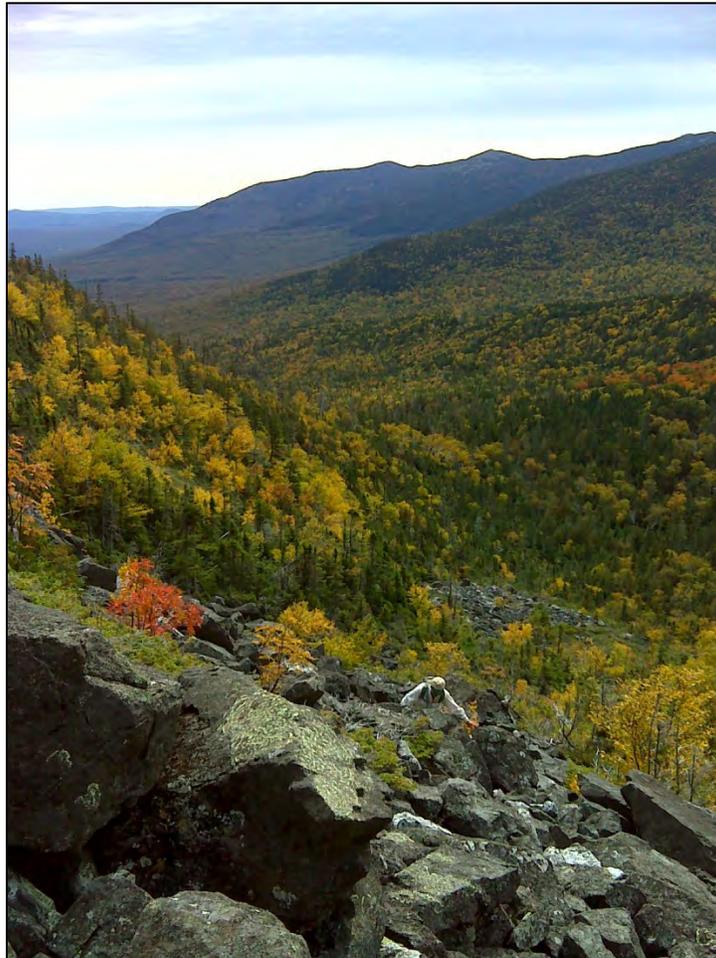


# CROCKER MOUNTAIN UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN

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*(With its adoption, this Plan becomes an amendment to the  
2007 Flagstaff Region Management Plan)*



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

April 2015



## ADOPTION CITATION

In accordance with the provisions of 12 M.R.S.A. § 1847(2) and consistent with the Bureau of Parks and Lands Planning Policy and Integrated Resource Policy for Public Reserved and Nonreserved Lands, State Parks, and State Historic Sites (revised December 18, 2000 and amended March 7, 2007), this Management Plan for the **Crocker Mountain Unit** is hereby adopted. Upon adoption, this plan will become an amendment to the Flagstaff Region Management Plan (adopted June 12, 2007 and amended June 26, 2014).

RECOMMENDED: Thomas A. Morrison DATE: 3/27/15

Thomas A. Morrison  
Director of Operations  
Bureau of Parks and Lands

APPROVED: Walter E. Whitcomb DATE: 4/9/15

Walter E. Whitcomb  
Commissioner  
Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

ADOPTED DATE: 4/9/15 REVISION DATE: 6/12/22



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  - Letter to State of Maine from The Trust for Public Land – Crocker Mountain Ecological Reserve
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- D. Crocker Mountain Ecological Reserve Nomination
- E. Caribou Valley Road Easement
- F. Sources

## ***Acknowledgements***

The Crocker Mountain Unit Management Plan was prepared through a collaborative effort involving contributions from the following Bureau of Parks and Lands staff:

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Scott Ramsay – *Supervisor, Off-Road Vehicle Program of the Bureau of Parks and Lands*

Gena Denis – *Geographic Information System Coordinator*

The Bureau also acknowledges the helpful participation of the Flagstaff Region Management Plan Advisory Committee, and the members of the public who participated in public meetings held during preparation of this Plan and submitted comments on the Plan (Appendix A).

## **I. Introduction**

### **About this Document**

This document constitutes a Management Plan (the Plan) for the Crocker Mountain Reserved Land unit, managed by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (the Bureau). This is the inaugural management plan for the unit, which was acquired by the Bureau in June 2013; it will become an amendment to the 2007 Flagstaff Region Management Plan (regional plan) upon its adoption. The Plan includes background information about the planning process and the regional context of the Plan as most directly affects the Crocker Mountain Unit; a broader and more detailed regional context discussion is provided in the regional plan. The core of the Plan is a description of the character and resources of the unit, a Vision for the future of the unit, and management allocations and recommendations, as is provided in the regional plan for the other reserved land units in the region.

One objective of the regional plan was to provide a balanced spectrum of opportunities across the Region, and in keeping with the opportunities and resources available in the broader surrounding Western Mountains Region. In developing the management recommendations for the Crocker Mountain Unit, the Bureau has been mindful of this broader perspective.

The Flagstaff Region Management Plan and -- by extension -- this plan is a commitment to the public that the public reserved lands in the Region will be managed in accordance with the Bureau's mission and goals, and within prescribed mandates. Revisions to the Plan commitments will occur only after providing opportunities for public comment. The Management Plan will also serve as guidance to the Bureau staff. It will provide clear management objectives, while providing a degree of flexibility in achieving these objectives. It will not, however, be a plan of operations.

An important aspect of the management of public lands is monitoring commitments made in the plans, and evaluating the outcomes of management activities relative to overall objectives. This management plan describes monitoring and evaluation procedures for recreational use, wildlife management, management of the proposed Ecological Reserve, and timber management.

Under current policy, the Bureau's management plans cover a period of 15 years after the date of adoption; however, the horizon for this plan is eight years to align it with the 2007 Flagstaff Region Management Plan, which will be subject to a comprehensive review in 2022. A review of current issues and progress on implementing this Plan's recommendations will be undertaken in 2017, as part of the second mandated 5-year review and update of the regional plan.

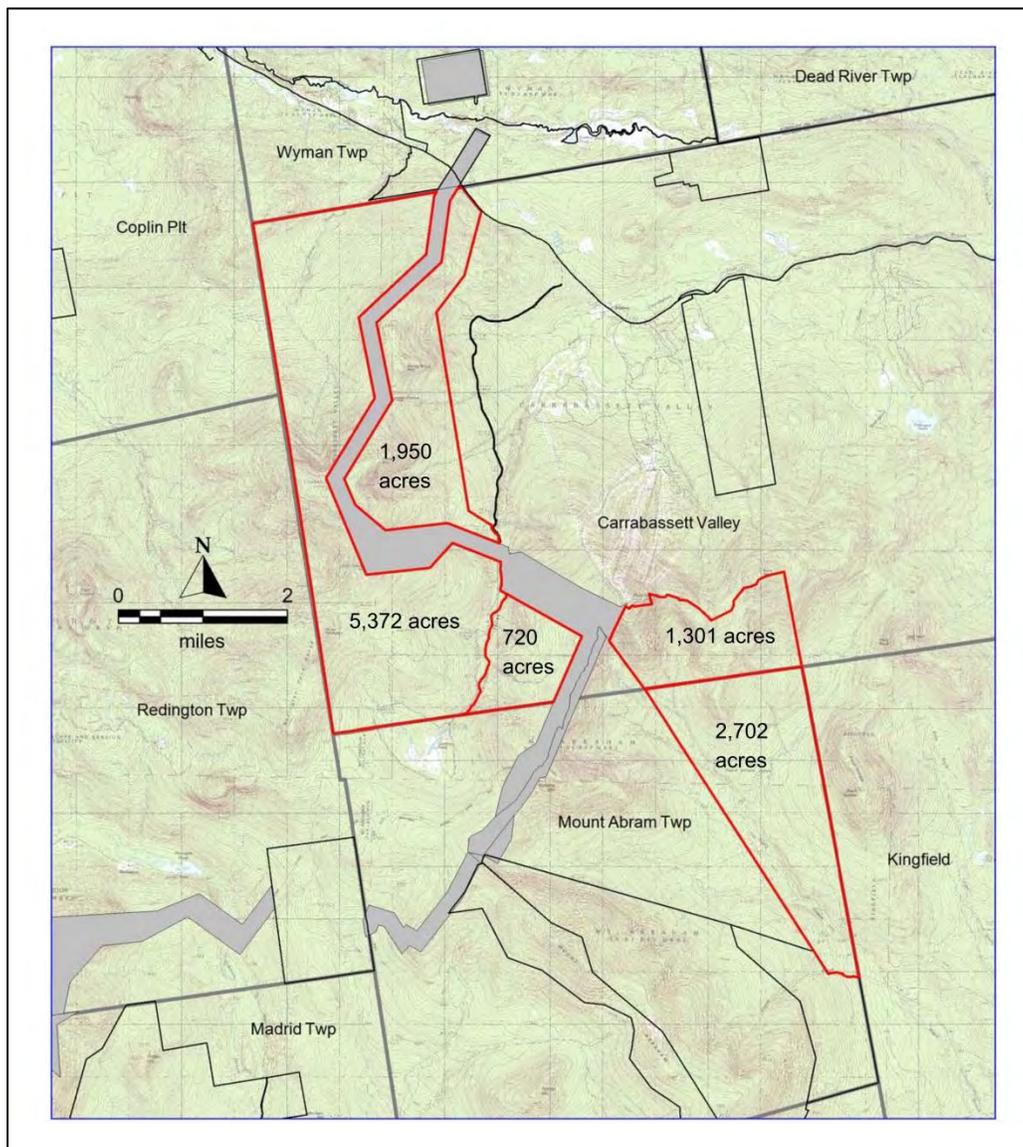
### **The Lands of the Crocker Mountain Unit**

The 12,046-acre Crocker Mountain Unit lands were acquired from Plum Creek Maine Timberlands, LLC, on June 7, 2013 with the assistance of The Trust for Public Land (TPL), the town of Carrabassett Valley, and numerous other contributors and supporting parties as the centerpiece of the Crocker Mountain Conservation Project. The unit is comprised of two areas

separated by the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) corridor (owned by the National Park Service): the Crocker Mountain area and the Rapid Stream area.

The Crocker Mountain parcels total approximately 8,000 acres on the western side of the Town of Carrabassett Valley, bisected by a 9.7 mile segment of the A.T. corridor. The area adjoins the Bureau's Wyman Lot parcel to the north, which is part of the Bigelow Preserve/Flagstaff Lake unit.

The Rapid Stream area is a wedge-shaped property covering approximately 4,000 acres, southeast of Crocker Mountain. The northern end of the property is a 1,300 acre parcel within Carrabassett Valley; the remainder of the area extends south into Mount Abram Township where it adjoins the Bureau's Mount Abraham unit.



MAP FIGURE 1: Crocker Mountain Unit parcels and acreage.

## II. The Planning Process and Resource Allocation System

### Statutory and Policy Guidance

Multiple use management plans are statutorily required for Public Reserved Lands pursuant to Title 12 MRSA § 1847 (2) (see Appendix B), and must be prepared in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the *Integrated Resource Policy* revised and adopted in December 2000 by the Bureau. Title 12 MRSA § 1805 authorizes the Bureau to create a system of ecological reserves on Bureau lands and sets for the purposes and management parameters for designated reserves. These laws and policies direct the Bureau to identify and protect important natural, ecological, and historic attributes; enhance important fisheries and wildlife habitat; provide opportunities for a variety of quality outdoor recreation experiences; and provide a sustained yield of forest products by utilizing forest management techniques and silvicultural practices that enhance the forest environment.

### Other Guiding Documents

The process for acquiring the Crocker Mountain Unit lands was a collaborative effort involving TPL, the Town of Carrabassett Valley and many other conservation and recreation interest groups. This pre-acquisition effort aimed to garner broad-based support and also to support development of grant applications and requests for funding. During this effort there was considerable public discussion of the values present on the land to be acquired and the visions and interests of these organizations regarding future management. The vision and understandings that grew out of the acquisition phase were memorialized in a September 2013 “Commemorative Agreement Celebrating the Crocker Mountain Conservation Project” (hereafter, the Crocker Mountain Agreement; see Appendix B) between the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, TPL and the Town of Carrabassett Valley.

TPL also submitted a letter to the Bureau in 2013 to memorialize the understanding that the Bureau would designate approximately 4,000 acres at Crocker Mountain as an Ecological Reserve, while maintaining a motorized trail corridor along Caribou Valley Road and the South Branch Carrabassett River (see Appendix B).

### Public Participation and the Planning Process

Overall, the development of Management Plans includes a series of steps, each involving interdisciplinary review, as well as extensive efforts to solicit and consider public comment, in order to achieve a Plan that integrates the various perspectives and needs while protecting and conserving the resources of the public reserved lands of the Crocker Mountain unit. In total 3 public meetings were held in the development of this Final Draft Plan, as described below.

*Resource Assessments*: The first phase of the planning process includes a thorough study of the resources and opportunities available on the Crocker Mountain unit lands. Beginning in the spring of 2014, Bureau staff undertook a review the natural and geological, historic and cultural, fisheries and wildlife, recreation, and timber and renewable resources. Much of this information was obtained from a natural resource inventory conducted during the acquisition process by the Maine Natural Areas Program, which focused on higher elevation lands that have been evaluated for designation as an Ecological Reserve as part of the acquisition agreements (see Appendix D). An Environmental Assessment conducted by a contractor during the acquisition phase supplied additional information on historic and current land uses and conditions. Resource professionals

from within the agency provided information on wildlife, recreation, and timber resources. Mapping and GIS-related information was also obtained as part of this phase.

Staff also participated in reconnaissance field trips to the Crocker Mountain Unit, both before and after the acquisition, to view first-hand and characterize the land-based resources and recreational features. In February 2014, a group of staff visited the Crocker Mountain parcels by snowmobile, traveling the existing snowmobile trail to the south part of the unit overlooking Caribou Pond. A summer 2014 vehicle-based trip allowed a larger group to evaluate the access roads into the parcels and to inspect portions of the existing management road network and some of the bridges on the unit. While driving and walking the roads, staff were able to view the young forests that are predominant on much of the lands and assess views from some key vantage points. Subsequent staff visits in the fall of 2014 focused on areas of potential trail development.

