - from Page 1

containers back for cleaning and reuse. This is great news for local entrepreneurs who have been blocked from doing so by current state policy and agency guidance.

Lawmakers passed a supplemental budget that includes \$60 million in storm relief funding to help businesses impacted by the severe storms in December and January, and to upgrade infrastructure to be more resilient in the face of climate change. They also approved the Governor's request for an additional \$5 million for the Community Resilience Partnership program, which supports local climate projects identified by cities, towns, and tribal governments.

Decision-makers enacted a bill addressing creation of an offshore wind port, ensuring that an extensive permitting and environmental analysis process can start to evaluate potential port locations, including the Mills Administration's preferred site on Sears Island. The bill includes \$1 million for a new sand dune restoration and protection fund and will protect 10 additional acres on Sears Island (two-thirds of the island already is permanently protected).

The Legislature passed bills that will strengthen enforcement of shoreland zoning, create a new Office of Community Affairs, and establish a new electric vehicle pilot program for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles.

Lawmakers again this year did a good job defeating bills that would have undermined existing safeguards for Maine's environment, including one that would have opened up Maine's coasts to industrial rockweed harvesting and another

designed to weaken Maine's net metering policy for renewable energy.

The bill that would have recognized the sovereignty rights of Wabanaki Nations was amended to a much more limited bill that addresses jurisdiction by the Nations over criminal justice matters and drinking water regulation. The Wabanaki Alliance supported this outcome and will continue seeking full recognition of tribal sovereignty. NRCM will continue to support that outcome through future legislation.

When the lawmakers adjourned, they did so without providing funding for 245 bills that were left to die on the "special appropriations table." NRCM supported a number of these bills, which passed the House and Senate but then failed to receive the funding needed to be enacted.

As in the past, NRCM worked closely this year with our colleagues in the Environmental Priorities Coalition, comprised of 34 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations, as well as many other conservation partners and allies. We're pleased to include a sampling of voices from our partners in the legislative summaries that follow.



Together, we helped protect the Maine we all love. Thank you.

—Pete Didisheim, Senior Director of Advocacy

## + Moving Forward with Offshore Wind



J.Shapiro/NRCM

Through passage of a bill (LD 2266) in both the House and Senate, and adoption of nearly identical language in the supplemental budget, the Legislature authorized the State to proceed with the permitting process for a port that will be necessary to launch an offshore wind power industry in Maine. Building a port for Maine workers to build floating offshore

wind turbines will be essential to realizing the climate and economic benefits of the vast clean energy resource in the Gulf of Maine. By supporting this bill, the Legislature is allowing the lengthy state and federal permitting processes to move forward, which will include evaluation of alternative sites for a port. Legislative action included creating a new Coastal Sand Dune Restoration and Protection Fund at the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, with \$1 million in initial funding for sand dune conservation projects. NRCM is part of a strong and diverse coalition of labor and environmental organizations that support the development of offshore wind as a critical element of Maine's efforts to create new jobs, reduce climate-changing emissions, and transition away from fossil fuels. The coalition supported passage of LD 2266.

*"The importance of building an offshore wind port in Maine cannot be overstated. Offshore wind isn't just a source of clean energy, it's a once-in-a-century economic development opportunity for our state."*

—Sen. Stacy Brenner (D-Cumberland)

## + Recognizing Wabanaki Sovereignty



CBurrant/NRCM

Progress toward achieving State recognition of sovereignty for the Wabanaki Nations in Maine was realized with the signing of LD 2007, the first time the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act has been significantly amended. The new law reflects a negotiated agreement reached between the

Wabanaki Nations, House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross, Office of the Attorney General, and Governor Mills. LD 2007 reflects many of the criminal justice recommendations from the 2019-2020 bipartisan Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. It also allows the Penobscot Nation a greater role in the management of its drinking water. NRCM is an active member of the Wabanaki Alliance working toward full recognition of sovereignty for the Wabanaki people. Without the legally protected right to self-determination, the tribes have limited regulatory control over the natural resources that impact their communities and livelihoods. We will continue to work in partnership with the tribes to protect Maine's environment and move toward recognition of their inherent sovereignty.

