

Maine Landowners to Benefit from Forestry Initiative

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Snow-covered stone steps along the trail to Big Moose Pond in the Little Moose Public Lands west of Greenville.

Eligible Maine forest landowners will be able to apply for federal funds to assist them with forest land planning and management while improving wildlife habitat on their property, thanks to increased funding from the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

NRCS Chief Dave White recently announced the allocation of an additional \$5.9 million in Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) funding under the New England/New York Forestry Initiative, \$2 million of which are for projects in Maine.

The federal funding is a result of Governor Baldacci's Keeping Maine's Forests Initiative, according to state officials. Keeping Maine's Forests is a broad coalition of forest interests ranging from land and mill owners to conservation organizations that have called attention to the importance of efforts to maintain Maine's forest land base.

"These funds come at a great time," said Baldacci. "The award demonstrates how the efforts of broad coalitions like Keeping Maine's Forests Initiative can help Maine landowners and our environment. We appreciate the value of these funds, which will help us achieve the objectives of keeping forests as forests, improving their stewardship and strengthening forest-based economies."

The funds can be used for a wide variety of activities to improve wildlife habitats, from enhancing aquatic habitats by reducing erosion to improving creatures from birds to reptiles on land, according to Juan Hernandez, NRCS state conservationist for Maine.

The funds, for example, could be used for activities such as enhancing the regeneration of softwoods in deer wintering areas, which are critical to survival of white-tailed deer, particularly in the northern and western portions of the state. Both state and federal agencies have identified improved management of deer wintering areas as an important priority.

"This is real progress," said Matthew Dunlap, Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM) board member. "It enables us to improve conditions on the ground for wildlife and benefit landowners, giving them more reasons to keep their forests as forests."

Rich Merk, Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine president, noted that “family forest landowners can clearly benefit from this funding if they choose to participate and wish to benefit wildlife on their lands.”

Karen Woodsum of the Sierra Club pointed out that “in addition to the intrinsic value of Maine’s wildlife, a wide variety of wildlife-oriented activities are important to the state’s economy.”

Membership of the Keeping Maine’s Forests Initiative includes: Appalachian Mountain Club, Baskahegan Company, Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce, East Machias and Machias Watershed Councils, Environmental Funders Network, Forest Society of Maine, Huber Resources, Katahdin Forest Management, Maine Audubon, Maine Department of Conservation, Maine Forest Products Council, Maine Professional Guides Association, Maine Pulp & Paper Association, Maine State Planning Office, Maine TREE Foundation, Maine Wilderness Guides, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Penobscot Indian Nation, Piscataquis County Office, Prentiss & Carlisle, Sierra Club, Small Woodland Owners Association of Maine, Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine, The Nature Conservancy, Treeline Inc., and the Trust for Public Lands.