



**Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
Bureau of Parks and Lands**

***Public Meeting***  
**Kennebec Highlands Public Land**  
***Management Plan for 2022 Acquisitions and Trails Plan***

**October 29, 2025, 5:30 to 7:30 pm**  
**7 Lakes Alliance Office, Belgrade Lakes**

**Meeting Notes**

The Public Meeting was attended in person by 25 members of the public and Kennebec Highlands Management Plan Advisory Committee members. Nine additional attendees participated via Teams videoconference.

The following BPL staff members were present: Rex Turner, Director of Planning and Acquisitions; Jeff Bartley, Western Region Lands Manager; Nicholas McDougal, Forester; Stephen Richardson, Sr. Forest Engineer; Bill Beeaker, Recreation Specialist\*; Sarah Spencer, IF&W Biologist assigned to BPL; Jim Vogel, Planner/Plan Coordinator.

*\* Attended via videoconference*

**Welcome/Introduction**

Jim Vogel welcomed the attendees, introduced himself and asked Bureau staff to introduce themselves. A meeting agenda was emailed in advance to Advisory Committee members and those on the contact list and was also distributed at the meeting (see Attachment 1). All were informed that the meeting would be recorded.

**Presentation**

PowerPoint slides, visible to those present as well as those participating via videoconference, were used to guide the discussion. The presentation began with background information on BPL planning and the Kennebec Highlands planning process to-date. The presentation then provided an overview of the character, vision, resource allocations and management recommendations for the 2022 Acquisitions as presented in the Final Draft plan. This was followed by a presentation of the key components of the Final Draft Kennebec Highlands Trails Plan. Opportunities were provided for attendees to make comments and ask questions regarding each plan, as reflected in the following record.

Maps of the Kennebec Highlands (a recreation basemap, a dominant resource allocations map, and a map from the Trails Plan featuring proposed “no additional development” zones with important wildlife habitats), were posted in the meeting room and also shared via Teams, along with other plan maps reproduced in the slides. The presentation slides are provided as Attachment 2.

## **Public Comments/Questions and BPL responses, when given (paraphrased from handwritten notes)**

### Management Plan for the 2022 Acquisitions (Allen parcels)

#### *Public Comment*

- Several attendees expressed concern about the rapid growth of trees on the Vienna Mountain blueberry fields and asked when the Bureau would implement the first phase of cutting back that growth, which is included in the management recommendations as an action for the Bureau to consider.

*BPL Response* – Jim and other BPL staff explained that no firm plans are yet in place to conduct the initial vegetation removal, but staff have been in discussion with IF&W to identify potential target areas and determine other protocols for the work that considers wildlife habitat objectives. We are aware of the interest of potential volunteers in assisting with this effort and would work with 7 Lakes Association to identify and coordinate with potential volunteers. There is the potential for this effort to occur this fall or early winter. There are also plans in the works for the Maine Forest Service to conduct a burn on the fields at the upper part of the mountain.

#### *Public Comment*

- An attendee asked for an explanation of the difference between the Developed Recreation Class 1 and Class 2 resource allocations applied to the parcels.

*BPL Response* – Jim explained that the Developed Recreation Class 1 is typically applied to primitive recreation sites and is applied to two small areas on the mountain; the area encompassing the house and barn and the area encompassing the snowplow turnaround, where winter parking may be developed. Class 2 is typically applied only to more developed and often manned recreation facilities, which are rarely present on the reserved lands. On Vienna Mountain, this allocation has been applied as a temporary expedient on the blueberry fields with the best potential for resumed blueberry production under a lease. This allocation will be replaced with the “other” category when that new category is officially adopted within the Integrated Resource Policy (IRP), which is currently under revision.

### Trails Plan

#### *Public Comment*

- An attendee commented that it would be beneficial for future hiking trail development to include a connection between the Round Top trail and Vienna Mountain, as well as the proposed connection from the Sanders Hill trail.

*BPL Response* – Jim explained that the Bureau considered a link from the Sander Hill trail to Vienna Mountain to be the more desirable option (e.g., a shorter trail could make the connection, and a trail from the Round Top spur to the blueberry fields would need to get around substantial wetlands). However, a second linking trail could be considered.

#### *Public Comment*

- An attendee asked whether future timber harvesting would affect the A Trail bike route, or whether the trail could be avoided when harvesting occurs.

*BPL Response* – Jim pointed out that the A Trail mainly lies within a timber management-dominant zone (the only such zone on the Highlands), so timber management remains a priority use in that area and will occur in the future. He also stated that the groups who develop bike trails are informed with the approval that access for timber management needs to be considered in laying out the trails, although that point may not have come across clearly as the trail was approved without formal plan review or discussion. Rex pointed out that regardless of this history, the Bureau will endeavor to minimize trail crossings and other damage to the trail when timber harvesting occurs.

#### *Public Comment*

- Attendees questioned why there has not been greater engagement with the mountain bike community before now, and why the plan doesn't allow for more expansion of bike trails on the unit. Conceptual ideas for new sections of bike trail, connected to existing trails (which have also been described in past comments from the Advisory Committee), were also mentioned.

*BPL Response* – Jim explained that the planning process up to this date, following standard BPL practice, is focused on engagement with the Advisory Committee, but now with the public meeting is expanded to the broader public. Also, that the committee includes a mountain bike club member and user group representative (which is similar to how other groups are represented on the committee). The expectation is that such user group representatives will engage with their community and bring their interests and concerns forward, and/or invite others to join the planning process as an interested member of the public. Advisory committee meetings are open to all, although engagement with committee members is prioritized.

In addition to listing the considerable mileage of existing bike trails and management roads open to bikes on the unit, Jim reiterated the purposes of the “no additional development” zones described in the plan as the primary reasons for the Bureau is not contemplating significant new bike trail development. Those purposes include prioritizing retaining large areas with relatively little disturbance of wildlife habitat that is associated with trails, which the Bureau is paying increasing attention to as data on impacts on wildlife become better known nationally. Those areas also provide space for unconfined primitive recreation, and help minimize areas closed to hunting with firearms as a result of the BPL rule that establishes a 300-foot buffer around marked trails.

The Bureau notes that attendees pointed out that the existing single track bike trails are largely designed for more advanced technical riders, and so they would like to provide a wider range of riding opportunities to include novice/intermediate riders. Jim encouraged trail proponents to share conceptual maps of the connecting bike trails they have described with the Bureau, and the Bureau will give those trails consideration.

#### **Next Steps**

Jim reviewed the next steps in the management plan review process, which included:

- an additional opportunity for the public to submit written comments over the next month
- revision of the Final Draft Plans, as needed, based on this public review and any comments received after the meeting

- finalization and adoption of the plans as part of the conclusion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kennebec Highlands Management Plan Five-Year Review.

**Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 pm.

Attachments:

1. Meeting agenda
2. PowerPoint presentation slides