

1-22-2002

Land for Maine's Future Program Government Evaluation Act Presentation, 2002

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Recommended Citation

Land for Maine's Future, "Land for Maine's Future Program Government Evaluation Act Presentation, 2002" (2002). *Land for Maine's Future*. 7.
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Land for Maine's Future

Government Evaluation Act
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry

January 22, 2002

(pictures deleted for web version)

Program Purpose

- Enhance the social and economic well-being of Maine citizens
- Maintain quality and availability of natural areas for recreation, conservation, wildlife habitat, ecological functions, and scenic beauty
- Protect Maine's heritage for future generations
 - (5 MRSA sec 6200)

Program History

- Established in 1987
- Voters approved \$35 million land bond
- Legislature appropriated \$3 million in 1998
- Voters approved \$50 million in 1999
- Protected almost 100,000 acres of the best of Maine

Program Administration

- Board Oversight
- Interagency Cooperation
- SPO Program Management
- Program Staffing
- Program Budget

Board Oversight

- 11-member board members
- Six public members nominated by governor; confirmed by Legislature
- Five standing members; Commissioners of state natural resources agencies
- Fiduciary responsibilities for LMF Fund
- Significant program responsibilities

SPO Program Management

- LMF housed at State Planning Office
- SPO provides multiple forms of support
- SPO coordinates interagency implementation of LMF

Interagency Cooperation

- Cooperative staffing arrangements with four sister agencies allows LMF mission to be carried out (Ag, DOC, IFW, DMR)
- AG Office provides overall legal support
- DOT provides legal assistance
- DEP conducts environmental hazards assessments
- Maine Historical Preservation Commission performs archeological inventories
- Maine Natural Areas Program provides ecological surveys

Program Staffing

- LMF Program funds one staff person with revenues from affinity credit card
- Three general-fund positions support program on top of other SPO duties
- Staff from Ag, Conservation, IFW, and DMR provide direct support on specific projects

Program Budget

- Almost exclusively funded with bonds
 - \$35 million in 1987
 - \$50 million in 1999
- One-time \$3 million general fund appropriation in 1998
- MBNA affinity credit card produces ~\$50,000 per year in special revenues to support a single full-time position
- Matching dollars from other sources leverage LMF funds

How a Proposal Becomes Funded

- Priorities for Funding
- Proposal Solicitation
- Project Selection
- Project Development
- Project Closure
- Other Considerations

Priorities for Funding

- In 1999, the Legislature approved recommendations for the Land Acquisition Priorities Advisory Committee
 - Funded the Public Access to Maine Waters Fund
 - Set aside part of funding for Farmland Protection
 - Expanded eligible projects to include regional and local projects in addition to statewide projects
 - Authorized LMF to fund acquisitions by qualified “cooperating entities” (e.g. municipalities and land trusts)
 - Established two tiers of funding priorities

Funding Priorities Tiers

- First Tier Priorities

- Access to Water
- Southern Maine Conservation Lands
- Ecological Reserves
- River Systems
- Undeveloped Coastline

- Second Tier Priorities

- Northern Forest Conservation Lands
- Municipal and Urban Open Space
- Trail Systems
- Farmland
- Regional Parks
- Mineral Collecting Sites
- Islands
- Significant Mountains

Proposal Solicitation

- Public Solicitation
- Public workshops around the state
- LMF Proposal Workbook
- Informal staff assistance and advice
- State agency endorsement

Project Selection

- Staff Review
- Evaluation by LMFB Scoring Committee
- Ranking by LMFB Nominating Committee
- Selection by full Board as finalists at public meeting

Project Development

- Independent appraisal
- Ascertain matching funds
- Other conditions
- Public Hearing
- Approval by full board

Project Closure

- Survey and legal work
- Archeological and ecological reviews
- Environmental hazard assessments
- Closure

Other Considerations

- Willing Buyer-Willing Seller
- 2:1 match requirements
- Approval by Municipal Officials or County Commissioners in certain situations
- Ownership by cooperating entities
- Lands open to hunting and fishing

1987-2000 Program Accomplishments

- 89,000 acres protected
- 99.8% of lands open to hunting and fishing
- \$8.5 million in outside monies leveraged
- Awarded *Downeast* magazine's environmental award in 1996

Progress to Date: \$50 Million Bond



- \$4 million expended
- 11,000 acres protected
- \$4.4 million in matching funds
- 103,000 acres and \$23 million in matching funds expected in 2002

Emerging Issues

- Protecting the State's Investment
- Large-scale Conservation Easements
- Board Workload
- Staff Workload

Protecting the State's Investment

- Need for baseline documentation of easements
- Need for ongoing monitoring of easements
- Need for accurate analysis and projection of income data to determine “working farm” values

Large-scale Conservation Easements

- Review of conservation easement purposes
- Develop a suitable framework as a guidance for state-held easements
- Modify LMF program procedures if necessary

Board Workload



- Heavy reliance on volunteer board to manage the program
- Risk of burn out and loss of valuable skills and knowledge

Staff Workload

- Increased complexity of projects
- Greater number of projects
- Year-round review of water access proposal
- Other general fund responsibilities carried by staff

Conclusions

- Seek easement monitoring staff position in future when budget revenues are more robust
- Seek grant funding for farm valuation work
- Establish framework for the development of large-scale conservation easements
- Maintain board commitment and better manage workload
- Explore options for additional staff support for project management