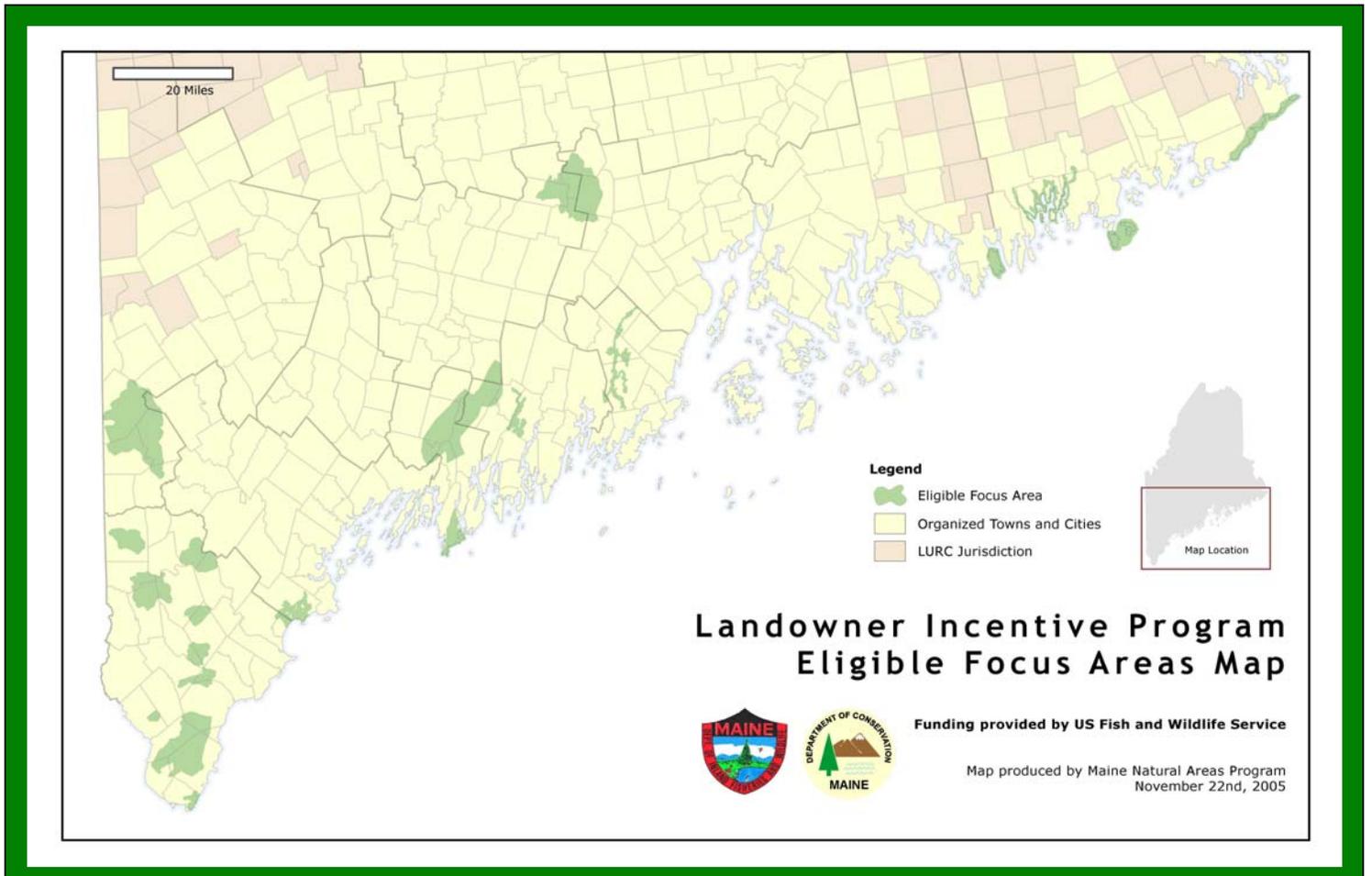


Landowner Incentive Program Application FY06



This program is funded by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Landowner Incentive Program, and is intended to provide incentives to private landowners for the protection of rare, threatened and endangered species.

