

STATE PARKS

Grade: B-

Overview

State parks are a key component of tourism, Maine's number one industry. The condition of the infrastructure of Maine's 47 state park facilities is stable and safe; however, additional investment will help greatly in providing the optimum level of service and gaining greater economic impact. A recent \$7.5 million bond provided some funding, though a backlog of \$30 to 40 million in needs remain.

Introduction and Background

Maine's public recreation backbone consists of 47 state parks and historic sites. An even larger destination for hiking, camping, fishing and interacting with nature is provided by public reserve land and easements, which total more than 500,000 acres. These areas are managed by the Maine Department of Conservation (DOC) and its associated divisions. The work of the DOC includes recent activities such as the development of the Seboomook Unit, as well as additions to Baxter State Park pending ongoing discussions with adjacent private landowners. In addition, the State Planning Office's Land For Maine's Future is working in general to identify lands holding special significance that need to be protected to maintain their value. The state also has numerous municipal areas, a national park and other recreational activity areas, though they are not addressed in this brief.

Maine's economy is heavily dependent on the tourism industry. A 2005 Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) study outlined the state's extensive natural resources as the basis for further development of marketing programs to enhance the economic impact of outdoor activities. An estimated 2.1 million visitors to state parks and facilities spent \$60.3 million on goods and services directly related to their state park visits. Park visitors were responsible for economic activity totaling \$95.7 million, including 1,449 full- and part-time jobs that provide \$31.1 million in personal income.

Condition and Adequacy

In 2004, the DOC commissioned a study to assess the condition of state parks' major infrastructure assets and develop a recommended capital improvement program. This study enabled the DOC to establish an updated baseline for prioritizing infrastructure improvements to the system. The assessment covered the 47 state park facilities, including more than 200 buildings and multiple site facilities, with an emphasis on assets that would likely require more than \$15,000 each to renovate or replace. A comprehensive team of engineers, planners, landscape architects, surveyors and historical preservation consultants conducted the assessment and worked with the DOC to develop the capital improvements plan.

The statewide assessment categorized the potential improvements from levels A through D. Condition A represents assets that require focus on long-term maintenance, while condition D denotes facilities that require full replacement given their condition. An additional category, E, was established for facilities requiring removal only. The improvements were prioritized according to the impact of condition on health, safety, operations and maintenance costs, resource significance and enhanced customer service. Priorities were categorized one through four—the highest priorities, such as health and safety, were assigned a priority of one.

Summary of 2005 DOC Capital Program Estimates

| Category | Capital Need | Estimated Cost (2005) |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| A | Maintenance | \$ 0.5 million |
| B | Reconditioning | \$ 4.8 million |
| C | Rehabilitation | \$ 5.1 million |
| D | Replacement | \$ 29.4 million |
| Total Need | | \$ 39.8 million |

Approximately 42 of the 47 facilities evaluated included projects in category D, emphasizing that facilities throughout the system require replacement. Approximately \$700,000 worth of projects listed as category D were projects deemed to have health and safety issues. Such projects include activities involving drinking water infrastructure or restroom facilities. The large majority of projects require capacity or maintenance improvements and the replacement of facilities reaching the end of life span.

Investment Needs

A \$7.5-million infrastructure bond was approved by Maine voters in November 2007. The DOC’s Bureau of Parks and Lands (BP&L) recently contracted more than \$5 million in critical need improvements for major sanitary projects to upgrade restroom facilities, including six major projects ranging from \$300,000 to \$1.19 million. Currently, the focus is on the highest-use facilities, such as Popham Beach. Other projects include masonry repairs, sanitary system replacements and shoreline protection. Costs for BP&L projects continue to escalate, making it increasingly difficult to address capital improvement needs. The \$7.5 million bond will begin to address critical major improvements, including health and safety projects, but a stable funding source is still necessary to upgrade aging facilities and utilities in parks and historic sites statewide. Furthermore, for at least a decade, the state’s general fund has not provided BP&L with capital money for renovations and new construction.

Money from dedicated license plate sales and water extraction fees have only been sufficient to make minor improvements and to cover a portion of maintenance for the past six years. Upgrades to the facilities—for sanitary systems, shelter, wayfinding and interpretive signage—are necessary to promote the areas, as well as to preserve the quality and natural existence of the resources. Without the maintenance of the recreational areas, the quality of the experience will be degraded and economic opportunity for the state will be lost.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The backlog of capital improvements identified for state parks, coupled with the rising costs of construction, demonstrate that more work could be done to maximize the level of service to the users of Maine’s parks. The condition of Maine park facilities’ infrastructure is stable and safe, but could benefit from additional investment to provide the optimum level of service and positive economic impact. Overall, Maine ASCE gives state park infrastructure in Maine a grade of **B-**.

Maine ASCE makes the following recommendations:

- Update the BP&L database to include recent investments and establish an updated baseline of where the inventory stands; and
- Evaluate fee structures to determine if any further optimization can be leveraged for support of funding key assets. User fees can potentially be leveraged further to assist with the funding process, resulting in a more sustainable infrastructure.



Report Card
FOR MAINE'S
Infrastructure

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Sources:

State of Maine Department of Conservation www.maine.gov/doc

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“The Economic Contributions of Maine State Parks: A Survey of Visitor Characteristics, Perceptions and Spending”, June 2006. Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center, University of Maine.
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Land for Maine’s Future www.maine.gov/spo/lmf

Maine Island Trail Association www.mita.org/