*"Having this expanded jurisdiction helps our communities protect our people and enhance our peace, prosperity, and safety. The signing of this bill on Earth Day is a good reminder that robust and collaborative relationships between tribal and state governments is a proven and tested way to heal and serve our shared Mother, the Earth. We remain hopeful and we remain focused on this journey of restoration and change."* —Maulian Bryant, Penobscot Nation Tribal Ambassador



## + Green Light for Reusable Containers

Lawmakers took a simple yet important step toward reducing packaging waste by enacting a law that will allow businesses to provide food in reusable containers and be able to receive them back to sanitize and reuse them. Surprisingly, current state policy and guidance prevents businesses from adopting sensible reuse strategies. We learned about this legal hurdle from Kate Pilotte, owner of Farm & Fish, a Castine-based, locally sourced meal kit service. Her customers requested reusable packaging, but she was prohibited from providing it because of a restriction in Maine law. Kate's State Senator, Nicole Grohoski (D-Hancock), responded to this problem by introducing a bill (LD 2091) to allow businesses to move away from disposable packaging where possible. The bill received a unanimous vote out of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, then sailed through the House and Senate with unanimous support. It was signed into law by the Governor. This sensible new law will help reduce waste and create new business opportunities as we continue to tackle the waste problem through strategies that "reduce, reuse, and recycle."



*"This new law will open the door for companies around Maine to make decisions that are right for their business, safely meet customer demands, relieve burdens on local municipalities tasked with waste disposal, and explore new business models."*  
—Kate Pilotte, owner of Farm & Fish (Castine, ME)

## + Enforcement Boost for Lake Water Quality



Lawmakers enacted a new law to enable towns and the State's Land Use Planning Commission to respond to major shoreland zone violations where wealthy homeowners have used litigation as a tool to avoid complying with this critical lake water quality law. The bill was introduced by Sen. Tim Nangle (D-Cumberland)

in response to a wealthy landowner on Sebago Lake who violated Maine's shoreland zoning law and caused the Town of Raymond to incur thousands of dollars in legal fees as it attempted to enforce the law. The bill allows officials to hold such violators accountable by claiming a lien against a property and revoking permits issued for work in the shoreland zone. The bill will protect towns and lakes from homeowners who ignore the shoreland zoning law and attempt to use their wealth to get away with it.

*"This new law will give municipalities and the Land Use Planning Commission a tool they need to more effectively stop egregious shoreland zoning violations and protect our lake water quality and wildlife habitat."* —Sue Gallo, Executive Director, Maine Lakes

## + Industrial Rockweed Harvesting Bill Defeated

Early in the session, lawmakers on the Marine Resources Committee voted unanimously to defeat a bill (LD 2003) that would have opened Maine's coastlines to unrestricted harvesting



of rockweed—a key ecological resource used as habitat by more than 100 marine species. Stopping industrial rockweed harvesting has been an NRCM priority in recent years, so we were pleased that this bill was quickly dispensed with.

*"I oppose this bill because I fear turning rockweed into a large-scale commercial fishery is going to lead to the depletion of the natural population, which will definitely have a negative impact on our coastal ecosystems."* —Kelsey Fenwick, Lobsterboat Sternman (Port Lyde, ME)

## + + Big Win for Maine Trails



*"Bravo to the Maine Legislature for recognizing the breadth, diversity, and statewide distribution of this coalition of supporters of the Maine Trails Bond. We appreciate this opportunity to vote for the Trails Bond."* —Gabe Perkins, Co-Coordinator, Maine Trails Coalition and Executive Director, Inland Woods + Trails (Bethel, ME)

Although lawmakers were at odds on many issues this year, they found common ground on a proposed \$30 million Maine Trails Bond. Introduced by Rep. Jessica Fay (D-Raymond) and a bipartisan group of cosponsors, the Maine Trails Bond (LD 1156) received overwhelming support by the House (133-6) and Senate (29-3)—far surpassing the two-thirds vote needed to pass a bond out of the Legislature. Now, the measure will appear on the November ballot to be considered by Maine voters.