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Introduction

Maine's diverse assemblage of native wildlife, plants, and natural communities is threatened. Over two-thirds of the state's rare, threatened, and endangered species are at-risk because of habitat loss. Today, development in Maine is spreading, sprawling across our landscape, impacting wildlife habitat by changing the land cover and altering the form of the natural landscape on a permanent basis. Private landowners own approximately 95% of the lands in Maine and are integral to the conservation of rare, threatened, and endangered plants and animals. While they are often committed in principle to stewardship of at-risk species, the lack of financial and technical incentives has limited the scale of long-term conservation.

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is a competitive grant program funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that provides financial incentives to private landowners for conservation easements, cooperative management agreements, and habitat management initiatives that conserve habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species.

The Maine LIP Steering Committee was established in January 2004 to provide programmatic guidance and oversight to Maine's delivery of LIP resources to landowners. More specifically the LIP Steering Committee is responsible for:

- the delivery of technical and financial assistance to landowners;
- administrative functions such as fiscal and contractual accountability;
- distribution of LIP funds through a fair and equitable process;
- coordination and outreach that assist in administering the program; and
- development of goals and measurable objectives for the conservation of Maine's species-at-risk and their habitat.

The Maine LIP Steering Committee includes representation from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Maine Natural Areas Program, Maine Forest Service, Maine Land Trust Network, US Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Maine Audubon Society, Natural Resource Conservation Service, State Planning Office, and local land trusts.

Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas

Beginning with Habitat (BwH) is a habitat-based model that provides the information to cooperatively create a landscape with local decision-makers that will support all breeding species of wildlife occurring in Maine into the future. BwH brings together the expertise and resources of a coalition of conservation partners from the public and private sectors and takes habitat data from multiple sources, integrates it into one package, and makes it accessible to communities to use proactively to create a landscape vision for the future that accommodates both growth and natural resource conservation.

Using data from recent inventory efforts and other sources, biologists at the Maine Natural Areas Program, Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy and Maine Audubon evaluated the landscape identifying areas with the highest concentrations of rare species and high quality habitats, known as Focus Areas. Of these areas of statewide ecological significance, 20 have been selected for eligibility in the Landowner Incentive Program.

For more information on Beginning with Habitat and the identification of Focus Areas, access the Beginning with Habitat website at <http://www.beginningwithhabitat.org/>.

Program Policies

Project Sponsorship

Proposals must be submitted by an entity willing and able to hold and monitor a conservation easement. This may include a local or state-wide land trust, municipality, state agency, or other entity authorized to hold easements. Organizations that work within the same Focus Area are encouraged to submit proposals cooperatively.

Willing Sellers Only

All applications must include either a signed Option Agreement or Purchase and Sale Agreement, or a letter from the land owner indicating their willingness to participate in the program.

Appraisal Standards

Easement appraisals must be completed in accordance with the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions (available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/enrd/land-ack/>) and the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP), and also must meet the requirements of the Uniform Relocation and Real Property Acquisition Policy Act (Public Law 91-646). The final report will consist of a complete appraisal and a self contained appraisal report.

Easement Purchase Price Determined by Appraised Value

The Landowner Incentive Program Steering Committee will not consider proposals requesting a purchase price greater than the appraised value of the easement.

Eligible Use of Funds

Many of the costs incurred in the application process are eligible for reimbursement by the Landowner Incentive Program. Funds may be used to cover the following costs:

- Boundary surveys
- Title work
- Baseline documentation
- Easement development and negotiations

- Environmental and Archaeological assessments
- Management Endowments
- Conservation Management Plans

LIP funds are intended to be used on a reimbursement basis only.

Public Access

The intent of the Landowner Incentive Program is to protect rare, threatened and endangered species and associated habitat occurring on privately owned lands. Therefore it is not necessary, and at times undesirable, to allow public access on lands protected with LIP funds.

Eligibility Criteria for Focus Areas

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for LIP funds related to conservation of at-risk species and associated habitat in selected Focus Areas, proposals must meet the following eligibility requirements

1) Actions must occur on privately owned lands.