*Advisory Committee:* Members of the Flagstaff Region Advisory Committee (reconvened in 2013, with several new members, for the Flagstaff Region Management Plan 5-Year Review) were informed in July 2014 of the start of the Plan process and invited to a public scoping meeting that would formally kick off the Plan's development.

*Issue Identification/Public Scoping Session:* The pre-acquisition work generated a firm foundation for the Bureau's own planning process, required by statute and as acknowledged in the September 2013 Commemorative Agreement. The first step in that planning process is a public scoping meeting. The purpose of the scoping meeting is to help ensure broad-based public input regarding management direction (particularly, for this property, related to trails and other recreation facility development) and other issues needing to be addressed by the Plan. A public scoping meeting was held in Carrabassett Valley on July 22, 2014. Attendees were invited to submit written comments during the one month period following the meeting. The Carrabassett Valley Chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association (CR NEMBA) and the High Peaks Alliance (HPA) submitted written scoping comments and maps depicting trail interests.

*Advisory Committee Meeting on the Draft of the Plan:* In the fall and winter of 2014-15 the Bureau compiled the resources and management issues identified as described above, and draft proposed vision, proposed resource allocations and management recommendations into a Draft Plan. An Advisory Committee meeting to review the Draft Plan was held February 25, 2015. Comments on the Draft Plan from the Advisory Committee and the public are included in the Appendices of this report and are reflected in this Final Draft Plan.

*Public Meeting on the Final Draft Plan:* The Final Draft Plan was presented and discussed at a public meeting on March 18, 2015.

*Commissioner's Review of the Final Proposed Plan, and Plan Adoption:* Comments received on the Final Draft Plan were considered in preparing the Final Management Plan. Upon recommendation from the Bureau of Parks and Lands, the Plan was then reviewed and approved of the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

5-Year Plan Review and Updates: The Bureau's management plans are normally adopted for a 15-year period. (Because this plan will be appended to the 2007 Flagstaff Region Plan, which is subject to a comprehensive review in 2022, the life of this plan will be only 7 years.) The Bureau is required to report to the Flagstaff Region Advisory Committee at five-year intervals on accomplishments and changing conditions that may warrant amendments to the plan. The second mandated 5-Year Review of the regional plan is scheduled for 2017. Advisory Committee members will review the Bureau's report on actions taken to implement management recommendations in the Plan and will be asked to identify any new issues or circumstances they feel warrant Committee input or action. If neither the Bureau nor the Advisory Committee identifies any new issues or circumstances that warrant Committee input or action, the 5-year review process is completed.

If any of the Advisory Committee members identifies new issues or circumstances that, in their opinion, may require an amendment to the plan, or that should be discussed with the Committee prior to the Bureau taking action without amending the plan, then the Bureau will seek Committee comment through correspondence or a meeting. Depending on Committee input, a decision will be made to formally amend the plan or to take action without amending the plan. If a decision is made to formally amend the plan, the Bureau will hold a public meeting to gather public input on the proposed amendment(s), document public comments and Bureau responses, and adopt the plan amendment. If a decision is made to take action without amending the plan, the Bureau will document the Committee discussion and the specific actions that can be taken without a plan amendment.

### Summary of the Resource Allocation System

The Bureau's Resource Allocation System is a land management-planning tool first developed in the 1980's, and formalized in a document entitled *Integrated Resource Policy (IRP)*, adopted in December 2000. The Resource Allocation System, which assigns appropriate management based on resource characteristics and values, is based on a *hierarchy* of natural and cultural resource attributes found on the land base. The hierarchy ranks resources along a scale from those that are scarce and/or most sensitive to management activities and where dispersed recreation facilities or activities are most appropriate, to those that are less sensitive and where more intensive recreation facilities or activities may be appropriate. The resource attributes are aggregated into seven categories or "allocations".

The hierarchy of the allocation system defines the type of management that will be applied depending on the particular resource attributes present, with *dominant* and *secondary* use or management designations as appropriate to achieve an integrated, multi-use management. Allocations, from most sensitive to least, include:

- **Special Protection Areas** (including Ecological Reserves and Significant Natural Areas)
- **Backcountry Recreation Areas** (Motorized and Non-mechanized)
- **Wildlife Areas** (essential wildlife habitat, significant habitats, and specialized habitat areas and features including rare natural communities)
- **Remote Recreation Areas**
- **Visual Protection Areas**
- **Developed Recreation Areas**
- **Timber Management Areas**

Appendix C includes a more detailed description of the Resource Allocation System categories and the management direction defined for each category.

### Forest Certification

In 1999 the Bureau made the decision to demonstrate exemplary forest management through participation in two nationally recognized sustainable forestry certification programs. The Bureau was awarded certification of its forestlands under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) programs in 2002. These third-party audits were conducted to determine if these lands were being managed on a sustainable basis. Successful completion of the FSC/SFI systems also qualified the Bureau to enter into the “chain of custody” program to market its “green-certified” wood. The process for enrollment in this program was completed in 2003, with certified wood now being marketed from Bureau managed lands.

The process for conducting the SFI and FSC audits was rigorous and unique in that the Bureau underwent the two audit programs simultaneously. The audit was comprised of a field analysis of forest management practices at selected sites around the state, and an analysis of the Bureau's financial, personnel, policy development, and record-keeping systems. A Bureau-wide certification team was implemented to address “conditions” and “minor non-conformances” stipulated in the audit reports, including: significant enhancements to forest inventory data, development of a computerized forest-modeling program, a timeline for updating management plans for the entire land base, improvements in the use of Best Management Practices to protect water quality, and new commitments to public outreach and education programs. The Bureau is required to meet these conditions within certain timeframes in order to keep its certification status in good standing over the five-year certification period.

In 2006, the Bureau hosted its first full recertification by FSC, concurrently undergoing its first surveillance audit by SFI, the latter now required under SFI's updated standards. Although the field portion took place during and immediately after a heavy November rainstorm, Best Management Practices implemented on Bureau lands were working well, and certifiers for both systems were very pleased with Bureau silviculture at all sites visited. As is usually the case, there were several conditions (now called Corrective Action Requests, or CARs) made by each certification system, which the Bureau needed to satisfy as it continues to improve its forest management which has already been certified as being exemplary. The Bureau's second full recertification audit for FSC took place in December of 2011, again in challenging weather conditions. The BPL forests have again been certified as being well managed, with only a small number of corrective action requests (now known as minor non-conformances).

### Ecological Reserves

In accordance with the legislative intent (Title 12 MRSA § 1805), ecological reserves were established as 1) benchmarks against which biological and environmental change could be measured; 2) habitats adequate to maintain viable populations of species whose habitat needs are unlikely to be met on other lands; and 3) sites for scientific research, long-term environmental monitoring, and education. In addition, public access, hunting, and fishing are among the allowed uses on ecological reserves. The ecological reserves include many of Maine's best examples of alpine meadows, lakes and streams, wetlands and old growth forests. Because of

their sensitivity and the management emphasis on natural processes, no timber management is allowed and wildlife management is non-extractive.

Beginning in 2002, the Department of Conservation worked with a multi-disciplinary committee to draft an *Ecological Reserve Monitoring Plan* to guide periodic data collection at the landscape, stand, and species levels. The monitoring program is tied closely to other statewide and nationwide forest monitoring programs that use U.S. Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) methods. To date, 387 permanent monitoring plots have been established on 12 Ecological Reserves, with ongoing monitoring work increasing the number of plots each year. The long-term monitoring program and the value of ecological reserves to this program have been recognized as models for public lands throughout the northeast.

## III. Planning Context

### Introduction

The Flagstaff Region Management Plan contains a detailed discussion of the character and resources, recreation opportunities, private-public initiatives related to recreation, and conservation initiatives in the surrounding region. That information is supplemented here with a summary of changes and initiatives related to recreation and land conservation in the region since 2007, particularly those associated with abutting lands and Bureau-managed public reserved lands closest to the Crocker Mountain Unit.

### The Character and Resources of the Abutting and Surrounding Lands

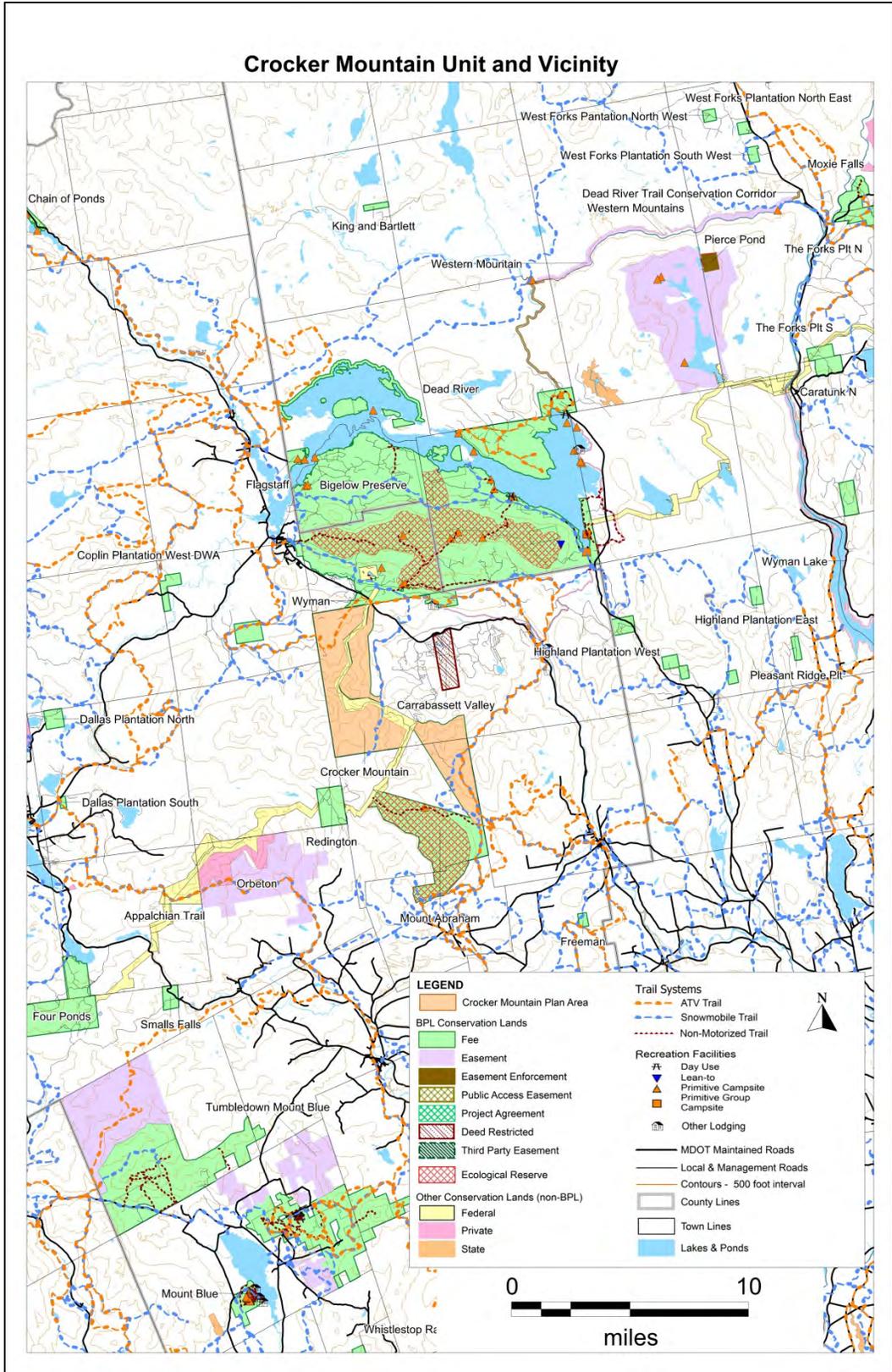
The landscape encompassing and surrounding the Crocker Mountain Unit is a dramatic setting of mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and wetlands known as the High Peaks region. It is a largely natural landscape that in large part is also a working landscape, where commercial forestry is the predominant land use. Sweeping views of mountain peaks, ridges and cirques are enjoyed from many vantage points along major highways, back roads, trails and waterways.

The Crocker Unit occupies a significant and exceptional portion of the High Peaks region, situated in the midst of a varied and complex assemblage of conservation lands, long-distance trails and other recreation amenities, and historic small towns that are increasingly recreation and tourism-oriented. Abutting or in close proximity are Sugarloaf ski resort and other commercial recreation establishments; extensive public lands managed by federal, state and local agencies; and commercial forest lands that are also used for recreation. In combination, all of these provide a unique diversity of recreation opportunities. This Plan will help define the role of the Crocker Mountain Unit in this regional mosaic. Map Figure 2 depicts public lands and recreation facilities in the vicinity of the Crocker Mountain Unit and in the High Peaks region.

Most prominent of the abutting lands is the nearly 10-mile long segment of the federally-owned A.T. corridor that winds through and adjacent to the unit. The corridor provides a buffer for the trail from 1,000 feet to as much as one-half mile wide on parts of Crocker and Sugarloaf Mountains and occupies several thousand acres. Due in part to the accessibility of this segment from Caribou Valley Road and the A.T. trailhead on Route 27, it is very popular for day-hikes, as well as being heavily traveled by section hikers and through hikers. Within this corridor, a designated campsite is available near the trail about one mile west of Caribou Valley Road.

The Crocker Mountain area is bounded on the east by 2,180 acres of timberland retained by Plum Creek when the Crocker Unit lands were sold to the State. The property, bounded on the east by the South Branch Carrabassett River, has been zoned for residential development. Caribou Valley Road traverses the parcel, connecting the Unit to Route 27; the Crocker Unit acquisition included a deeded right of way on the road for public vehicular access, shared with Plum Creek and Sugarloaf Corporation.

Across the South Branch is Sugarloaf, the largest ski resort in the eastern U.S., featuring 1,400 acres of skiable terrain and over 150 runs serviced by several chair lifts. The runs occupy the north face of Sugarloaf Mountain, which at 4,237 feet is the highest peak in the state other than



MAP FIGURE 2 [provided as 11 x 17 fold out in printed copies of Plan]

Katahdin. The resort has recently developed part of the north face of adjacent Burnt Hill for hike-in glade skiing. Hikers can ascend ski runs or service roads to reach the peak of Sugarloaf, although the more common route to the summit is via the A.T. and a half-mile connector trail on the back (south) side of the mountain. Hiking trails also connects the base of Sugarloaf Mountain and Burnt Hill with the summit ridge of Burnt Hill. Both peaks offer expansive 360-degree views of the several surrounding peaks, including North and South Crocker, Mount Abraham, and the Bigelow Range. The ridgeline between the summits of Sugarloaf Mountain and Burnt Hill demarcates the north boundary of the Crocker Mountain Unit's Rapid Stream area.

