

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.

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To our valued friends and supporters:

By now, many of you know that Maine's Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) recently made some significant decisions regarding Plum Creek's proposed Concept Plan for the Moosehead Lake region. At this important juncture, we want to update you on what Moosehead Futures has accomplished so far, what will happen next, and the important role that Moosehead Futures—with your support—will continue to play as the Plum Creek process moves forward.

On October 1, three and a half years after Plum Creek submitted its initial application, Maine's Land Use Regulation Commissioners voted to accept a final round of revisions to Plum Creek's proposal as recommended by LURC staff and consultants. These revisions have since been accepted by Plum Creek and its partners in the Conservation Framework, The Nature Conservancy, the Forest Society of Maine, and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Since April 2005, Plum Creek's proposal has gone through four major revisions: in April 2006, April 2007, and October 2007, with the fourth and final round of revisions developed this year by LURC staff and consultants following four weeks of public and intervenor hearings. The final version of the Concept Plan will include several improvements for which Moosehead Futures successfully advocated, as outlined below. You should be proud to know that your ideas and support played a key role in these revisions—working together, we have made a difference! (A map of Plum Creek's proposal showing the latest revisions is available on the Moosehead Futures website at www.mooseheadfutures.org.)

Revisions to Plum Creek's proposal since April 2005 for which Moosehead Futures successfully advocated:

Development:

- Relocation of lots proposed for high-value natural areas:
 - Big W Township (northwest shore of Moosehead Lake)
 - Northwest shore of Brassua Lake
 - Moose River
 - North shore of Long Pond
 - East shore of Upper Wilson Pond
 - Prong Pond
 - 8 remote ponds (Fish, Luther, Center, Ellis, Knights, Second/Third Roach, and Penobscot Ponds)
- Location of a proposed resort at Big Moose Mountain, close to the service center of Greenville and existing resort development
- Reduction in the size of the Lily Bay development zone by more than 50% [however, the remaining development acreage and the total number of development units far exceed Moosehead Futures' recommendations]

Conservation:

- Increase in donated working forest easement lands (the 11,000 acres proposed in 2005 have grown to approximately 94,000 acres in the latest revisions)
- Strengthening of easement terms so that conservation values are better protected

Other elements of proposal:

- Provision for affordable housing
- Impact fee assessment each time a house lot is sold with potential contributions from resorts as well [these funds will support local needs related to recreation, affordable housing, wildlife, and invasive species control]
- Bicycle/pedestrian connection from Greenville to Lily Bay State Park and from Lily Bay State Park to the Lily Bay development zone
- Funding to support design and implementation of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Greenville

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

- *Four areas are still slated for development that is inconsistent with LURC's goals: the south peninsula of Brassua Lake, the Lily Bay peninsula, Indian Pond, and the west shore of Upper Wilson Pond.* We let LURC know that these are high-value natural areas, that they are signature places of the Moosehead region and key elements of the "green infrastructure" needed to support a sustainable nature tourism economy. We believe that no amount of conservation in other areas could offset the cumulative adverse impacts of the types of development that will be zoned for these special places on our waterways. Moosehead Futures continues to seek development that works for the long-term well-being of our communities, based on what we have heard from local citizens over the past three and a half years and what we have learned through participation in many meetings and hearings.
- *With regard to conservation, we have concluded that Plum Creek's proposal sets a dangerous precedent.*

Under the terms of a Concept Plan, Plum Creek is required by law to create a "publicly beneficial balance" by offering conservation that will mitigate the adverse impacts of proposed development. Plum Creek must provide this conservation to Maine citizens in exchange for the granting of extraordinary development rights: rights to which Plum Creek would not otherwise be entitled. LURC has determined that the Balance easement offered by Plum Creek is *not* adequate for this purpose. Recently, LURC decided to count the Conservation Framework—a private deal for which Plum Creek will be well paid—toward the "publicly beneficial balance" the law requires. Eight Maine attorneys who are experts in environmental law have concluded that Maine law does not justify this approach, which amounts to "double dipping" on Plum Creek's part.