2) Parcel lies within one of the following Focus Areas:

- Beaver Dam Heath
- Bold Coast
- Central Parsonsfield
- Corea Heath/Grand Marsh
- Georges River
- Great Wass Archipelago
- Greater Braveboat Harbor
- Kennebunk Plains
- Killick Pond
- Massabesic Forest
- Merrymeeting Bay
- Morse Mountain
- Mount Agamenticus
- Pleasant Bay
- Scarborough Marsh
- Lower Sheepscot River
- Unity Wetlands
- Upper Saco River
- Waterboro/Shapleigh Barrens

- 3) Landowner must be willing to engage in long-term commitment (i.e. perpetual conservation easement), **and** allow long-term monitoring on their property
- 4) Entity must be identified as willing and capable of holding and monitoring easement or cooperative management agreement
- 5) A preliminary area conservation plan has been drafted that identifies this tract as appropriate or private landowner incentive program funding. (e.g. *a conservation priority AND appropriate for easement or long term agreement as opposed to fee acquisition*)

Application Procedures and Review Process

Procedures

All applicants are required to submit a one-page Project Summary Form two months prior to the Final Application deadline. Requirements for Project Summary Form and Final Application are specified on pages 8 & 9.

Deadlines

Project Summary Form: March 9th, 2006

Final Application: April 14th, 2006

Send one copy of your project summary form to:

Sarah Demers
Maine Natural Areas Program
93 State House Station
August, Maine 04333

Send ten copies **AND a digital copy** (disk or CD) of your final application to:

Division of Purchases, Burton M. Cross Building, 4th Floor, 111 Sewall Street, 9 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0009.

Review, Ranking, and Nominations

At the close of the Proposal Period applications submitted to the Landowner Incentive Program will be reviewed for completeness by program staff. All proposals will be reviewed and ranked by members of the LIP Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will review the proposals, select the finalists, and allocate funding.

All applicants will be contacted and notified of the status of their proposal after final decisions have been made.

Ranking & Nomination Considerations

Applications will be ranked using the Focus Area Prioritization Process, detailed below. In summary, the scoring criterion evaluates the parcel itself and the likelihood of success if funded and includes the following:

- Assessment of the parcel's Biodiversity Ranking,
- Potential Threat to the parcel from development or other incompatible uses,
- Project Cost and Available Match,
- Project Readiness

The Steering Committee will also consider the capacity of the organization to bring the project to a successful conclusion including, without limitation, fund raising capacity, project management experience and land stewardship experience.

Focus Area Prioritization Process

The steering committee will consider each proposal based on the following criteria:

- 1. Biodiversity Ranking.** An assessment of how the parcel supports rare, threatened and endangered plants and animals, parcel's proximity to an exemplary Natural Community, total acreage of wetland and riparian areas, documented USFWS habitat, parcel size and location within a large undeveloped block of land and connectivity to conservation lands (see Appendix B for methodology)
- 2. Potential Threat.** Sites in communities where rapidly growing populations and/or expanding development pose a high risk of conversion to residential or commercial development in or near species populations or fragmentation of large habitat blocks will be given preference, as will sites currently or imminently impacted by incompatible logging, agriculture, or water use practices.

3. **Easements vs. Cooperative Management Agreements.** Priority will be given to applicants that propose to implement permanent conservation measures over term management agreements.
4. **Project Cost.** Consideration will be given to the amount of funding needed to achieve the conservation measure compared to current fair-market land value.
5. **Availability of Match.** Sites with available matching funds will receive preference.
6. **Stewardship/Management Endowment.** Priority will be given to proposals that include cost estimates and funds secured for a stewardship or management endowment.
7. **Project Readiness.** Projects with well-established contacts between the conservation organization(s) that will hold and/or monitor the easement or agreement and the willing landowner will receive preference. Such evidence will include:
 - a letter from the landowner affirming willingness to be included in application,
 - a signed statement of assurance from the land trust regarding their ability to hold and monitor the easement, and
 - evidence that negotiation of conservation easement or management agreement terms and baseline documentation of property condition are already under way.