Adjacent to the Crocker Mountain parcel at the southern end of Caribou Valley Road is a parcel, with Caribou Pond at its center, owned by the Sugarloaf Corporation. The pond area is a popular destination for snowmobilers who ride the club-maintained trail that follows Caribou Valley Road from Route 27. Southwest of the Crocker Mountain Unit, the U.S. Navy owns and operates 12,500-acres, the "SERE" (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape) training facility.

### **Surrounding Public Lands and Facilities**

North of the Crocker Mountain Unit across Route 27 is the Bigelow Preserve, one of the largest and most exceptional of the Bureau's public land units. The 36,000 acre Preserve features the Bigelow Range, with two peaks over 4,000 feet and lesser peaks along a ridge-line running the length of the preserve from east to west. Nearly 11,000 acres have been designated as an Ecological Reserve. The A.T. enters the Preserve soon after crossing Route 27 and follows the ridge line of the Bigelow Range, with side trails providing additional hiking options. Snowmobile trails circumnavigate the Preserve, and mountain bike routes have been designated on public use and management roads.

On the north side of the Unit west of the A.T. corridor, the 175-acre Wyman Lot provides continuity of public lands between the Crocker Mountain Unit and the Bigelow Preserve. Although the parcel is crossed by a powerline corridor, it also hosts a notable remnant old-growth forest. Stoney Brook Road (labeled Plum Creek Road on some maps) crosses the parcel and provides the only vehicle access to the north part of the Crocker Mountain Unit.

Two public land units to the south are also in close proximity to the Crocker Mountain Unit: the Mount Abraham Unit and the Redington Lot. The 6,214 acre Mount Abraham Unit abuts the south end of the Crocker Mountain Unit's Rapid Stream area. Most of the Mount Abraham Unit has been designated an Ecological Reserve, which encompasses the treeless alpine ecosystem at the top of the 4,050 foot mountain and much of the northern and eastern slopes. An A.T. side trail ascends the mountain from the west and drops down the eastern slope to a trailhead. The 1,000-acre Redington Lot is about 1.25 miles south of the Crocker Mountain Unit but is accessible to visitors only via private logging roads which have been closed to vehicles. The A.T. crosses the lot within a 1,000-foot wide Bureau-allocated buffer zone; the remainder of the lot is allocated to timber management.

### **Public and Private Recreation Initiatives**

A number of initiatives to expand the four-season recreation opportunities in the Town of Carrabassett Valley and the wider High Peaks region have been ongoing for more than 10 years, and several significant projects have been accomplished since the adoption of the Flagstaff

Region plan. Coordinated efforts have resulted in a number of recreation facilities developed by different entities that are interconnected; this allows recreationists to take advantage of the region's combined network of trails and associated amenities, with many starting points, routes, destinations and levels of challenge from which to choose.

The Sugarloaf Outdoor Center, operated by the Town of Carrabassett Valley with Sugarloaf Mountain Resort and other partners, occupies over 7,000 acres at the base of Sugarloaf Mountain and Burnt Hill. The facility offers winter visitors over 90 km (56 miles) of groomed cross-country skiing and snowshoe trails and an ice skating rink. An expanding network of more than 30 miles of mountain bike trails (largely collocated with the ski trails) serves riders during the summer and fall. Both trail systems offer varied experiences, distances and levels of challenge. The center also offers ski, snowshoe, and bike rentals. A disc golf course utilizing the existing trails is near completion. A fee is charged for access to the trails and other facilities (Sugarloaf alpine skiers may purchase a combined alpine/Nordic pass).

The trails at the Sugarloaf Outdoor Center connect to the Narrow Gauge Pathway, located on the opposite side of Route 27. The pathway is a six-mile gravel-surfaced pedestrian and bike trail developed by the town that utilizes the right-of-way of a former narrow-gauge rail line beside the scenic Carrabassett River. Several short single-track mountain bike trails branch off the pathway. Three trailheads along Route 27 -- each with parking, restrooms, and a kiosk with a trail map -- provide visitors with convenient direct access to the pathway.

The period since 2007 has also seen the emergence in the region of Maine Huts and Trails (MH&T), a non-profit organization dedicated to establishing a long-distance non-motorized trail network linking backwoods "huts" that provide meals and lodging. MH&T has focused its hut and trail development on Carrabassett Valley and the Flagstaff Lake area to the north, with four huts and dozens of miles of groomed and un-groomed ski trails as well as hiking and mountain biking trails built to-date. MH&T ski and mountain bike trails link to the Narrow Gauge trail. Stratton Brook hut, built on a knoll just south of the Bigelow Preserve and opened in the winter of 2012-13, is the most recent hut. A new single-track mountain bike trail to Stratton Brook hut is in progress and plans are proceeding for a hiking trail, approved in concept by the Bureau in 2013, connecting the hut to the Bigelow Preserve.

The Carrabassett Valley chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association (CR NEMBA) was established in 2010 and has had a central role in developing the region's mountain bike trail network. The organization has collaborated with the Town and MH&T on the design and construction of the trails described above, and has responsibility for the Sugarloaf Outdoor Center bike trails. The chapter also hosts group trail rides and multiple-day trail work and competitive mountain bike race events. The Bureau has recently approved CR NEMBA's request to allow mountain bike use on additional short management roads within the Bigelow Preserve, to better link existing routes on the Preserve to the adjacent trail networks; also approved was a conceptual plan for four miles of single-track trail in the Preserve to replace trail routed on a management road that is to be upgraded for use in forest harvesting in the next few years. CR NEMBA, the Town of Carrabassett Valley, and MH&T and have further collaborated on trail maintenance and funding and production of an annually updated trail map.

Taking a broader regional perspective, both motorized and non-motorized trail systems have been expanded and enhanced in recent years. The State’s acquisition of the West Saddleback Connector in 2010 provided a motorized trail corridor across the A.T. that allowed completion of the Moose Loop, important for both ATV and snowmobile trail systems. The Moose Loop is a 139-mile interconnected backcountry trail system that encircles the High Peaks region and connects Carrabassett Valley, Stratton, Kingfield, Phillips and other small towns. (Segments of the loop cross the northwest corner of the Crocker Mountain area and the east side of the Rapid Stream area on management roads.)

The regional snowmobile system has been well established for some time, and substantial sections of the Interconnected Trail System (ITS) encircle the region. Local snowmobile clubs maintain these and many additional miles of trails in Carrabassett Valley and encircling the Bigelow Preserve. A branch of the local snowmobile trail system extends down Caribou Valley Road, crossing the southern part of Crocker Mountain Unit and terminating at Caribou Pond, while the ITS 115 Connector Trail crosses the Rapid Stream area (co-located with the ATV trail).

A non-profit organization, Longfellow Mountains Heritage Trails (LMHT), has proposed a new long-distance non-motorized trail that would cross through Carrabassett Valley. The 47-mile non-motorized trail would run between Coburn Gore, at the Canadian border, and Kingfield. The trail would serve hikers, bike riders, skiers and snowshoers. Most of the trail would be on private lands, but the Bureau recently gave conceptual approval to trail segments on public lands at Chain of Ponds and the Bigelow Preserve (the latter to be co-located with existing snowmobile and bike trails on management roads). The area of focus for the first phase of trail development is at the north end, in the vicinity of Chain of Ponds.

The Crocker Mountain Unit sits about midway along the length of the Route 27 Scenic Byway, which extends from Kingfield to the Canadian border. Recently renamed the “Maine High Peaks Scenic Byway” by a local committee working to implement the byway’s management plan, work is progressing on a signage plan that will include informational, educational and other types of signs to be installed at pull-off stops and overlooks. Development of the byway signage and other enhancements is seen as vital to efforts to market the region as a four-season recreation and tourism destination.

### **Summary of Planning Implications**

The following points are drawn largely from the regional plan, but have been updated and revised or restated to more specifically relate to the Crocker Mountain Unit:

1. The Crocker Mountain public reserved lands lie in Maine’s most mountainous area, in an area highly valued for its natural resources. The culture and economy of the area are historically linked to the forest resources and outdoor recreation.
2. The recreation opportunities on the Crocker Mountain Unit are part of a much larger landscape-level system connecting expansive mountain ranges and historic travel routes – including the nationally significant Appalachian Trail; an interstate system of snowmobile trails, and a growing regional network of ATV trails.

3. New public and private initiatives to further develop the recreation-based economy, and to conserve the special natural areas in the Region are strong, and sometimes competing.
4. The overriding attraction of the area for recreationists is its undeveloped backcountry character and exceptional natural beauty. Careful stewardship is needed to protect these values while making the public lands available to enjoy.
5. There are many opportunities for development of public-private partnerships to further both conservation, and development and stewardship of recreational opportunities on the Bureau managed public reserved lands - including partnerships or cooperative agreements with the Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC); local snowmobile and ATV clubs; Maine Huts and Trails; the Town of Carrabassett Valley, CR NEMBA and others. These collaborative relationships are essential to good stewardship of the public lands.

## IV. Resources and Management Issues of the Crocker Mountain Unit

This first half of this section provides background information on the Crocker Mountain property, including the general character of the land base; geologic and ecological resources and natural communities; wildlife resources; historic and cultural resources; recreation and visual resources; and timber resources. The second half summarizes the key management issues and opportunities that the Plan will seek to address through the Vision, resource allocations and management recommendations for the unit.

### Character of the Land Base

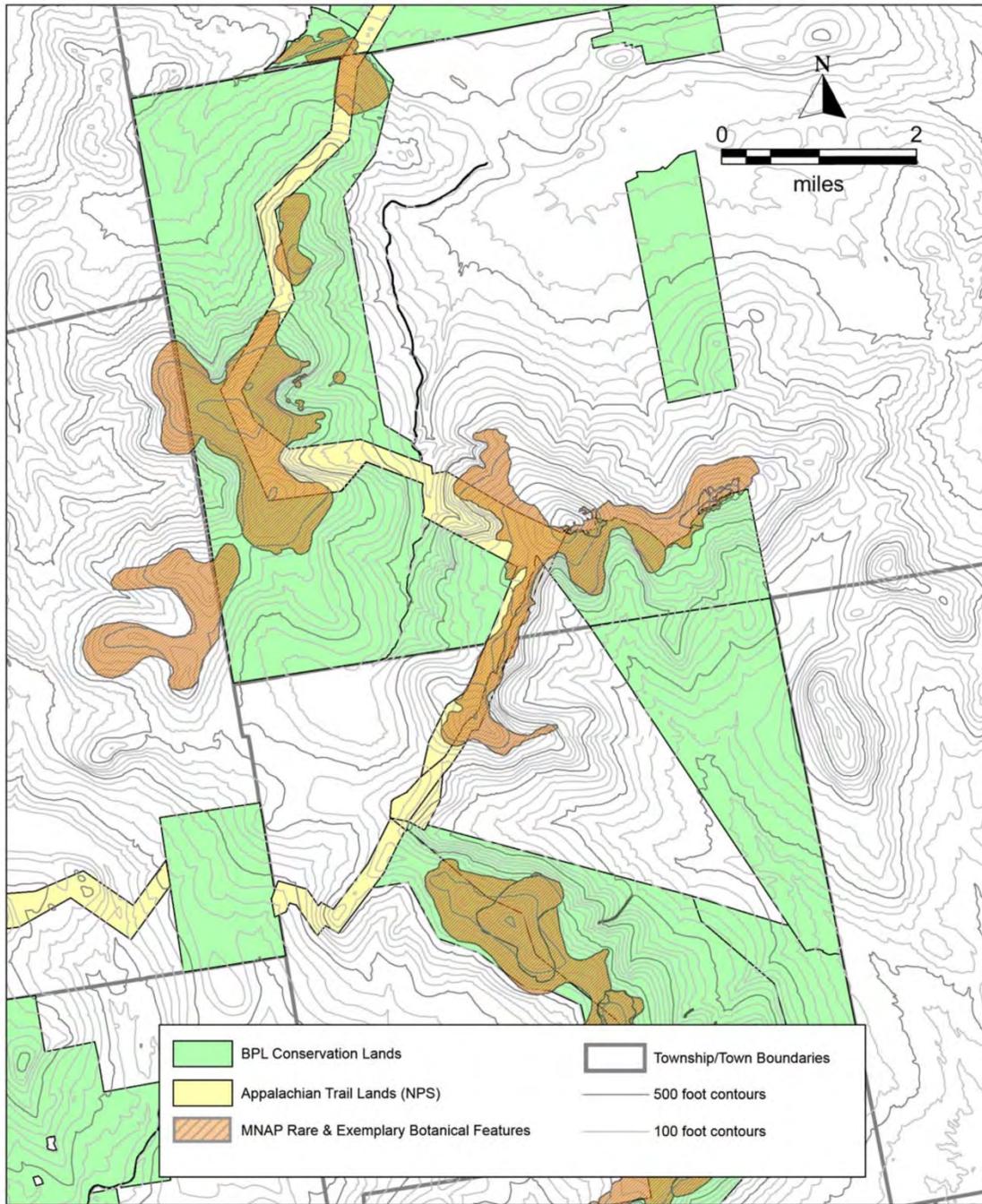
The Crocker Mountain Unit is located in the Town of Carrabassett Valley and in Mount Abram Township in Franklin County (see Map Figure 2). The property contains most of Crocker Mountain, as well as the south slopes of Sugarloaf Mountain and adjacent Burnt Hill. Crocker Mountain is crowned by two of Maine's fourteen 4,000 foot peaks, North and South Crocker (the actual peaks are within the A.T. corridor); Sugarloaf also tops 4,000 feet. The highest elevation within the Crocker Mountain area of the unit is near the summit of North Crocker at about 4,200 feet, while the lowest elevation is 1,450 feet at the northeast corner of the unit, along Route 27. The highest elevation within the Rapid Stream area is about 4,150 feet, at the north end, on the shoulder of Sugarloaf Peak; the lowest elevation is about 1,100 feet, where Rapid Stream exits the south end of the Unit.

