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Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources with respect to the proposed Governor's 2024-2025 Biennial Budget

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Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Neal Berry, and I am the executive director for the St. Croix International Waterway Commission (SCIWC). The SCIWC was established through reciprocal legislation between the State of Maine and the Province of New Brunswick in 1987. We are governed through a 1986 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Governor of Maine, and Premier of New Brunswick. The MOU highlights the following 8 key points.

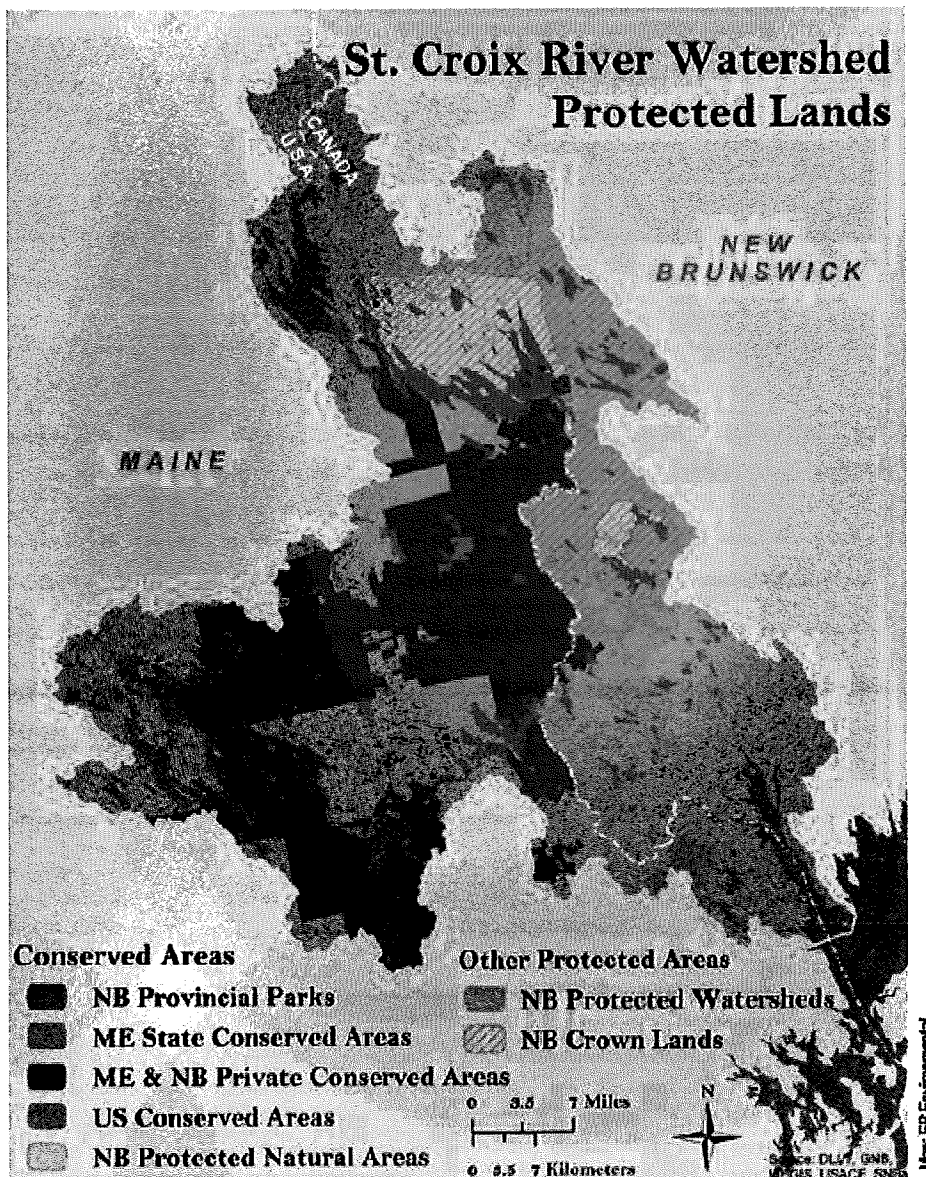
- To protect and manage a valuable natural and recreational resource for current and future usage.
- To encourage and maintain a high quality back country recreational and educational experience for users.
- To encourage tourism with resultant economic benefits to the region.
- To protect and promote awareness of human heritage resources including both Indian and early European.
- To ensure coordination in the planning and management of a shared watershed.
- Establish the processes of ensuring fair representation of all user groups within the watershed to minimize conflict.
- Obtain optimal benefits from the recreational and educational use of the resource.