For more information about the application process contact Sarah Demers (phone (207) 287-8670, email sarah.demers@maine.gov).

**Landowner Incentive Program
Project Summary Form**

Application Date: _____

Project Title: _____

Project Coordinator (name, address, phone, e mail): _____

Partner Organizations (names, phone): _____

Beginning with Habitat Focus Area: _____

Project Location (physical address & Town, Map & Lot #): _____

Acreage: _____

Landowner(s) Info (address, phone, fax, e mail of current landowner(s): _____

Project Abstract: _____

Project Cost:

Easement Value (note whether estimate or appraised): _____

Estimated Additional Project Costs: _____

Estimated Stewardship/Endowment Costs: _____

Total Project Cost _____

LIP Funding Request _____

Other Funding Sources and Amounts (designate in-kind or match): _____

Final Application Format and Requirements

All applicants are required to use the outlined application structure and must include:

- Not more than five pages of text detailing your project,
- Not more than four pages of maps, aerial photos and pictures of the property,
- A signed letter from the landowner indicating their willingness to donate or sell an easement
- Signed letters of commitment from entities providing match

If a question is not applicable to your proposal, please indicate so by placing a N/A.

Project Description

Include a narrative description of the entire project that provides a clear image of the project itself, as well as the landscape context surrounding it. Photographs of the property can be very effective. If these are incorporated in the text electronically, please provide the images on a CD with the application (JPEG or TIFF format).

The narrative should identify and describe why it is appropriate to conserve the natural values of the property through the use of a conservation easement.

Location Information

Delineate approximate project boundaries on maps no larger than 11”X17” as follows:

- Maine Atlas & Gazetteer Base Map - showing project location and regional perspective
- USGS Topographic Base Map - showing entire boundary of proposed project, legal access and adjacency of other public and private conservation lands.
- Aerial Photo (if available)- showing project location and boundaries
- Other Maps as Appropriate - showing rare plants and animals, natural communities, and/or significant habitats, or landscape context of the project within a larger conservation plan.

Biodiversity

Describe the presence of or habitat that supports rare, threatened and endangered species, or classified Natural Communities on the parcel.

Proximity to Other Public Lands or Complements a Larger Conservation Plan

The narrative for this section should demonstrate how the applicant is affirmatively working to connect the proposed project to larger local and regional conservation efforts. Describe how the proposed land has one or more of the following attributes:

- Connects existing public holdings or private conservation lands (state, federal, municipal, land trust, etc.).
- Is immediately adjacent to existing conserved properties
- Is linked to a larger local or regional conservation effort to protect open space, or other natural resource values.
- Is a first acquisition designed to establish a nucleus around which and from which future conservation efforts can grow.

Need & Potential Threat

Identify the associated level of need for protection and the potential threats that make protection of this parcel appropriate for the Landowner Incentive Program. This need must be substantiated by a published report(s) or credible testimony.

Management & Easement Monitoring

A description of the management envisioned for the property for the first 10 years following acquisition.

- The application must provide a description of the anticipated management responsibilities retained by the landowner and those to be assumed by a cooperating entity;
- Preliminary estimates of the costs of managing the land for the uses proposed in the application; and
- Preliminary estimates of the costs associated with monitoring for compliance with the easement terms.

Project Budget

The following form should be used to present the budget for the proposed project. Please consult with LIP staff with any questions. Proposals with incomplete budget information will not be accepted for Steering Committee consideration.

Easement Cost (indicate whether appraisal is estimate or agreed upon price w/ land owner)

Value of easement(s) to be purchased _____

All other costs

Appraisal _____

Title, legal and closing _____

Land survey _____

Environmental hazard survey _____

Baseline documentation _____

Other (*specify*) _____

TOTAL PROJECT COSTS _____

Project Match

Purchased Easements _____

Easement Donations _____

Bargain sale components _____

Cash contribution _____

Stewardship endowment _____

All Other Matched Costs

Appraisal _____

Title, legal and closing _____

Boundary survey _____

Environmental hazard survey _____

TOTAL MATCH _____

Amount requested from LIP _____