Besides the mountain peaks themselves, perhaps the most dramatic feature of the lands is the east-facing glacial cirque below the North Crocker peak (and the similar cirque below South Crocker Peak, within the A.T. corridor). The steep walls and outcrops of the cirques are visible from a distance to sightseers on Route 27 and, from closer-up, to skiers and hikers on nearby Sugarloaf peak.

The Crocker Mountain unit is nearly entirely forested, with no significant waterbodies. Unlike the open rocky summits of the Bigelow Range, Sugarloaf Mountain, and Mount Abraham, Crocker Mountain is cloaked with a high-elevation forest that reaches all the way to the peaks of the mountain. The forests at lower elevations consist of hardwood stands (mainly beech, birch and maple) and mixedwood stands. From 2,000-2,700 feet the forest gradually changes to one dominated by spruce and fir. Above 3,000 feet the trees decrease in size, becoming low and shrub like in areas with thin soils. The lands have been managed as commercial timberland for more than 100 years. Most of the lower elevation forests have been harvested during the past 30 years.

Several exemplary natural communities are present at the higher elevations, as are rare plant species that are associated with the unique geology of the lands, both on the Bureau's parcels and within the AT corridor (Map Figure 3 depicts rare plants and exemplary natural communities identified by the Maine Natural Areas Program). Stoney Brook arises on the north side of Crocker Mountain and flows across the northwest quadrant of the unit, eventually flowing into Stratton Brook at the margin of the Bigelow Preserve. The South Branch of the Carrabassett River flows north from its origin at Caribou Pond (just outside the state lands) and through Caribou Valley, crossing the south portion of the unit; after 12 miles the branch joins Huston

# MNAP "Rare and Exemplary" Features



March 17, 2015

MAP FIGURE 3

Brook to form the main stem of the Carrabassett, which is a primary tributary of the Kennebec River.

While the main draw for visitors to the Crocker Mountain lands has been the 4,000 foot peaks and the Appalachian Trail that provides hikers access to them, a wide range of other dispersed activities have historically occurred on the lands including hunting, fishing, cross country skiing, mountain biking, sightseeing and wildlife watching.

## **Natural Resources**

*Geology and Soils:* Much of the bedrock at the higher elevations within the Crocker Mountain Unit is classified as 'gabbro' and 'ultra-mafic'. These are intrusive, dark, coarse-grained igneous rocks rich in magnesium and tending to be more alkaline (higher pH) than the acidic/granitic rocks that underlie most of Maine. Ultra-mafic bedrock occurs in only a few places and accounts for less than 0.2% of the state.

The bedrock geology of the Unit also includes other intrusive igneous rocks or weakly metamorphosed sedimentary rocks of similar age. Also present are older sedimentary rocks (sandstone, shale, and conglomerate), which underlie most of the Rapid Stream parcels. The oldest bedrock present within the Unit, metamorphic rocks of the Ordovician Dead River Formation, is found beneath the northwest portion of the Crocker Mountain area.

The surficial geology is characterized by bedrock at or near the surface on the higher elevations (with prominent outcrops visible on the steep sides of the glacial cirques). At mid and lower elevations, glacial till deposited during the retreat of the last ice sheet overlies the bedrock. In most areas, loamy and organic soils from a few inches to a few feet thick, often with surface stones and boulders, overlie the bedrock or glacial till. Soils on the ridgelines are shallow, typically consisting of a thin layer of organic soil directly on bedrock.

*Ecological Processes:* As at neighboring Bigelow Preserve and Bigelow Mountain, ecological processes at Crocker Mountain reflect the influence of high elevation and steep topography. Traveling up slope, the wind increases, precipitation increases and temperatures decrease. These factors have conspired to create distinct habitats – and therefore distinct plant communities. Hardwoods dominate on the lower slopes of the mountains, the Stoney Brook drainage, and in the Rapid Stream valley, while spruce and fir communities become more prominent as elevation increases. The transition zone between hardwoods and spruce/fir takes place at a lower elevation on the northern and eastern sides of the mountains than on the southern and western sides, because the northern and eastern sides are cooler and more shaded. Growing conditions continue to become harsher as one gains elevation. In some wind-scoured areas near the summits of the Crocker Mountain peaks and Sugarloaf, the vegetation is in the form of “krummholz” (meaning “crooked wood”), which consists of dense spruce, fir and birch limited to a low, shrub like growth form by the harsh conditions.

There is also a history of fire from roughly 100 years ago along the valley of the South Branch of the Carrabassett River. Fire history is evident here both as old charred stumps and the abundance of aspen and paper birch in the overstory.

Natural Communities: The Crocker Unit is comprised of upland and alpine forest communities, with few wetlands. The upland forests are a mix of Northern Hardwoods Forest (dominated by beech, sugar maple and yellow birch) on the lower elevations and softwoods (Montane Spruce-Fir Forest and Fir-Heartleaf Birch Subalpine Forest) on the mid and higher elevations. Most of the lower and mid-elevation forest is young (saplings or pole timber) with patches of more mature trees, particularly in riparian buffers. Several 30-50 acre plantations, nearly entirely spruce and now about 20 years old, have been planted on the moderate slopes above Stoney Brook Road and Rapid Stream Road. A small bog covering about 5 acres is perched atop the steep slopes east of the Carrabassett River, at about 3,300 feet; a shrub wetland surrounds a small stream in the south part of the unit that flows into Caribou Pond.

Exemplary Natural Communities and Rare Plant Species: An Ecological Reserve has been proposed for about 4,000 acres of the Crocker Mountain area to protect several exemplary natural communities and rare plants (see Appendix D). The exemplary natural communities include Beech-Birch-Maple Forest, Fir-Heartleaf Birch Sub-Alpine Forest, a Subalpine Hanging Bog and a Boreal Circumneutral Outcrop, the last three considered rare in Maine. (Fact sheets on Maine's natural community types are available at <http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mnap/features/commsheets.htm>.) The Beech-Birch-Maple Forest on the unit, a common forest type, is considered exemplary because of the stand composition of very mature trees – possibly old growth. The Boreal Circumneutral Outcrop is a plant community associated with the “ultramafic” type of bedrock described above and only found in a few other locations in Maine. These special ecological resources are concentrated on the higher elevations and the glacial cirques.

Glacial action and subsequent erosion scoured and plucked bedrock off the ridgetop and steep slopes of Crocker Mountain, exposing ledges and high elevation seeps and creating habitat for a number of rare plants that are restricted to these conditions, including black sedge (*Carex atratiformis*), bulrush sedge (*Carex scirpoidea*), and several others. (Fact sheets for Maine's rare plants are available at [http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mnap/features/rare\\_plants/index.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mnap/features/rare_plants/index.htm).)

Wildlife and Fisheries Resources: The Crocker Mountain Unit is within the Mount Abraham-Saddleback-Crocker Mountain Focus Area of the Maine Wildlife Action Plan, one of 140 such areas of statewide ecological significance identified by state biologists. These areas support rare plants, animals, and natural communities; high quality common natural communities; significant wildlife habitats; and their intersections with large blocks of undeveloped habitat.

Crocker Mountain is part of the largest contiguous block of high elevation forest in Maine (above 2,700 feet), which provides critical habitat for species dependent on spruce/fir forest (Canada lynx, pine marten, snowshoe hare) and deep snowpack. The high elevation subalpine forest may be used as nesting habitat by a number of high elevation and/or coniferous forest specialist bird species, such as the spruce grouse, dark-eyed junco, bay-breasted warbler, black-backed woodpecker, white-throated sparrow, and blackpoll warbler. The rare Bicknell's thrush, which breeds in subalpine forest habitat dominated by stunted fir and spruce thickets, has been documented on Crocker Mountain. The yellow-nosed or rock vole, formerly listed as a species of Special Concern in Maine, favors high and mid-elevation forests with abundant crevices

beneath rocks and roots<sup>1</sup>. A 2006 NPS survey captured rock voles near the Appalachian Trail on Crocker Mountain as well as on Bigelow Mountain. Similar sites within the Unit, consisting of steep slopes with boulders and ledge, may also harbor this species.

The mid-elevation spruce-fir forest may be utilized by a number of coniferous forest specialist bird species such as black-throated green warbler. The lower elevation hardwood forests are home to a wide variety of passerine bird species (e.g., black-capped chickadee, black-throated blue warbler, white-throated sparrow, cedar waxwing), and other common wildlife such as porcupine, snowshoe hare, moose, white-tailed deer, black bear, and red squirrel.

Native brook trout are present in the South Branch Carrabassett River, Stoney Brook, and Rapid Stream, and potentially in the perennial tributaries of these streams, where deeper pools provide pocket habitat. The southerly 70 percent of the Unit is within the area designated by NOAA as critical habitat for the Gulf of Maine Distinct Population Segment of Atlantic Salmon, which is federally listed as endangered.

Roaring Brook mayfly, endemic to the Northeast U.S. and listed as Endangered in Maine, prefers cold, swift-flowing undisturbed perennial streams in high elevation habitats (> 1,000 feet in elevation). Surveys conducted by MDIF&W in 2007 and 2009 on the Crocker Mountain lands found the species in Stoney Brook and in two tributaries to the South Branch Carrabassett River; it may also be present in other suitable habitat on the unit that has not been surveyed. (A fact sheets on this species is available at [http://www.maine.gov/ifw/wildlife/endangered/pdfs/roaringbrookmayfly\\_94\\_95.pdf](http://www.maine.gov/ifw/wildlife/endangered/pdfs/roaringbrookmayfly_94_95.pdf).)

Detailed mapping of rare, threatened or endangered wildlife and rare or exemplary plants and natural communities on the Unit and the surrounding Carrabassett Valley region is available from the Beginning with Habitat program ([http://beginningwithhabitat.org/the\\_maps/pdfs/Carrabassett%20Valley/Carrabassett%20Map%202.pdf](http://beginningwithhabitat.org/the_maps/pdfs/Carrabassett%20Valley/Carrabassett%20Map%202.pdf)).

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

Little specific information is available on historic or cultural resources that may be present on the Unit. Native American archeological sites have been identified downstream along the Carrabassett River. For example, in 2008 an archeological survey found evidence of a small Native American encampment on the river terrace at the south end of the Sugarloaf Regional Airport.

The Crocker Mountain area and the upper Rapid Stream area are within the former Crockertown Township. (The town of Carrabassett Valley was formed by the incorporation of adjacent Jerusalem Township in 1971. Crockertown Township was annexed by the town in 1975). The historical record indicates that in 1837, Crockertown was uninhabited but logging had begun. Just a handful of families resided in Jerusalem Township. The first residents did not arrive in Crockertown until 1880, establishing a farm along the Carrabassett River near what is now the

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<sup>1</sup> Rock vole was recently taken off the Maine Special Concern list because it was found to be more common than previously thought. Nevertheless, it is considered less abundant in the eastern part of its range (including Maine) than elsewhere and may have experienced a long-term population decline.

Campbell Field trailhead [Maine Resource Guide (on-line) – Carrabassett Valley and Sugarloaf, Maine].

For the past century or more, the Crocker Mountain Unit lands were in the ownership of various paper companies. Historical topographic maps from 1928, 1932, and 1956 indicate no roads on the property. Jeep trails were present along parts of the South Branch Carrabassett River, Stoney Brook and Rapid Stream by 1928. No structures are apparent other than a single structure near Caribou Pond shown on the 1932 map.

## Access

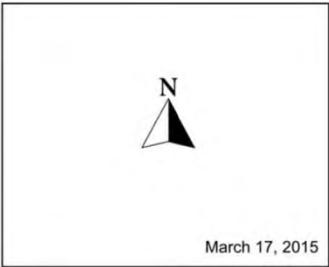
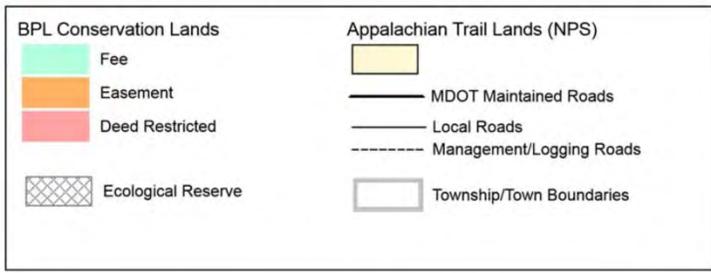
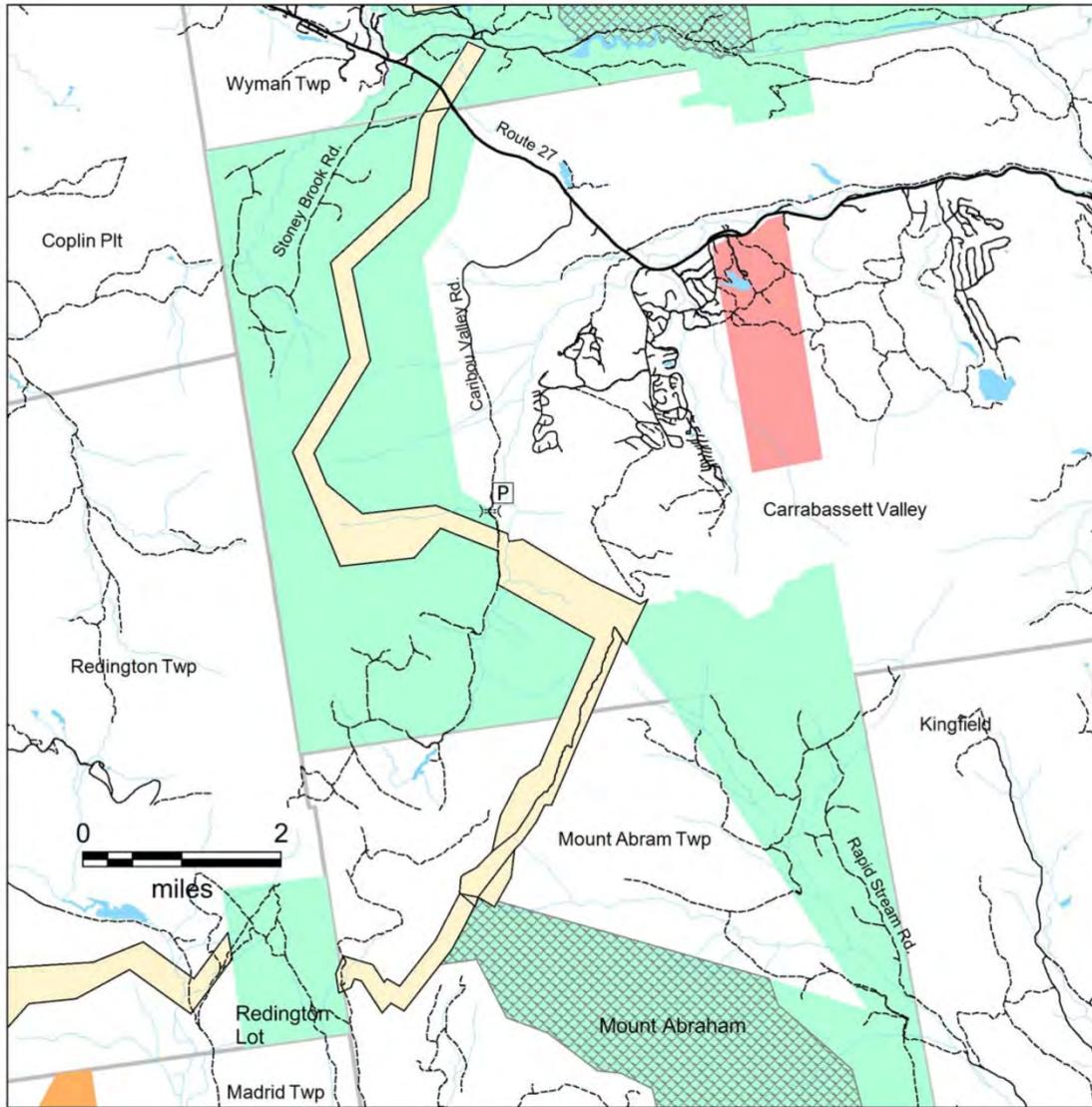
Vehicle access to the Crocker Mountain area of the Unit is available via Caribou Valley Road and Stoney Brook Road (labeled Plum Creek Road in the DeLorme Atlas) (see Map Figure 4). The boundary of the unit is approximately 4 miles south of Route 27 on Caribou Valley Road. An easement granted by Plum Creek (see Appendix E) provides for public recreational access for registered vehicles; the easement does not grant a right-of-way for ATVs or snowmobiles, but the local snowmobile club has received permission for snowmobile use of the road on an annual basis. The Sugarloaf ski resort also has deeded access rights along Caribou Valley Road to access the parcel they own at Caribou Pond. The section of the road crossing the unit is closed to vehicles due to bridges that are in need of maintenance or upgrading. Plum Creek has recently installed a gate about 800 feet before the boundary (replacing seasonally-installed cement barriers), where several parking spaces are provided. The gate will be opened during the winter to allow snowmobile passage.