The Trails Bond was endorsed by one of the broadest coalitions supporting a bond measure in years, with 520 organizations, businesses, and towns supporting the bond and encouraging lawmakers to send it to the ballot. This level of legislative and statewide support demonstrates that Maine people value our existing trails and recognize the importance of investing in them for the future. With further investments, Maine could be one of the top-tier states in the nation that's recognized for outstanding trails that support all types of users. Although trails are an important part of Maine's \$3.3 billion outdoor recreation economy, the state currently invests essentially nothing in trail development and maintenance. Small amounts of federal and private funding help support some trail projects, but these sources are grossly insufficient to meet demand. ATV and snowmobile clubs receive funding from vehicle registrations and the gas tax, but these funds also fall far short of the need.

Maine voters have approved more than \$1.1 billion for highway bonds over the past 15 years but have never had the opportunity to vote for a trails bond. There's every reason to believe that the bond will receive strong support in November. If approved, it will provide \$7.5 million in funding per year for four years for trail projects that will make a big difference for Maine people, communities, visitors, and our economy generations to come.

## + New Climate Funding for Communities and Businesses

Climate change already is having significant, expensive impacts on Maine people, businesses, and our environment. We have no choice but to respond to these changes through investments that help Maine become more resilient and accelerate our transition away from fossil fuels. As part of the supplemental appropriations bill, lawmakers took two important steps that will help. First, they approved \$60 million for Maine businesses and communities responding to the storm damage that devastated working waterfronts along Maine's coastline and damaged infrastructure throughout inland Maine. This spending will help Mainers recover and rebuild to better protect against future storms. Lawmakers also provided an additional \$5 million for the popular Community Resilience Partnership program, which supports projects by cities, towns, and tribal governments to reduce climate impacts and make their communities more resilient. This program has already supported creative problem-solving in 175 cities, towns, and tribal governments. The new funding will allow another 100 communities to participate.



*"Expanding the capacity of the Community Resilience Partnership to include 100 new communities would not only benefit the current and future livelihoods of Maine residents, but increase our state's resilience to human-caused climate change and increased storms as a whole."*  
—Olivia Lenfestey, Island Institute Fellow (Islesboro, ME)





Beth Comeau

## + New Maine Office of Community Affairs Created

The Legislature approved the Governor's proposal to create a new Maine Office of Community Affairs, which will bring together planning and technical support staff from multiple agencies, including

the Municipal Planning Assistance Program, Maine Coastal Program, Community Resilience Partnership, and other entities. NRCM strongly supports this new office, which will help fill a planning and technical assistance role for Maine communities that has been lost since the State Planning Office was dismantled in 2012.

*"Communities across the state are dealing with major challenges, tighter budgets, and newly emerging and constantly developing issues such as climate resilience and housing. The State needs high-level coordination and a means to measure progress as we move forward on challenges such as these, and having one office tasked with that effort will be essential to success."*

—Amanda Bunker, President, Maine Association of Planners

## - Inaction on Natural Gas Expansion

At a time when Maine is seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, we should not be subsidizing the expansion of Maine's gas distribution pipelines—which have a 50-year average economic life.

That's why NRCM worked this session with the Office of the Public Advocate and other allies to support a bill (LD 2077) that, as introduced, would protect ratepayers by curbing open-ended expansions of natural gas and scrutinize the operations of gas utilities. The bill would have terminated existing subsidies for adding new customers to the gas system; prevented utilities from expanding into new municipalities; studied geothermal energy as a potential transition for the gas utility workforce and existing infrastructure; and studied the indoor air quality and health impacts of burning fossil fuels inside residences and commercial buildings. Not surprisingly, the bill faced stiff opposition from the fossil fuel sector, including from the American Petroleum Institute, American Gas Association, American Biogas Council, Summit Natural Gas, Bangor Natural Gas, and scores of others who reacted very strongly to any possible limitations on the build-out of natural gas infrastructure in Maine.

