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Bulletin: Maine Department of Conservation Employee Newsletter, January 1991

Maine Department of Conservation

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January
1991

BULLETIN

Maine Department of Conservation Employee Newsletter

Commissioner's Column

Happy New Year greetings to each of you and best wishes to you and your families for the coming year.

A great deal has happened since our last *Bulletin* in November. I hope you all received and enjoyed our *Forests Parks and Lands* newsletter in December. Looking over the summary of accomplishments in *Forests Parks and Lands* shows how much is being achieved by the people and programs in this department, even though most recent discussions of state government have been focusing only on the outlook for the state budget. I felt especially proud of our work while reading that newsletter. It is a great tribute to your dedication and hard work. Thank you for your continuing commitment during these more difficult times.

At the time this *Bulletin* is being prepared, no final decisions have been announced on the FY '91 budget cuts. The proposed cuts for the department remain as outlined in our December 13 letter to you. A public hearing on the department's cuts was held January 7 by the Appropriations Committee.

The proposed reductions for FY '92 and FY '93 will be considered separately by the legislature at a future time.

Recently we received word that discussions continue on ways to reduce the number of unpaid days off. Efforts continue to find alternative savings in other places in the state budget. At present, it appears that the plan to implement unpaid days off will be postponed until February.

We will provide the most recent information available on the budget situation at the employee meetings - most of which will have been held before you receive this *Bulletin*.

In December, Forest Service Director John Cashwell was activated to duty in the National Guard and has gone to Germany on assignment. I have designated Tom Doak to serve as acting director of the Bureau of Forestry in John's absence. Tom will do a fine job and we look forward to working with him as we move ahead to achieve the many objectives before us. Several other department employees have also been called to active duty, and our thoughts are with them as they serve.

We look forward to seeing you at the employee meetings.

Ed Meadows

Sue Bell and the Department Recognized by Maine Street '90

The Department of Conservation has been recognized for assistance and cooperation to the Maine Street '90 program. The executive director of Maine Street '90 cited Deputy Commissioner Sue Bell, our designated Maine Street '90 coordinator, and the department for being instrumental to the program's tremendous success. Our thanks to Sue and to all of you who worked with this program to provide assistance to the many municipalities that participated in Maine Street '90.

Conservation Notes

- The Geological Society of Maine will meet at Bowdoin College in February to consider how professional geologists can assist in earth science teacher training. Maine Geological Survey staff will attend and help develop opportunities for earth scientists to share information and experience with teachers. **Woody Thompson** will speak on the proposed CREST project for curriculum enrichment in school earth science programs, and there will be a presentation on MGS resources available to teachers.
- **Cheryl Fiore** has left the MGS to study landscape horticulture at the University of Maine. She will be greatly missed by her Department of Conservation friends.
- BPL's **Tom Morrison** and **Henry Whittemore** continue to assist the Mackworth Island Advisory Committee and the Baxter School in developing a management plan to address natural resource management needs on Mackworth Island.
- **Tom Charles**, BPL's staff silvicultural specialist, is temporarily providing assistance to the Maine Forest Service.
- **David Allen** spoke to the annual meeting of the Soil and Water Conservation Society on Land Use Regulation Commission regulations governing timber harvesting and road and bridge construction.
- Articles in the December issue of *Forests Parks and Lands* on the Forest Stewardship Assistance program, BPR's carry in, carry out program award, and BPL's Eagle Lake Management Unit are being "recycled" in the newsletters of the Maine Solid Waste Management Agency and the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine.

The Forest Practices Act and Wildlife

Readers of the current (winter 1990-91) issue of *Maine Fish and Wildlife* magazine will find Joe Wiley's article on wildlife and the Forest Practices Act to be a useful primer on timber harvesting and forest habitat.

In the article, BPL's wildlife biologist says many people worked very hard to produce reasonable Forest Practices Act rules that accomplish the legislation's objectives while allowing forest management to remain viable.

"A trial period of five years or more, with adjustments possible during this time, will be needed to see how the rules are meeting their purpose. While no legislation can be all things to all people, wildlife habitat across Maine will be better off with the new Forest Practices Act," Wiley wrote.

Diagrams originally produced by Tom Driscoll of the Forest Information Center illustrating two categories of clearcuts complement the article.