The Bureau is entitled to maintain the Caribou Valley Road at its own cost, with the approval of Plum Creek. Plum Creek is not responsible to maintain the road except for its own uses. However, the Bureau and Plum Creek worked collaboratively to conduct maintenance in the fall of 2014, when grading and ditch work was performed on a shared cost basis. The road is generally drivable by standard vehicles, although some sections require caution when used by vehicles without high clearance.

Stoney Brook Road enters the northwest part of the Crocker Mountain area three quarters of a mile south of Route 27, after crossing the Wyman Lot. The road climbs steadily across the Wyman Lot and for the first mile after entering the unit, and is most eroded in that section. The road winds for several more miles on the unit, running southward across the lower slopes of Stoney Brook Mountain before turning west then north and terminating near the northwest corner of the unit.

Deeded access to the Rapid Stream area is via Rapid Stream Road, a rough gravel timber management road which begins at the end of West Kingfield Road, about 3.5 miles west of Kingfield, and winds northward alongside Rapid Stream for about 3 miles to reach the boundary of the Unit. Soon after entering the unit, the road leaves the stream and begins to climb the shoulder of Black Nubble, leveling out after about 1.5 miles. The steeper portions of the road on the Unit are eroded and suitable only for high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicles. After about 3.5 miles, the road exits the State lands at the east boundary. It connects to several short spur roads and other rough gravel timber management roads on the Unit that extend into the north end of the parcels and to the west side of Rapid Stream. Missing bridges at stream crossings limit access to the further reaches of this road network.

# Crocker Mountain Unit Roads



MAP FIGURE 4.

## Recreation and Visual Resources

The Crocker Mountain Unit lands have historically been open to multiple forms of recreation such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling and ATV riding. Access provided by logging roads and favorable habitat conditions resulting from timber harvesting practices have made the property popular for hunting game birds, deer, bear and moose. The existing snowmobile trails on Rapid Stream Road (a critical link in the ITS system) and Caribou Valley Road (a local trail providing access to Caribou Pond) have been in place for several years, as have the ATV routes on Rapid Stream Road and Stoney Brook Road. Map Figure 5 depicts snowmobile and ATV trails and other recreational facilities in and near the Unit.

Situated at the heart of the High Peaks region, the Crocker Mountain lands are a part of one of the most dramatic and scenic landscapes in the state. The lands provide much of the visual backdrop to the 9.7-mile section of the A.T. that crosses the unit, beyond the NPS-owned trail corridor. Views of Crocker Mountain are prominent from many vantage points in the High Peaks but in particular from the high ground of the Bigelow Range, Sugarloaf peak, and Mount Abram. Particularly dramatic are views of the east-facing glacial cirques from Sugarloaf. The Crocker Mountain area is visible from the Route 27 (now High Peaks) Scenic Byway, a state designated byway that is valued as a scenic and recreationally significant road.

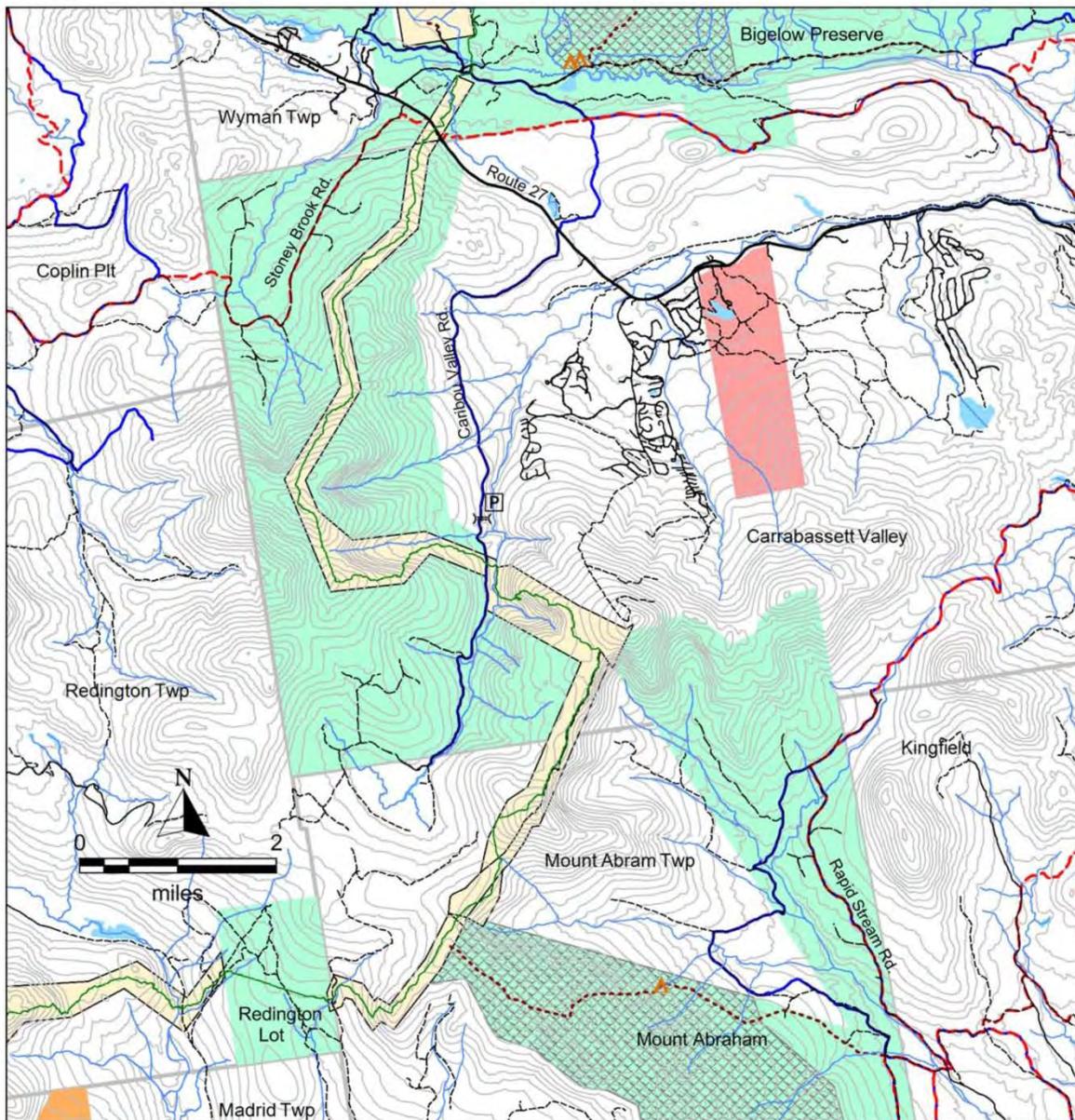
## Timber Resources

These following summary descriptions are limited to the potential timber management acres on the Crocker Mountain tract, not including the area designated as an Ecological Reserve. This summary is also limited by the small amount of exploration of the lands done since State acquisition.

*Harvest History and Current Stocking:* An inventory done in 2011 and provided by the previous landowner showed a merchantable volume of 14.7 cords per acre. However, that inventory covered all forested area, including several thousand acres to be included in an ecological reserve or another allocation where timber harvesting is not a planned activity. Most stands outside that reserve area have been harvested to some extent over the past 30 years, with perhaps one-third (about 2,000 acres) having been clearcut. On the 6,000+ acres where timber will be managed, the volume averages in the range of 8-9 cords per acre. This low volume is counterbalanced by full stocking in most of the clearcut/heavily cut stands, though tree sizes there are small, mainly 3-6" in diameter. Nearly 700 acres of the clearcuts were planted, almost all to spruce, with most plantations established in 1992-93 and some 1998-99. The remainder of the clearcut acres appears to have received a softwoods release using herbicide shortly after being harvested, and a minority of those acres were precommercially thinned in the late 1990s. Some of the clearcut/herbicide acres are at elevations above 3,000 feet, though on land with modest slopes and deep soils.

*Stand Type Characteristics:* Due to the relatively low per-acre stocking, species composition is presented for the timber management acres as a whole, with brief discussions of softwood/mixedwood/hardwood type characteristics described later. The 8-9 cords per acre on the timber management area is about 60% softwoods, with spruce and fir each at 21-22% and cedar 10%. Hemlock and pines (mainly white pine) make up the rest of the softwood component, except for occasional tamarack. Red and sugar maples share equally 19% of total volume and yellow birch adds 8%, beech 6%. Paper birch, quaking aspen, and white ash are 3%,

## Crocker Mountain Unit Infrastructure and Recreation Facilities



March 17, 2015

MAP FIGURE 5.

2%, and 1% respectively. In general, merchantable size spruce, fir, paper birch, and aspen are 5-10" in diameter, found mainly in the plantations and other clearcut/heavy cut acres, though some larger spruce is found in riparian buffers. Other species have a wider range in diameters. On average, quality appears fair in many larger trees, especially in hardwood areas which have had recent harvests, while the younger, smaller trees are mostly healthy and vigorous.

Softwood stands, except for riparian buffers, are nearly all 30 years old or younger and growing well, although those at high elevation are naturally growing less rapidly than those lower down. These young stands currently hold modest volume, but are at the stage where volume increases rapidly as trees attain merchantable size, and cords per acre might double to 15-20 by the end of the planning period. Much of this type appears to be high quality hare habitat, and would thus be important for lynx if their range expands to include this area (assuming it has not already done so.)

Mixedwood stands include over 400 acres of plantations and probably that much or more in the herbicide release stands. Most of these acres are heavy to softwoods but with sufficient hardwood component to meet the mixedwood standards. Older mixedwood stands are mainly Northern hardwoods plus spruce-fir. Volumes on mixedwood acres are probably similar to those on the softwoods.

Hardwood stands are generally of pole timber (6-10" diameter) or saw timber size, and nearly all have been partially harvested at least once during the past 30 years. Volumes are probably somewhat higher than in other types but still modest. Species composition is mainly maples, yellow birch, and beech, with fair to poor quality in the largest stems and better in pole timber sizes.

## **Management Issues, Concerns and Opportunities**

The Bureau of Parks and Lands will manage the Crocker Mountain Unit for multiple uses including outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat, scenic and natural area protection, water quality protection, and production of forest products. The following discussion summarizes the key management issues and opportunities associated with each of these uses on the Crocker Mountain lands.

### *Timber Management*

The Crocker Mountain Agreement stipulates that at least 50 percent of the Crocker Mountain lands will be managed as a multiple use working forest. Timber harvests on the Unit will supply forest products to local mills and be a source of employment for loggers, truckers, road construction, and others in related businesses. Timber harvests will also be an important source of timber revenue to support the Bureau's management program.

The Bureau manages timber resources where allocated to provide a diverse forested environment and generate high quality-high value products to support Bureau operations and the local economy. Exemplary management that contributes to public values, including recreation and wildlife habitat, is the standard.

There are approximately 7,250 acres of potentially regulated forest – those lands which the Bureau could manage to yield a sustained flow of forest products and to improve the quality of

the forest resource – that may be allocated to timber management as a dominant or important secondary use. Timber management may be designated as a dominant land use but may also occur as a secondary activity on lands with other dominant resource allocations, such as Remote Recreation or Wildlife Management areas.

Access is good for most of the Stony Brook valley, though some culverts need replacing, and is mostly in place though sometimes eroded in the Rapid Stream area on Mt. Abram Township. Access to the southwest corner of Carrabassett Valley on the Caribou Valley Road south of the current blockage is more problematic, with restoration an expensive proposition due to the road's location on the steep sidehill near the Carrabassett River. Access from the south would be less costly, though it hinges on abutting landowner and A.T. permission. (There is an approved timber haul road A.T. crossing on private forestland adjacent to the Redington Lot.)

A considerable portion of the area available for timber management is at high elevation, impacting both growth and harvesting cost. In addition, recent harvests have resulted in low overall timber volumes and a high proportion of young stands. Barring some catastrophe, significant timber harvesting during the planning period seems unlikely.

