

The Value of Maine State Parks

February 2021

State Parks and their Value to Maine

The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) manages 48 State Parks and historic sites, including some of the most popular and iconic places in Maine, such as Sebago Lake State Park, Popham Beach State Park, Quoddy Head State Park, Lily Bay State Park, and Aroostook State Park. Through careful long-term stewardship, BPL is committed to:

- Providing high quality recreational and educational opportunities
- Preserving natural, historical, and cultural resources
- Contributing to Maine’s growing outdoor economy

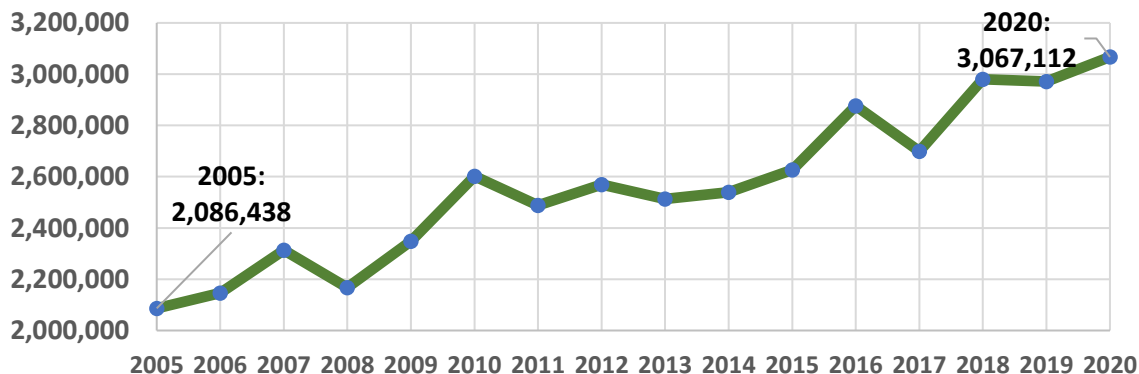


State Parks connect people to nature, introduce families to the outdoors, and safeguard our natural assets. State Park employees are dedicated ambassadors for the state, and for many visitors, Park staff are the “face of Maine.” **State Park visitors and their associated activities contribute an estimated \$100 million to the state’s economy, and State Park revenues to the state’s General Fund grew by 45% between 2014 and 2020.** One study has indicated that for every dollar spent on a state park, more than \$40 is delivered back into Maine’s economy through related expenditures in retail, transportation, and hospitality. In addition, a recent analysis by the Department of Commerce indicated that Maine ranks third nationally in percentage of Gross Domestic Product generated through outdoor recreation.

State Parks have Never Been More Popular

For the last fifteen years, use of Maine’s State Parks has seen an overall increase (see chart below). In fact, despite COVID-related closures and capacity limitations, Maine State Parks set an all-time record for attendance in 2020, topping the **3 million** visitor mark for the first time.

Maine State Park Visitation: 2005 - 2020



In particular, several State Parks saw huge surges of campers in 2020:

- Aroostook State Park camping increased by **44.9%**
- Cobscook Bay State Park camping increased by **37.1%**
- Mt. Blue State Park camping increased by **30.9%**
- Lamoine State Park camping increase by **20.4%**

Thus far in 2021, State Park season pass and reservation sales are off to a strong start, indicating that the record 2020 was not an anomaly. **Through February 7, on-line sales of 2021 season passes were up 71% from the same date in 2020.** Moreover, in its opening weekend for the 2021 season, the State Park Reservation Office processed more than 7,000 reservations. More than 75% of those making early reservations in 2021 have been Mainers. (In a typical year, the reservation totals ratio is approximately 60% Maine residents/40% non-residents.)

Decades of Funding Back-log

Our State Parks are at great risk. Despite the commitment of staff to work with limited resources, roads and water lines are in disrepair, State Park offices and housing require long-overdue renovation, historic sites need structural support, bath houses need replacement or upgrades, and campsites and trails need funding to become compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

It has been more than a decade since significant funds were directed to State Park infrastructure, and many Park roads have not been resurfaced in 30 years, creating a major safety concern. ***In total, BPL has developed a maintenance back-log of costs up to \$50 million.*** The Maine Land Conservation Task Force identified the need for Parks funding in its 2019 report, stating, *"The State Park System, like any business, must continue to invest in its physical structure in order to be successful over the long-term."* Every dollar invested in Park infrastructure has cascading economic impacts, and failure to invest now risks continued deterioration, reduced visitation, and long-term erosion of Park benefits.

Immediate Funding Needs

Staff of the Bureau of Parks and Lands have categorized the most pressing needs as follows:

- Road and parking lot infrastructure
- ADA accommodations
- Restroom facilities/infrastructure upgrades
- Playgrounds (upgrades for safety and ADA)

Examples of Specific Funding Needs

- Acquired in 1946, **Reid State Park** is the first state-owned ocean beach in Maine. At 770 acres, Reid is now one of Maine’s most treasured State Parks, but the poor condition of the bridge to Griffith Head currently requires us to restrict larger vehicles, including school buses, because of safety concerns.



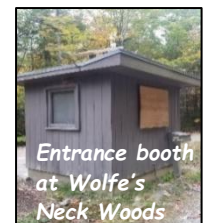
- Located on Route 1, **Camden Hills State Park** offers year-round outdoor activities, outstanding hiking trails, and camping. It is renowned for the panoramic views of Camden Harbor and Penobscot Bay from the top of Mt. Battie. However, the summit road is badly in need of grading and surfacing. Because of its many trails and proximity to Camden, the Park is very popular with families, but the outdated Park playground requires major renovations.



- **Bradbury Mountain State Park** is easily accessed off Interstate 95, just a few miles from Freeport. With a short hike to the summit and trails that connect to the Pinelands Public Lands, the Park is popular with hikers and mountain bikers. However, campground facilities are extremely outdated, with no running water for toilets or sinks. Other State Parks in need of bath house upgrades include **Range Pond, Peaks-Kenney,** and **Aroostook State Park.**



- On the shore of Casco Bay, **Wolfe’s Neck Woods State Park** is known for its gentle coastal trails and outstanding guided nature programs. The entrance booth at the Park is representative of many undersized and non-ADA compliant booths across the State Park system (**Sebago Lake, Two Lights, Crescent Beach, Damariscotta Lake**).



- The cinder-block shelter at **Crescent Beach State Park** is in a beautiful location and has a high potential as a popular gathering place, with room for a commercial kitchen that could be used to generate event-related income. However, the roof is leaking, electrical and plumbing improvements are needed, and the installation of glass doors and windows would safeguard the interior while still providing a view of the ocean. Many other Parks have old buildings in need of structural improvements, including **Holbrook Island Sanctuary.**

