

Moosehead Region Futures Committee

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The Moosehead Region Futures Committee's mission is to encourage, gather and incorporate area residents' ideas and expertise to shape and balance the region's future development, economy, and conservation efforts.

June 2009

To our valued friends and supporters:

In March, nearly four years after Plum Creek submitted its re-zoning proposal for its lands in the Moosehead Lake region, the staff and consultants of Maine's Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) released their revised version of Plum Creek's Concept Plan. This document, over 800 pages in length, incorporated the changes approved by the LURC Commissioners in outline form last fall. The Moosehead Futures Steering Committee carefully reviewed this document and submitted detailed comments to LURC in April. On June 9, LURC released what we believe is a close-to-final version of the Concept Plan.

LURC's version of Plum Creek's Concept Plan, as compared to Plum Creek's initial submission in 2005, includes a number of improvements for which Moosehead Futures successfully advocated:

With regard to development:

- Lots proposed for several high-value natural areas have been relocated.
- The size of the Lily Bay development zone has been reduced by more than 50 percent.
- A proposed resort has been located at Big Moose Mountain, close to the service center of Greenville.

With regard to conservation:

- The acreage of donated working forest easement lands has increased over eightfold.
- Easement terms have been strengthened so that conservation values will be somewhat better protected.

(For a more detailed listing of revisions for which Moosehead Futures has successfully advocated, see our November 2008 update, available at www.mooseheadfutures.org, or contact our office and we will be happy to mail you a copy.)



Despite these improvements, we remain concerned that Plum Creek's Concept Plan still falls far short of being a good deal for our communities and for Maine citizens:

- We remain concerned that the type and amount of development still allowed in certain areas—in particular, Brassua Lake and Lily Bay—will degrade the essential character of the Moosehead region and undermine our nature-based economy.
- We remain concerned that commercial and industrial enterprises allowed within working

forest easement lands—septic spreading, water and gravel extraction, and wind power facilities—will compromise the conservation values of the easement lands. We do not believe that large-scale industrial facilities in so-called “conservation” lands would mitigate adverse impacts of resort and residential construction in nearby development zones.

We also remain concerned about Plum Creek's poor record of land stewardship in our state:

- Plum Creek has incurred the largest fine in Maine's history for violations of the Forest Practices Act.
- Last October, a Plum Creek logging operation on Kibby Mountain (in western Maine) caused a mudslide nearly 900 feet long.
- Just this past February, Plum Creek admitted logging part of a deer wintering area in Indian Stream Township, in violation of a 2007 agreement with Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. This area lies within the lands that are supposed to serve as conservation balance for Plum Creek's proposed development.

What will happen next?

Although it is impossible to predict the future, the following is our best attempt to outline the most likely course of events. We expect that LURC staff and consultants will spend the next couple of months writing a document explaining why, in their view, the revised Concept Plan meets the criteria for approval by LURC Commissioners. The Commissioners will then vote to approve the plan, likely in August or September. After that, it is likely that one or more organizations will initiate a legal appeal of the plan's approval. We expect that it will take at least a year, and possibly much longer, before the court system resolves these appeals.

During the appeal process, LURC may begin evaluation of applications to construct resorts or subdivisions in specific areas re-zoned for development under the Concept Plan. Each application will present further opportunities for public input. LURC will not be able to issue any permits for actual construction until all appeals are resolved.

Acquisition of the Roaches Pond Tract by the Appalachian Mountain Club will be completed within 45 days of the Commissioners' vote to approve the Concept Plan, regardless of the status of any appeals.

What would happen if Plum Creek decided not to go through with its development?

This question was a major focus of discussion during deliberations held by LURC on June 2. After the Commission approves the Concept Plan, Plum Creek could decide it no longer wants to pursue development of the areas re-zoned for resorts and subdivisions. Potential reasons for such a decision could include: a prolonged downturn in the real estate market, a lengthy appeal process, the passage of new laws restricting development, or the inability to obtain federal permits that may be required for development in some areas. If Plum Creek decided to "walk away" from the development rights approved under the Concept Plan and requested that LURC terminate the plan, LURC has stipulated that the lands intended to serve as conservation balance for the development would remain protected under the terms of the working forest easement for up to 5 years. This 5-year period would allow LURC time to conduct a planning process for the Moosehead region. This process would result in zoning that would replace the Concept Plan and guide future development in the region.

What role will Moosehead Futures play going forward?

A strong, articulate, well-informed local voice will be vitally important as LURC reviews the many development applications that will likely follow approval of the Concept Plan. Local understanding of these applications could play a crucial role in minimizing adverse impacts to high-value natural areas—such as Brassua Lake and Lily Bay—that define our waters, support our wildlife, and sustain our economy. Local involvement could also play a crucial role in limiting adverse impacts of commercial and industrial activities in easement lands.

Working together, we have made a difference—and we will continue to do so in the future.

We have come a long way since Plum Creek submitted its initial proposal for the Moosehead region four years ago, but we never forget the values, hopes, and needs you have shared with us from the outset. As the only

independent local organization intervening in the Plum Creek process, we continue to serve as your eyes, ears, and voice. The knowledge and experience we have gained will serve us well as we work toward a vibrant future for our local communities and the natural resources that sustain us.

Without you, our work would not be possible. We remain very grateful for your loyal support. Please feel free to contact any one of us with your ideas, concerns, or questions. You may also call 207-695-4888 or email us at info@mooseheadfutures.org.

We know these are tough times. But if you still want a local voice to remind policy-makers about what matters to us, we absolutely need your help, right here, right now. We operate on a shoestring budget. Every single dollar we receive really does count. We currently rely on volunteer labor and donated office space. But to continue serving as your voice in the Plum Creek process—and to keep you informed as events unfold—we must raise money to cover our website, office supplies, and postage. Any contribution of any size you can afford will truly make an impact. Think of it. If 50 people send just \$10 each, our local voice will have \$500. That \$500 will go a long way with us. It is just that simple. Think of what a \$30 or \$50 donation, or more, could do.

We have heard from many of you about the good work we are doing. That keeps us going. Please help keep us going in a practical way by sending a check by mail or donating by credit card via our website at www.mooseheadfutures.org. Our status as a 501(c)(3) public charity means that your donations are tax-deductible.

Together, we can secure our region's unique "quality of place" and way of life, not only for ourselves, but for the generations of Mainers—and visitors—who will be coming here long after we are gone. They, like us, will cherish the distinctive woods, waters, and wildlife found only in the Moosehead region—just as we do today.

This is our final opportunity—right now—to get it right.



Sincerely,

Wendy Weiger, Executive Director

On behalf of the Moosehead Futures Steering Committee: Suzanne AuClair (Vice President), Rockwood; George Bakajza, Sandbar Tract Township; Sandra Neily, Sandy Bay; Christina Pritham, Greenville; Joe Richards, Greenville; Wendy Weiger, Greenville and Frenchtown Township; John Willard (President), Rockwood; Joan Wisher, Frenchtown Township.