Specific timber management issues and concerns include:

- Outside of the spruce plantations, much of the young stand area is heavy to fir, which could be a concern if there is a spruce budworm outbreak.
- Most of the land is clearly visible from points where recreational users are likely to visit. The distance from viewpoints to lower elevation forest is sufficiently great that Class 2 Visual Consideration allocation will probably cover most viewsheds.

Wildlife and Habitat Protection

Roaring Brook mayfly has been found in Stoney Brook and its feeder streams and in small streams flowing into the Carrabassett River on the east side of Crocker Mountain. Based on habitat conditions and proximity to known Roaring Brook mayfly occurrences, there is good potential for it to be present in some of the other perennial streams on the unit. It will be necessary to maintain existing wooded buffers or to reestablish wooded buffers on those streams to help reduce potential sedimentation and maintain cool water temperatures.

This protection would be provided by a Special Protection allocation on the portions of the Unit designated as an Ecological Reserve. Where Roaring Brook mayfly has been documented or suitable habitat exists outside the Ecological Reserve, protection would be provided by a Wildlife dominant allocation, based on the “significant habitat” criteria described in the IRP. The allocation would be applied so as to demarcate a 330-foot buffer zone on each side of the streams that are known to harbor or that provide suitable Roaring Brook Mayfly habitat, rather than the 75-foot buffer zone typically applied in minor riparian zones. (Minor riparian zones are generally designated around flowing water bodies upstream from the point where such water drains less than 50 square miles.)

The subalpine conifer forest habitat of the Bicknell's thrush, and the moist high elevation forests with mossy rock outcrops and talus slopes favored by the yellow-nosed vole, will require special protection. Protection of these habitats will occur by the future Ecological Reserve designation

and an overlapping Special Protection allocation. Any trail construction or other recreational development in these areas would need to be carefully planned to minimize potential impacts to these important habitats.

### Recreation Facility Development

The residents of Carrabassett Valley and the surrounding region place a particularly high value on the existing recreation uses and the recreation potential of the Crocker Mountain Unit lands, which were a primary purpose of the state's acquisition of the property. As described in the Crocker Mountain Agreement (Appendix B), development of new motorized and non-motorized trails and related infrastructure – subject to development of this management plan, permitting and funding – is a prominent interest. Therefore, a primary objective of this plan is to provide direction for the management of recreation uses and for development of trails and, potentially, other recreation facilities over the next 15 years within the context of the other land uses and the Bureau's management policies.

The need for recreational trail connectivity has been recognized throughout the acquisition of the Crocker Mountain Unit. Continued use of the approximately 3 miles of ITS snowmobile trail and 6 miles of state-sanctioned ATV trail are understood to be vital to the regional motorized trail networks. The Bureau also recognizes the desire to connect any future mountain bike trails on the Unit to existing networks in Carrabassett Valley, as has been the case with mountain bike routes approved in the adjacent portion of the Bigelow Preserve.

The Crocker Mountain property is also an important element in the continued development of the Maine Huts & Trails trail system. Potential extension of the existing trails south from Carrabassett Valley includes a groomed cross-country ski trail connection along or over the Caribou Valley Road that would link to a hut tentatively planned for a site overlooking Caribou Pond, on a parcel abutting the Unit.

### **Non-motorized Trails**

*Mountain Bike Trails* – Mountain bike interests and the local community have a keen interest in the development of mountain bike trails on the unit. During Plan scoping, CR NEMBA submitted a 3-page “Concept Plan for Mountain Bike Trail Development” to BPL which details the organization's vision for development of a third mountain bike trail network (termed a “pod” in the Concept Plan) that will complement and be connected to existing pods at the Sugarloaf Outdoor Center and north of Route 27. As describe previously, these existing pods link to the Narrow Gauge pathway, MH&T trails and trails in the Bigelow Preserve. CR NEMBA expresses the overall long-term vision for the completed network on the Crocker Mountain Unit and surrounding lands as follows: “100 miles of trail for all levels of rider and...of sufficient size and scope as to attract riders who wish to stay in the region for a multi-day riding experience.”

The concept plan includes maps depicting two areas of primary interest for bike trail development within the Unit, both within the Crocker Mountain area and accessible by existing gravel roads. Each covers an area of about 700 acres. The first area of interest is on the southeast shoulder of South Crocker Mountain, upslope from Caribou Valley Road, which forms

the east boundary. Elevations along the road, which climbs gradually from north to south, range from about 2,250 to 2,700 feet. The highest elevation in the area is about 3,750 feet, on a broad ridge overlooking Caribou Valley and Caribou Pond. Logging roads connected to Caribou Valley Road cross the area and run along much of the perimeter. The second area of interest is at the north end of the Unit in the vicinity of Stoney Brook. It lies on the western slope of the ridgeline that climbs south of Route 27 toward North Crocker Mountain, and which the A.T. traverses. The area is crossed by Stoney Brook Road and several spur roads. Stoney Brook is along the west boundary. The elevation of the area ranges from about 1,500 feet along the brook to about 2,100 feet along the upper slopes.

CR NEMBA's concept is for 15-20 miles of single-track purpose-built mountain bike trail within the Crocker Mountain Unit, designed for intermediate to advanced riders. Trails in both areas would be linked to the existing networks by existing roads and trails or by new trails to be built by Maine Huts & Trails. The Concept Plan includes the adjacent Wyman Lot as a trail across that parcel would be needed to link new trails in the Stoney Brook vicinity to the mountain bike trail network on the north side of Route 27.

Preliminarily, the two areas of interest appear suitable for well-planned and executed mountain bike trail development, with a reasonable trail density if the full desired length were to be constructed. Moderately steep slopes in these areas provide opportunities for constructing challenging trails, but also present challenges for constructing sustainable trails with suitable drainage and erosion control. The existing spur roads provide opportunities for breaking longer trail loops into shorter segments by which riders may exit a trail and more easily return to their starting point. These roads may also assist in conducting logging operations without disrupting access to an entire riding area or loop trail or necessitating construction of alternative routes while logging work is in progress.

Trails in the Stoney Brook area of interest would have the advantage of being more easily accessed from Route 27, with a trailhead built along Route 27 (as already contemplated for winter use) or along Stoney Brook Road within the Unit. It may also be possible to construct a bike trail across the Wyman Lot that would connect to trails north of Route 27. Trails on the southeast shoulder of Crocker Mountain would be accessed from the existing parking area on Caribou Valley Road just outside the Unit boundary, and riding in from there on the road.

In both areas, timber management would continue. Judicious trail planning and routing will be necessary to develop trail systems in each area that allow timber harvesting with the least crossing and disruption of constructed trails.

*Hiking Trails* – Although scoping comments have not included requests for new hiking trails, development of hiking trails could be pursued as needs dictate and resources allow. Demand for new trails in the area is likely lessened by the fact that the central ridgeline across Crocker Mountain is already occupied by the A.T., and hikers are thereby provided access to the Crocker Mountain peaks. Also, the opportunity for new trails is to some degree constrained by the lack of large unroaded areas within the unit and the numerous logging roads present. (This is in contrast to the Bigelow Preserve and Mount Abraham, where roads are mainly confined to the perimeter, leaving large blocks of unroaded land in the center of the units for trails.)

However, the Bureau has recognized a scarcity of shorter (2-3 day) backpacking trail loops in the region and the state. An opportunity to supply a new opportunity of this type may be present in the Rapid Stream area, via a north/south trail linking to the A.T. on Sugarloaf Mountain and the Firewarden's Trail on Mount Abraham. Any new trails that connect to the A.T. would need to be coordinated with the National Park Service, Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and Maine Appalachian Trail Club (MATC), and designated as a "blue-blazed" A.T. side trail.

*Cross-country Skiing and Snowshoeing Trails* – The Crocker Mountain Agreement recognized the importance of connecting the MH&T trails in Carrabassett Valley with a potential future hut to the south of the Crocker Mountain Unit, possibly near Caribou Pond. Specifically, the agreement specifies that a groomed cross-country ski trail connection over or along the Caribou Valley Road will be permitted by the Bureau, subject to local and state regulations. If a new hut is developed adjacent to the Unit, there may be increased interest in ski trails at the south end of the unit.

On BPL lands, management roads and logging trails are often used as shared-use trails for both snowshoeing and ungroomed cross-country ski trails (there are two such trails on the Bigelow Preserve). On the Crocker Mountain Unit, the numerous miles of unplowed logging roads should provide opportunities for both ungroomed cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

## **Motorized Trails**

*Snowmobile Trails* – At the present, the primary interest of snowmobile riders is to continue the club-maintained trail on the Caribou Valley Road from Route 27 to Caribou Pond (using the deeded motorized crossing of the A.T.) and the ITS 115 trail that runs down the east side of the Rapid Stream parcel in Mount Abram Township. If in the future the Caribou Pond trail is extended southward to the Redington Lot and on to Madrid Township, it would serve as primary north-south route for snowmobiles in the region. Reestablishing this former route through the High Peaks region has been a long-standing desire of the local snowmobile community and is considered a vital part of developing the regional snowmobile trail system, providing more opportunities for shorter loop rides.

*ATV Trails* – The primary interest of ATV interests is to maintain the current ATV trails crossing the unit on logging roads. One trail crosses the Stoney Brook area of the Unit (linking trails in Carrabassett Valley to those in Coplin Plantation and Redington Township); another crosses the Rapid Stream area, following the same logging roads as the ITS snowmobile trail and linking Carrabassett Valley to Kingfield and Salem Township. There is also an interest in use of Caribou Valley Road and designation of short destination trails, primarily on existing management roads, in the south part of the Crocker Mountain area. It should be noted that ATV use is not currently permitted on the portion of Caribou Valley Road leading to the Unit from Route 27 across Plum Creek lands.

In the longer term, ATV riders are also interested in a north-south trail along the Caribou Valley Road and extending southward to the Redington Lot and on to Madrid Township. Similar to the snowmobilers, ATV interests consider this north-south link to be vital to the development of the regional trail network that would provide shorter trail loops. Shorter loops tied into the 138-mile Moose Loop trail that encircles the High Peaks region would provide for a variety of less

demanding day-trip rides appealing to a greater range of riders. During the acquisition of the Crocker Mountain Unit, the Bureau evaluated the feasibility of an ATV trail across the south part of the unit on old logging roads, climbing the saddle between South Crocker Mountain and Redington Mountain and continuing west, and determined that route to be infeasible due to severe erosion on the roads, drainage issues, and steep terrain.

The Town of Carrabassett Valley expressed concern that the existing snowmobile access (and other potential motorized access) from Rt. 27 to the Unit on Caribou Valley Road could be lost due to future development of the lands surrounding the road. The town requested that a motorized trail corridor be provided on the east side of the Crocker Mountain Unit lands to provide an option to Caribou Valley Road for future motorized trail connections.

### **Other Potential Recreational Facilities**

New trailheads and parking areas may be incorporated into planning for new mountain bike trails, to provide for the opportunity to access the new trails from within the unit as well as by riding into the unit using existing trails and roads. As noted in the Flagstaff Region Plan (p.149), the Bureau has contemplated developing a trailhead on the Wyman Lot on the south side of Route 27. The purpose would be to provide cross-country skiing and snowshoeing access to unplowed roads and trails on the Bigelow Preserve during the winter. (The nearby A.T. trailhead is not plowed in the winter.) Such a trailhead could also serve non-motorized trails on the Wyman parcel and in the Stoney Brook area.

It may be feasible to develop drive-in, bike-in or walk-in campsites in association with the development of hiking, mountain biking, and motorized trails. For example, a 2-3 day backpacking loop passing through the Rapid Stream area could include a campsite to complement the existing lean-to site on the A.T. at Spaulding Mountain and the group campsite on the Fire Warden Trail at Mount Abraham. Also, mountain bike riders may appreciate the opportunity to camp in a backcountry setting in the vicinity of new trail networks on the unit, providing for a multi-day riding and camping experience.

#### Specific recreation facility development issues and concerns include:

- Providing regional trail connections to and across the Crocker Mountain Unit for motorized and non-motorized trail systems, including a MH&T groomed cross-country ski trail,
- Providing adequate space and appropriate areas for the mountain biking community to develop trail networks, with total mileage, ride distances and types of riding experience consistent with their vision and complementing existing trails in Carrabassett Valley,
- Providing areas where mountain bike trails can be developed with minimal disruption or need for reconstruction or rerouting due to future timber harvest activity,
- Protecting the resources of the A.T. and A.T. corridor lands and hiker experiences from potential adverse impact associated with new motorized and non-motorized trails,
- Exploring the potential for day hiking and backpacking trails that may connect to the A.T. to expand the diversity of hiking options in the area with new trail loops, and

- Providing parking areas and trailheads that provide direct access to potential hiking and mountain biking trails on the unit.

### Appalachian Trail Access and Protection

The Bureau recognizes the importance of protecting the scenic qualities of the lands surrounding the A.T. and the quiet recreation experience desired by hikers. Most of the Crocker Mountain Unit lands adjacent to the A.T. corridor will be designated as an Ecological Reserve, with a Special Protection allocation, which will provide a substantial additional buffer to the trail beyond the existing federally-owned trail corridor. The only exception to this is the lands to the west of the northernmost 2.5 miles of the 9.7 miles of the trail bisecting the Unit. The mid-slope lands below the trail corridor in that vicinity have been harvested in recent decades, and are the site of several plantations that extend upslope from Stoney Brook Road nearly to the corridor. Bureau management of these lands will need to address visual considerations as viewed from the A.T.

The Bureau does not anticipate a need for new road or motorized trail crossings of the A.T. on the Unit. It is anticipated that the current snowmobile use of the deeded crossing on Caribou Valley Road will continue. ATV use is not included among the vehicular uses permitted on the Caribou Valley Road from Route 27 to the Unit boundary by the easement granted by Plum Creek. However, in the future ATV interests may seek permission from Plum Creek to use the section connecting to Route 27, as the snowmobilers have done.

Until the bridges along Caribou Valley Road within the Unit are upgraded or repaired at some future date (e.g., in conjunction with timber harvesting), recreation access to on-road vehicles during the non-winter seasons will be limited. In the near term, no increase in vehicle activity at the approved A.T. crossing is anticipated.