DOC's Geographic Information System will be the subject of an article written by Dan Walters for the spring issue of *Maine Fish and Wildlife*. An article on state parks by Steve Curtis is scheduled for publication in the summer issue.

Health and Dental Insurance Options During Layoff

This summary provides important information to state employees concerning options for the continuation of health and dental insurance benefits during layoff. The information was provided by the State Employee Health Insurance Program within the Department of Administration.

Q. When does employer paid health/dental insurance end?

A. An employee who is laid off becomes ineligible for the state funded health and dental insurance at the end of the period for which the health and dental insurance premium was paid and/or deducted from the payroll check.

Example 1: The layoff date for an A cycle employee is Jan. 11, 1991. Since the last check for this individual is paid on Jan. 23, 1991, health/dental coverage terminates on Jan. 31, 1991.

Example 2: The layoff date for a B cycle employee is Jan. 4, 1991. Since the last check for this individual is paid on Jan. 16, 1991, health/dental coverage terminates on Jan. 31, 1991.

Q. What choices does a laid off worker have with regards to health/dental benefits?

A. An employee who is laid off has several options to consider when deciding to continue health and/or dental insurance:

1. The person may elect to continue health and/or dental insurance for a period of 18 months at a cost to the individual of 102% of the group health/dental insurance premium. This provision is made as a result of COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act).

2. The person may elect to continue health and/or dental insurance for a period of up to 12 months at a cost to the individual of 100% of the group health/dental insurance premium, provided that the individual is unemployed. COBRA rights must be waived with the selection of this option. This provision is made as a result of certain bargaining agreements (see your bargaining unit's agreement).

3. A laid off worker may be entitled to participate in a working spouse's health/dental insurance program. The person being laid off by the state should inquire about eligibility as a dependent under the spouse's plan through the spouse's employer.

4. The person should review other insurance coverages that may be available to other family members. In some cases, the laid off person may want to delete coverage for family members who have other coverage available.

5. The person may wish to seek non-group health insurance coverage through the Blue Cross and Blue Shield organization, a commercial insurance company or an insurance agent. In some cases, coverage may meet very basic needs and cost less.

6. Retiring employees may continue their health insurance under the Maine State Retirement System (MSRS) **as long as coverage has been in effect for**

at least one year as an active employee prior to application for retirement benefits. This is not done automatically. The MSRS will advise the person retiring to complete a form that will transfer coverage from the active group to the MSRS. This form will be included with other retirement papers provided by the MSRS.

Q. When does insurance coverage begin for an employee who is recalled or rehired?

A. A person who is recalled from layoff or is rehired is treated as a newly hired employee. Coverage begins on the first of the month following completion of one month of employment.

Example 1: An employee is recalled from layoff or is rehired on June 1, 1991. Coverage will begin on July 1, 1991. The premium will be paid or deducted from the person's first check in July.

Example 2: An employee is recalled from layoff or is rehired on June 3, 1991. Coverage will begin on August 1, 1991. The premium will be paid or deducted from the person's first check in August.

For more information:

Contact the Maine State Employees Health Insurance Program at 289-6780 (all seven digits must be dialed) or 1-800-422-4503 for more information concerning options for continuing insurance coverage during layoff.

Seniority

Seniority for MSEA-covered classifications is determined as follows:

- 1 point for each month of continuous service in the employee's current class, class of equal pay, or higher paid class.
- 1/2 point for each month of continuous service in lower level classes.

Other factors affecting seniority are:

- Seniority points **are not** counted during unpaid leaves of absence.
- Seniority **will be broken** by resignation, discharge, or other breaks in service.
- Seniority **will** continue up to three years while an employee is on layoff or on military leave.

Reminder

Augusta-based employees are invited to the last of a series of meetings on the department's budget reduction plan scheduled for Wednesday, January 23, at 9:00 a.m. in Coburn Hall. Coburn Hall is located in the Elkins Building, adjacent to the Harlow Building at the AMHI complex. Signs providing directions to Coburn Hall will start at the north entrance of the Harlow Building.

Bulletin Correspondents

The *Bulletin* is published every month except July and December. Give contributions of information to your bureau correspondent who is: Administrative Services, Judy Andrews; Forest Service, Tom Wood; Geological Survey, Woody Thompson; Land Use Regulation Commission, Gloria LeVasseur; Parks and Recreation, Sheila McDonald; and Public Lands, Pat Simard. Thank you.