After extensive negotiations, the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee approved a scaled-back study bill, which NRCM supported, but the bill eventually died. On the final day of the session, lawmakers failed to adopt a minor amendment that would have clarified that the University of Maine Cooperative Extension had agreed to do the study within existing resources. The bill passed the House and Senate, required no State funding, but died for lack of final action.

*"This bill was introduced to support Maine's clean energy transition. It would have helped prevent an increase in methane emissions, the major component of natural gas, which has more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide. The amended bill would have resulted in a valuable study of the full range of issues associated with natural gas. It's a shame that it wasn't enacted."* —Jack Shapiro, NRCM (Climate & Clean Energy Director)

## + Nuclear Power Public Relations Bill Defeated

The Legislature defeated a bill (LD 1549) introduced by Rep. Reagan Paul (R-Winterport) to promote the development of so-called "small modular nuclear reactors." The bill is part of a nationwide public relations campaign by the Nuclear Energy Institute to create the impression that states are interested in helping revive the nuclear power industry. Lawmakers did the right thing by defeating this bill.



*"The hard truth is that when a product isn't financially viable and there are more cost-effective alternatives available, market demand evaporates. Nuclear power has failed in the competitive market of electricity generation, where there are less complex, more affordable choices."* —Rep. Gerry Runte (D-York)

## + Promoting Medium- and Heavy-duty Electric Vehicles

The Legislature passed a bill (LD 122), introduced by Sen. Henry Ingwerson (D-York), to create a pilot program to encourage adoption of medium- and heavy-duty electric vehicles by Maine

businesses. The new law directs Efficiency Maine to discount the upfront cost of the vehicles through rebates, vouchers, or other financial incentives, and to gather data on the use and efficacy of those vehicles in commercial settings over the next two years. This information could create a basis for expansion of the program.

*"At Luke's Lobster, we have researched the options available for electric heavy-duty trucks and fast-charging infrastructure. We are ready to pilot this technology on a path to full adoption."*

—Ben Conniff, Co-founder and Chief Innovation Officer, Luke's Lobster



JCalderwell/NRCM

## Unfunded Bills

The following bills were among the 245 approved by the House and Senate that died on the "special appropriations table" because funding was not provided in the supplemental appropriations bill. Some funding requirements would cover agency staffing and other implementation expenses.

**Forest Advisory Board** LD 993 would have created an advisory board with diverse stakeholders to provide advice to the Maine Forest Service about the state's forest action plans. *Funding not provided: About \$5,000 in annual appropriations*

**Environmental Justice Funding** LD 1621 would have required the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to provide meaningful and equitable involvement of historically marginalized and underserved communities in DEP policy development, regulations, and decision-making. *Funding not provided: \$725,702 over the next two years*



courtesy Memorial Middle School

**Outdoor School for All Maine Students** LD 1817 would have created immersive outdoor education experiences for Maine students enrolled in grade 4 through grade 8. *Funding not provided: \$6.2 million annually*

**Reduction and Recycling of Food Waste** LD 1009 would have curbed food waste from large generators, starting in 2026 with entities that create more than 2 tons per week of food waste and are located within 30 miles of an organics recycler. Food waste

would be kept out of landfills and incinerators and directed toward agricultural applications, composting, or anaerobic digestion. *Funding not provided: About \$550,000 annually*

**Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks** LD 25 would have provided free admission for members of federally recognized Indian nations, tribes, or bands to State-owned parks, historic sites, beaches, and camping areas. *Funding not provided: About \$30,000 annually*

**Land for Maine's Future Funding** LD 1285 would have provided an additional \$20 million in funding for land conservation through the Land for Maine's Future program. *Funding not provided: \$20 million*

**Expand PFAS Testing to Private Wells** LD 1488 would have required residential landlords that have residential drinking water wells to test the wells for PFAS and other contaminants every five years and provide the test results to tenants. *Funding not provided: About \$100,000 annually*