### Administrative Issues

*Road Maintenance:* The Bureau is responsible for maintenance of Caribou Valley Road across the Plum Creek lands for the purposes of public recreational, administrative and timber management access. Plum Creek is responsible for maintenance only as required for their timber management use of the road. Nevertheless, Plum Creek has recently constructed a new gate near the Unit boundary to replace the seasonal barrier and has contributed to costs in conducting road maintenance on the portion of the road on their lands.

Rapid Stream Road, a gravel timber management road on private forestland, provides deeded access to the Rapid Stream area as well as to the Mount Abraham Unit. However, the road does not meet the Bureau's public road standards. Increased demands placed on the road as the result of the Crocker Mountain acquisition may increase the need for road improvements and maintenance.

As touched upon in relation to timber management, upgrading and maintenance of Caribou Valley Road across the unit presents challenges due to the several substantial bridges in need of repair and the location of the road on a steep side slope above the Carrabassett River. Given the substantial costs to upgrade and repair the road and bridges, and the lack of road connections or

recreation destinations that such work would benefit, the Bureau is not likely to invest in the road until necessary for timber harvests in the south part of the Unit.

Repair of erosion and replacement of culverts is needed on portions of Stoney Brook Road and Rapid Stream Road within the Unit for the roads to be used by other than 4 wheel-drive high clearance vehicles. However, like Caribou Valley Road, there is no immediate need to upgrade the roads since they do not connect to any other roads or provide access to recreation facilities. Any improvements are likely to be deferred until they are necessary for timber management. If improved access is desired to the Stoney Brook area of the Unit in conjunction with mountain bike trail development, this could be provided with modest repairs to the eroded portions of the road on the Wyman Lot and possibly to the initial segment on the Unit.

Spur roads off Stoney Brook Road and Caribou Valley Road and Rapid Stream Road that are not needed for recreation access should be “put to bed” until needed for future timber management.

*Bear Baiting Sites:* The previous owner leased bear bait sites in the Stoney Brook area. The Bureau will need to assess where this use could occur compatibly with other uses.

*Boundary Markings:* Most of the boundary lines of the unit were blazed (or reblazed) during the acquisition period. NPS and MATC have taken responsibility for blazing the common boundaries of the A.T. corridor and the Bureau’s lands.

*Fire Control:* The Bureau will work with the Maine Forest Service to develop a fire control plan for the Crocker Mountain Unit.

*Leases and Agreements:* There are no camplot or commercial leases on the Crocker Mountain lands.

*Inholdings:* There are no inholdings within the Crocker Mountain Unit lands.

## V. Vision for the Crocker Mountain Unit

*The Crocker Mountain lands are a recreationally and ecologically significant forestland prominently situated in the midst of the scenic High Peaks region, with existing and potential links to a variety of non-motorized and motorized trail networks.*

*The Crocker Mountain lands will provide a flow of forest products with a majority of the property managed as a multiple-use working forest for quality timber, respecting wildlife habitat needs and accommodating recreational trails. An Ecological Reserve will be established on approximately 4,000 acres focused on the higher elevations and areas surrounding the Appalachian Trail.*

*The Ecological Reserve will provide permanent protection for exemplary natural communities, several rare plants (black sedge, bulrush sedge, neglected reed-grass, and lesser wintergreen) and an endangered animal (Roaring Brook mayfly), with no timber harvesting or motorized recreation on those acres. The Ecological Reserve will be open to hunting, hiking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing and other non-motorized recreation compatible with the protection of Ecological Reserve values. Designated trails will support these uses, as needed, while avoiding impacts to the functions and values of the Ecological Reserve.*

*Outside the Ecological Reserve, additional protections will be provided with appropriate allocations for sensitive natural resources, such as habitat for the Endangered Roaring Brook mayfly.*

*The 9.7 mile segment of the Appalachian Trail surrounded by the Unit is a primary recreational resource and attraction to the area. Management of the Crocker Unit lands will ensure that the remote, wild and scenic A.T. experience is protected. Hiking and backpacking trails that complement and may link to the A.T. may be developed on the unit, with the cooperation and approval of the A.T. community.*

*Along with ecological values, a driving motivation for the acquisition of the Unit was the recreation potential of the lands. Varied recreational interests and the local communities are strongly interested in recreational development on the Unit. The Bureau will work with these interests to plan, build and maintain recreation amenities as needs dictate and resources allow, particularly new trails for mountain biking, hiking, and groomed cross-country skiing.*

*Traditional recreation activities such as hunting, trapping, and fishing will continue on the unit. Snowmobile use of the Caribou Valley Road corridor to reach Caribou Pond will continue, as will snowmobile and ATV use of other existing trails on management roads that are important links in the regional trail networks. ATV destination trails within the Unit will be explored if landowner permission allows access to the Unit via the Caribou Valley Road. An option will be provided for motorized trail connections along the east side of the unit in the eventuality that Caribou Valley Road becomes unavailable for this use. A groomed cross-country ski trail along or over the Caribou Pond Road will be designated, in cooperation with MH&T, in conjunction with potential future development of the MH&T hut and trail system through and beyond the Unit.*

## VI. Proposed Resource Allocations

The Resource Allocation System is a land management-planning tool first developed in the 1980's, and formalized in the Integrated Resource Policy (IRP). The current version of the IRP was adopted December 18, 2000, following a public review and refinement process. The Resource Allocation System, which is used to designate appropriate management based on resource characteristics and values, is based on a *hierarchy* of natural and cultural resource attributes found on the land base. The hierarchy ranks resources along a scale from those that are scarce and/or most sensitive to management activities, to those that are less so. The resource attributes are aggregated into seven categories or "allocations," including (from most sensitive to least) special protection, backcountry recreation, wildlife management, remote recreation, visual consideration, developed recreation, and timber management.

This hierarchy defines the type of management that will be applied where these resource attributes are found, with *dominant* and *secondary* uses or management designations as appropriate to achieve an integrated, multi-use management.

The following "allocations," as shown on the Crocker Mountain Dominant Use Allocations map on page 30, define general management objectives and direction for specific areas within the Unit. (Secondary allocations are not shown on the map.) See Appendix C for a description of designation criteria and management direction for the various allocation categories.

### Special Protection Areas (Dominant Allocation)

- An area of approximately 4,000 acres to be officially designated as an Ecological Reserve, surrounding the federally-held A.T. corridor and consisting primarily of higher elevation ground on the east and west slopes of Crocker Mountain and the southwest slope of Sugarloaf Mountain. (Final boundaries of the Ecological Reserve will be determined in cooperation with MNAP and the Ecological Reserve Scientific Advisory Committee.) Recreation will be a secondary use in this area. Commercial timber harvesting is not allowed.

### Backcountry Recreation - Non-Mechanized Areas (Dominant and Secondary Allocation)

- Approximately 1,100 acres of generally steep ground, mainly over 2,500 feet in elevation and comprising most of the Carrabassett Valley portion of the Rapid Stream Area of the Unit and some adjacent portions of Mount Abram Township; hiking or backpacking trails may be developed in this area, but no timber harvesting would occur.
- Approximately 100 acres of ground, generally above 3,500 feet in elevation and comprising the east side of Redington Mountain.
- A secondary allocation applied to the proposed Crocker Mountain Ecological Reserve, excepting any parking areas, mountain bike trails, groomed cross-country ski trails, or motorized trails that may be developed (e.g., along Caribou Valley Road).

### **Backcountry Recreation - Motorized Area (Dominant Allocation)**

- Approximately 275 acres of ground in a 500 foot-wide strip along 4 miles of the east boundary of the Unit, between Rt. 27 and Caribou Valley Road; the northernmost three-fourths mile of the strip widens to 1,000 feet. The purpose of this allocation is to provide an option for routing a motorized trail in the event that ORV access to Caribou Valley Road is lost, with the objective of maintaining regional ORV trail connectivity. The 500 foot-wide strip reserved for this contingency could be adjusted if necessitated by terrain or other resource conditions. The northernmost part is widened to 1,000 ft. in recognition of the steepness of the terrain. No timber harvesting would occur due to the adjacency of the Ecological Reserve.

### **Wildlife Management Areas (Dominant Allocation)**

- A total of about 730 acres as a dominant allocation in the following areas: (1) the riparian zone (330 feet) along each side of streams known to harbor Roaring Brook mayfly, including Stoney Brook and its upper tributaries and feeder stream entering the Unit from the west, and the eastward flowing tributary to the South Branch Carrabassett River on the south shoulder of Crocker Mountain; (2) the major riparian zone (330 feet) along each side of the main stem of Rapid Stream; (3) the minor riparian zone (75 feet) along the west side of the South Branch Carrabassett River; also along each side of the stream flowing from the Unit into Caribou Pond, South Branch Carrabassett River and Stoney Brook tributaries not known to harbor Roaring Brook mayfly, and Rapid Stream tributaries. Remote Recreation is a secondary allocation in these riparian areas.

### **Remote Recreation Areas (Dominant Allocation)**

- As applied elsewhere in the Flagstaff Region, a Remote Recreation buffer would apply to areas within 500 feet of the A.T. (Specifically, this would apply to small portions of the Stoney Brook area, along the west side of the A.T. corridor, where the A.T. is less than 500 feet from the Unit boundary in a few places. The A.T. is not centered within the NPS owned 1,000 foot wide corridor; hence where the trail is located less than 500 feet from the NPS boundary, the Remote Recreation zone is applied on adjacent Bureau lands to attain 500 feet of protection). No new forest management roads or motorized trails would be allowed in these areas.

### **Visual Consideration Areas (Secondary Allocation)**

- Visual Class I areas (generally areas where foreground views of natural features that may directly affect the enjoyment of viewers) will be defined as a secondary allocation on the ground for areas adjacent to the primary access roads (Caribou Valley Road, Stoney Brook Road, and Rapid Stream Road) and areas around developed recreation sites and designated non-motorized trails.
- Visual Class II areas will be defined as a secondary allocation in areas beyond the immediate foreground, such as background views of forest canopies from ridgelines and background hillsides viewed from public use roads, or interior views beyond the Class I area likely to be seen from a road or trail; due to the presence of the A.T. on the ridgelines crossing through and near to the Unit, all areas not designated Visual Class I are allocated to Visual Class II.

### **Developed Recreation - Class I Areas (Dominant Allocation)**

- All roads or trails designated for public motor vehicle use, snowmobile use, or ATV use.
- Areas set aside for development of parking areas and trail heads to serve both motorized and non-motorized (hiking and mountain biking) trails and, potentially, drive-to camping areas; these are small areas of less than one acre in most cases and no more than a few acres.
- Mountain bike and groomed cross-country ski trails are to be allocated to Developed Recreation – Class I once the trail routes are established.

### **Timber Management Areas (Dominant Allocation)**

- All other areas not allocated above are designated Timber Management dominant (approximately 5,800 acres); includes a majority of the Rapid Stream area in Mt. Abram Township and extending into Carrabassett Valley, much of the area at the southwest corner of Carrabassett Valley (excepting the portion allocated to Backcountry Non-Mechanized Recreation), and the majority of the Stoney Brook area (excepting the portion allocated to Wildlife Management).
- Recreation will be recognized as an important secondary use within two similarly-sized areas within the timber dominant allocation (encircled with a red line on the allocation map). One area is on the south shoulder of Crocker Mountain, upslope of Caribou Valley Road and the other is in the Stoney Brook area, upslope of Stoney Brook Road and adjacent to the Wyman Lot. These areas, totaling approximately 1,400 acres, are identified as focus areas for the development of permanent mountain bike trails. Groomed and ungroomed cross-country ski trails may also be developed in the south Crocker Mountain area, including a groomed trail along and generally upslope/west of Caribou Valley Road to connect to a MH&T hut south of the Unit. Timber management would be conducted so as to limit crossings and other direct impacts of any established mountain bike or ski trails to the extent possible without placing excessive constraints on access to timber.

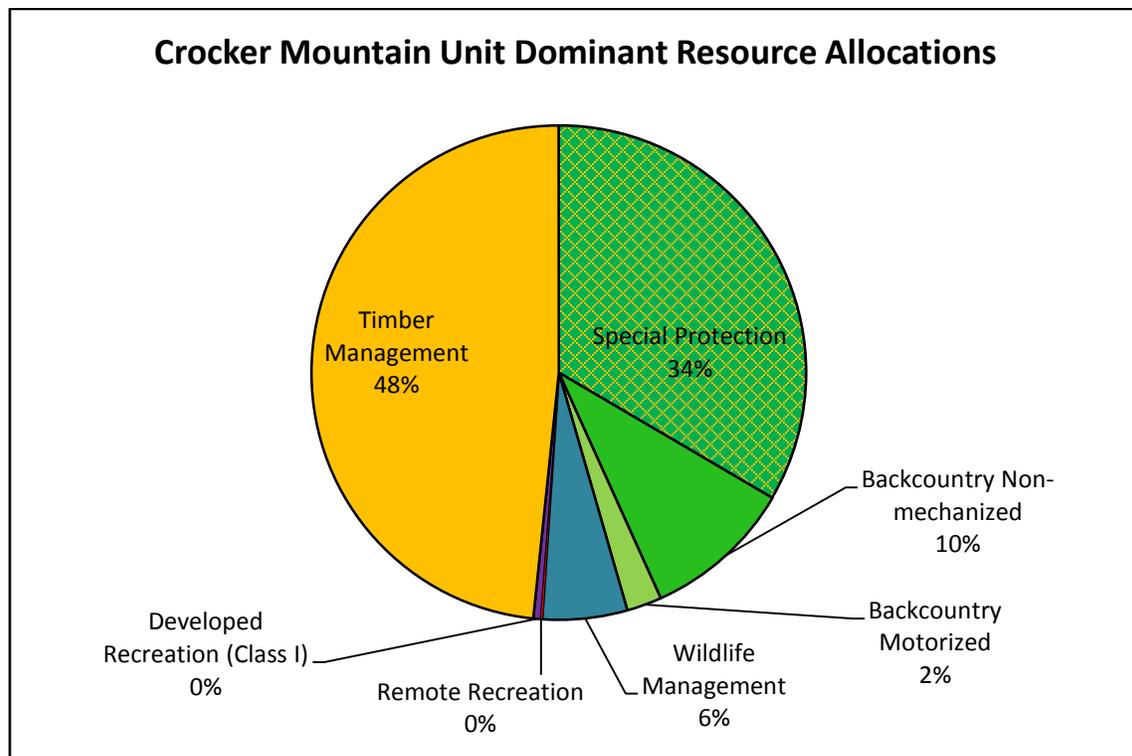
## Crocker Mountain Allocation Summary

Allocation	Number of Acres			%
	Dominant	Secondary	Total	
Special Protection	4,000	Not applicable	<b>4,000</b>	<b>33.7%</b>
Backcountry Non-mechanized	1,170	Not applicable	<b>1,170</b>	<b>9.8%</b>
Backcountry Motorized	275	Not applicable	<b>275</b>	<b>2.3%</b>
Wildlife Management	660*	Not applicable	<b>660</b>	<b>5.5%</b>
Remote Recreation	20	~ 300	<b>320</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
Visual Consideration – Class I	0	~ 100	<b>~100</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>
Visual Consideration – Class II	0	11,000	<b>11,000</b>	<b>91.3%</b>
Developed Recreation – Class I	50	Not applicable	<b>50</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>
Timber Management	5,780	300**	<b>6,080</b>	<b>51.1%</b>