Moosehead Futures believes that Plum Creek's plan goes beyond double dipping to triple dipping, since Plum Creek will also be allowed to develop commercial and industrial enterprises within the working forest easement lands that are supposed to serve as balance for the adverse impacts of development elsewhere. We remain concerned that these commercial and industrial enterprises will compromise the conservation values of the easement lands. Some of these enterprises—which include septic spreading, water and gravel extraction, and wind power facilities—will likely prove enormously profitable to Plum Creek. While we have no problem with a company making money on its own land, we believe these activities compromise the intent of the conservation balance. 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.

There are some "gray areas" in Plum Creek's proposal where the long-term outcomes remain uncertain. In the greater Rockwood area, LURC acknowledged that the acreage being rezoned for development is expansive and excessive. As a result, the Commission is requiring that 50% of the acreage in the Rockwood/Blue Ridge area and 25% of the acreage on the south peninsula of Brassua Lake be held back from development and decided upon after the 30-year life of the Concept Plan. Plum Creek will be allowed to develop the same total number of lots, but must concentrate these lots into a smaller acreage. After 30 years, LURC said these reserved lands could allow additional development or could be added to conservation, depending on future community needs.

What will happen next? LURC staff and consultants will spend the next few months working out the final details of the Concept Plan and writing specific language that will integrate the latest revisions into Plum Creek's application, in consultation with Plum Creek and its partners in the Conservation Framework. A comment period will follow allowing Moosehead Futures, other interveners, and citizens to submit suggestions regarding any perceived inconsistencies, loopholes, or areas that appear to require further clarification. We expect that the LURC Commissioners will vote to approve the final amended application in late winter or early spring.

Approval of the Concept Plan does not mean Plum Creek will immediately break ground on development projects. LURC's approval of Plum Creek's amended application only results in the rezoning of portions of Plum Creek's land to allow for possible development. However, before any actual construction can occur, Plum Creek (or developers who purchase Plum Creek's land) will have to submit a detailed development application for each proposed subdivision or resort. Each of these applications will undergo a LURC review that will allow further public input. Public scrutiny of development applications may play a crucial role in minimizing adverse impacts to high-value natural areas that define the Moosehead Lake region, such as Brassua Lake and Lily Bay. Public oversight could also play a crucial role in limiting adverse impacts of the commercial and industrial activities that can occur in easement lands.

The Commissioners' October 1 vote marked the end of the first phase of our work—but there is much more work to come. A strong, articulate, well-informed local voice will be vitally important as LURC reviews the many development

applications that will follow approval of Plum Creek's amended proposal. Working together, we can continue to craft creative solutions to protect the high-value natural resources that will sustain our region's unique "quality of place" and way of life for generations to come. Without our voices, the developers from away will surely decide for us.

With your continuing support, Moosehead Futures will remain in the forefront of the coming development review phase. We know times are tough, and money is tight, but if you continue to believe in making a better plan that takes into account our communities, please take a moment right now and show us by sending any donation in any amount. We operate on a shoestring budget, so every single dollar we receive is put to good use. Your contribution will be stretched a long, long way. You may send a check by mail or donate by credit card via our website at www.mooseheadfutures.org.

As always, we are very grateful for your loyal support. And, as we have for more than three years, we will continue to show you *our* loyal support as the Plum Creek process moves forward. Please feel free to call or email the Moosehead Futures office, or contact any of our Steering Committee members, with your ideas or questions. Our work depends on you.

We promise we will do all that we can to continue working for smart planning in the Moosehead region—for our communities, our businesses, and for all of our futures.

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; Jim Thorne, Misery Gore; Wendy Weiger, Greenville and Frenchtown Township; John Willard (President), Rockwood; Joan Wisner, Frenchtown Township.