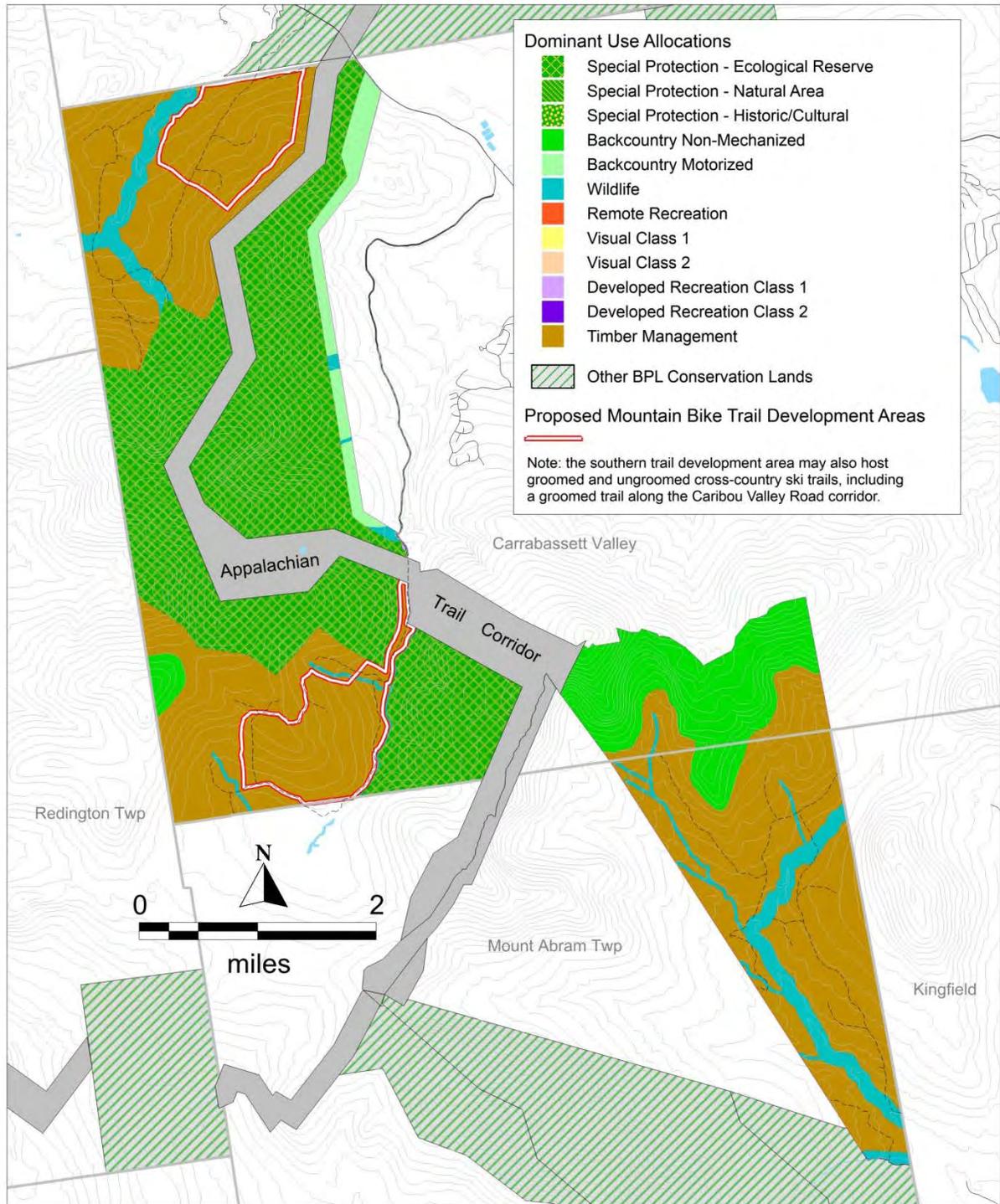
Note: Acreages are representations based on GIS metrics rounded to the nearest 5 acres, and do not sum to the acreages by parcel due to measuring error and limits of GIS precision (above acres are overall low by approximately 1-2%).

\* This allocation may be increased if additional information is obtained on perennial streams within the Unit that are not currently mapped.

\*\* A 25 foot no-cut buffer will be maintained along both sides of streams allocated to Wildlife Management and hosting Roaring Brook Mayfly. Timber management will be a secondary use in the remaining riparian buffer areas.



# Crocker Mountain Unit - Dominant Use Allocations



FINAL - MARCH 27, 2015

MAP FIGURE 6.

## VII. Management Recommendations

### Wildlife/Rare of Exemplary Ecosystems and Habitats

- Work with MNAP and the Ecological Reserve Scientific Advisory Committee to finalize the boundaries and officially designate the Ecological Reserve.
- Consult with MDIF&W on potential additional surveys of perennial streams on the Unit for suitable Roaring Brook mayfly habitat, and where suitable habitat is found, presence of Roaring Brook mayfly.
- Follow management guidelines recommended by MDIF&W (January 2012 Draft Guidelines) for forestry activities and other land use in or adjacent to Roaring Brook mayfly habitat.
- Coordinate with MDIF&W on any potential motorized or non-motorized trail development in areas allocated to Special Protection and Wildlife Management to ensure protection of sensitive wildlife habitats.

### Recreation

#### Mountain Biking Opportunities

- Collaborate with CR NEMBA on specific routes and design of single-track, stacked loop mountain bike trails, to be constructed by CR NEMBA, in the two areas described in the CR NEMBA concept plan: the southeast slope of Crocker Mountain and the Stoney Brook area. The trails will be intended primarily for intermediate and advanced riders. The maximum total distance of trails to be constructed will be 20 miles, developed in phases as resources, use levels, and needs dictate. Timber management will be allowed in all areas; however, recreation will be an important secondary use in the areas designated for trail development. Trails will be laid out so as to maximize the area retained for timber harvesting.
- Once a mountain bike trail has been routed and designed, the trail would be allocated as a Developed Recreation Class I area. Timber management would continue in surrounding areas and crossing of the trail for harvesting purposes would be allowed. Timber management activities would be planned to minimize any direct or indirect impacts (for example, to drainage systems) on mountain bike trails.
- In conjunction with any future trail construction in the Stoney Brook area, develop a trailhead in the vicinity of the trail network to allow drive-in access to the trails.
- In conjunction with or following any mountain bike trail development achieved in the Stoney Brook area, work with CR NEMBA to plan a trail on the Wyman Lot, approximately one mile in length, to connect the existing mountain bike trail network north of Route 27 to the new trails on the unit.

#### Hiking, Backpacking and Camping Opportunities

- In consultation with the MATC and ATC, explore the potential for hiking/backpacking trail(s) that would provide 2-3 day backpacking loops partially following the A.T. in the vicinity of Crocker Mountain. One such loop could be established with a new trail through the Rapid Stream valley linking Sugarloaf Peak and Mount Abraham.

- Consider the establishment of primitive campsites along any new backpacking loop trails developed, to support 2-3 day trips and avoid straining the capacity of existing campsites within the A.T. corridor and at Mount Abraham.
- Upon request, and in consultation with MATC and ATC, work with Maine Huts and Trails to develop a summer hiking trail east of the Carrabasset River to connect to a trail head and spur trail to the AT.

### Motorized Recreation

- Continue to allow snowmobile use of the Caribou Valley Road within and across the Unit, providing the adjacent landowner north of the Unit in the Town of Carrabasset Valley allows access to the Unit, or an alternate trail connecting from Route 27 to the Caribou Valley Road on the Unit has been established. The trail may not extend to the boundary with Mount Abram Township unless there is permission from the adjacent landowner in Mount Abram Township to continue the trail across their lands.
- Continue to allow snowmobile use of the ITS and other existing snowmobile trails on gravel management roads in the Rapid Stream area, as shown on Map Figure 5, provided they are also allowed by permission of the landowners on adjacent lands.
- Continue to allow ATVs to use the management roads in the Rapid Stream and Stoney Brook areas as part of the regional ATV-club maintained trail network, provided they are also allowed by permission of the landowners on adjacent lands.
- Consider allowing ATV use of Caribou Valley Road within the Unit and designation of short destination ATV trails (to viewpoints) on connected management roads, provided ATV clubs obtain permission for ATV use of Caribou Valley Road to access the Unit. If needed, explore constructing connector trails within the Unit to access management roads without the need to cross over into Mount Abram Township and back into the Unit, in the event this is not allowed by the adjacent landowner. Any such destination trails may also be designated for snowmobile use.
- In conjunction with consideration of expanded snowmobile or ATV access or new motorized trails, BPL will work with snowmobile and ATV clubs to identify and actively discourage unauthorized motorized use on the Unit and in unauthorized areas of adjacent public or private lands accessed via Unit management roads that continue beyond the Unit.
- If motorized recreation access is lost on Caribou Valley Road across the Plum Creek lands and there are no other options for a permanent north-south motorized trail connection, work with motorized trail interests to route a motorized trail extending south from Rt. 27 in the corridor allocated to Backcountry Recreation – Motorized. The boundary between this corridor and the adjacent ecological reserve may be adjusted if necessitated by terrain or other resource conditions to the extent required for the intended trail to be feasible.

### Winter Recreation

- Collaborate with MH&T on the routing of a groomed cross country ski trail on or along the Caribou Valley Road, generally west/upslope of the road. Trail routing should seek to minimize conflicts with snowmobile use along the road and would make use of the existing A.T. crossing.

- Consider other winter recreation requests (e.g., groomed or ungroomed cross-country skiing, snow shoeing) that may be compatible with other lands uses and the Plan.
- Explore options to provide a plowed winter parking area on the south side of Rt. 27 (on the Wyman lot) serving the Stoney Brook area (as well as the south side of the Bigelow Preserve) for access to snowshoeing, cross-country ski trails and winter hiking. [Note: The 2007 Flagstaff Region Plan does not contain a specific management recommendation to develop this parking area, but on p. 149 describes an area along Rt. 27 “to be reserved for a future parking lot” and excluded from the surrounding Visual Class I allocation.]

#### Other Recreation Enhancements and Development

- Support initiatives, evaluated on a case-by-case basis, to provide connectivity to regional trail networks using the Crocker Mountain Unit lands if otherwise consistent with the Plan.
- Work with partners in the acquisition to design and install a kiosk at the Caribou Valley Road gate and parking area with area maps and information highlighting the partnership that achieved the acquisition of the Unit, the presence of the Ecological Reserve, and the unique natural resources present on the Unit and adjacent NPS lands and BPL plans for future trail development.
- In conjunction with improvements to the bridges that currently limit vehicular access to the Unit via Caribou Valley Road, develop a trailhead and parking area on Bureau lands north of the AT corridor.

#### **Public Access Roads**

- Continue to coordinate with Plum Creek in planning maintenance of Caribou Valley Road between Rt. 27 and the Unit boundary.
- Continue to block access to vehicles on Caribou Valley Road during the non-winter season at the Unit boundary and to provide trailhead parking at the gate.
- Prioritize improvements of eroded portions of public access roads on the Unit, as resources allow, with priority placed on segments of road needed for access to new trails and other recreational amenities.
- Identify spur roads and other management roads to be “put to bed” and take action to implement these closures as resources allow.

#### **Timber Management**

- The Bureau will manage areas allocated to Timber Management as a multiple use working forest. Timber resources where allocated will provide a diverse forested environment and generate high quality-high value products to support Bureau operations and Maine’s timber-based economy. The Bureau will practice multi-aged management with a long-term focus primarily on mature quality timber.
- Because of the high elevation lands on this unit and its visibility from the Rt. 27 Scenic Byway, the AT, and surrounding public use areas (the Bigelow Preserve, Sugarloaf ski resort, Mount Abraham) any timber management is subject to Visual Class II considerations.
- Most timber management activity during the planning period will be monitoring as the young stands grow into merchantable sizes, and watching the progress of any budworm outbreak. Should defoliation begin due to budworm, the Bureau will monitor its severity

and respond as appropriate. For the duration of this plan, objectives are to allow stocking to increase and to improve overall quality through careful harvesting of lower quality stems and mature fir.

### **Administrative Issues**

- Install yardarm signs at appropriate locations identifying the Unit, and directional signs at appropriate locations directing travelers to the main access roads into the Unit (Caribou Valley, Stoney Brook and Rapid Stream Road). Coordinate with the Highway 27/High Peaks Scenic Byway signage location and design within the byway in Carrabassett Valley.
- Continue to maintain existing gravel pits as needed for road maintenance in the Stoney Brook and Rapid Stream areas. Identify, close and restore any unneeded gravel pits.
- Assess where within the Crocker Mountain Unit bear bait sites could be located, considering factors such as accessibility to roads and ATV trails and compatibility with other uses.

## **VIII. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation are needed to track progress in achieving the management vision, goals and objectives for the Flagstaff Region public reserved lands, and effectiveness of particular approaches to resource management. As described in Section VIII of the regional Plan, monitoring and evaluation will be conducted on wildlife, ecological, timber, and recreational management efforts in the region, and will now be extended to include the Crocker Mountain Unit.

Regarding implementation of Plan recommendations, individual projects are planned and budgeted for during annual planning exercises. New initiatives, particularly larger projects, are planned in two year cycles. The Bureau will report progress in accomplishing management objectives and recommendations every 5 years through the 5-Year Management Plan Review process (see Section II. The Planning Process), noting any new management issues and recommending changes to the Plan as appropriate.