The SCIWC board consists of 8 appointed commissioners, 4 from Maine, and 4 from New Brunswick. We also have appointed liaisons from both Maine and New Brunswick, through their departments of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF), and Natural Resources and Energy Development (DNRED), respectively.

The St. Croix watershed is large, rural, and primarily forested, with its East branch constituting the federal border between the US and Canada. It is the 7th largest watershed in Maine, and the 4th largest in New Brunswick. The watershed represents some of the largest tracts of conservation lands in northeastern North America, with over 70% of its landmass (700,000+ acres) under some



form of conservation, with almost half under permanent protection. The SCIWC coverage area is from the headwaters in Monument Brook (Orient, ME), to the Chiputneticook Lakes (North, East Grand, Mud, Spednic, Palfrey Lakes), the upper river corridor flowing into Grand Falls, then down to the tidewater past Calais/St. Stephen, into Passamaquoddy Bay at Robbinston/St. Andrews. Our coverage area is extremely large, representing some of the largest lakes in Maine (East Grand is the 8th largest lake in Maine, Spednic is the 6th largest), and comprises 118 Miles of continuous waterway.



Note: number of conservation lands has increased since this graphic was made in 2008 – a 12,000 acre conservation easement on the Maine shoreline of East Grand Lake, and 7,265 acres of permanently protected lands were added to the Chiputneticook lakes parcel on the New Brunswick side. There are also several other smaller conservation parcels contributed by land conservancies in both Maine and New Brunswick.



The St. Croix is worthy of protection, it holds the largest concentration of bald eagles in the northeast, over 5% of the common loons of Northern Maine, a native population of landlocked salmon, as well as an increasing number of native sea-run fish species that are returning to the river each year to complete their life cycle. The St. Croix is currently the subject of the largest river restoration project in northeastern North America, with the first dam on the river scheduled to be removed in July of 2023, and a fish lift scheduled to be built at the second dam beginning in 2024. The SCIWC has monitored anadromous fish throughout the watershed since its inception. Currently we are conducting fish counts at the first dam, and tracking fish as they move through the watershed at various other dams in order to inform stakeholders about restoration efforts, and future fish passage design at dams.

The St. Croix has some of the highest quality sportfishing in Maine and New Brunswick. The watershed comprises the highest concentration of registered Maine Guides in the state, with many lodges, camps, and workers dependent upon the bountiful natural resources in order to make a living. The SCIWC works with guides, lodges, and other organizations to enhance, restore, and monitor fish and wildlife populations in order to sustain this rural economy.

While sharing a border can provide unique collaborations, it can also hinder organizations working on both sides. As an international organization we strive ourselves on being able to employ workers from both the US and Canada, providing essential services in both Maine and New Brunswick, as well as maintaining a non-biased approach to the management of resources from both countries. In doing so we must maintain non-profit and charitable status in both countries, maintain federal work visas and work permits, maintain separate banking and accounting services, file two separate federal income taxes, and more. It has become increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain insurance coverage while operating commercially in both countries.

Inflation has hit our organization particularly hard, with increased costs for transportation, wages, fuel, currency exchange fluctuations, and more. As a primarily recreational and environmental organization with such a large coverage area, increased costs for gas to power our boats, trucks, chainsaws, lawnmowers, and more have greatly increased expenditures. As both Washington and Charlotte (New Brunswick) counties are some of the most economically depressed regions in both Maine and New Brunswick, we strive to provide meaningful seasonal and full time employment to



locals. As wages in both Maine and New Brunswick have increased, maintaining our standard of providing jobs paying more than minimum wage has become increasingly difficult.

Maine has provided funding through the general fund since the SCIWC's inception. Currently \$25,000 goes towards general administrative overhead – rent, office supplies, employee training, and equipment. \$25,000 also goes toward the hiring of an administrative assistant (employee is a Maine resident), a cost which is shared with New Brunswick, which has allowed the SCIWC to grow and flourish. In 2022 we were awarded with the non-profit of the year award by our local Calais chamber of commerce. Maine has also provided the SCIWC with \$5,300 annually from the DACF for care, maintenance, and management of 18 canoe-access only campsites, 2 portages, and 3 access points to the upper St. Croix River. In December of 2022, the department acknowledged they would no longer be able to contribute this funding as we are now classified as a general fund organization. As of 2023, this funding was barely able to cover the cost of sewage pumping at the three access points. In addition to the previously supplied \$5,300, SCIWC has received a varying amount of funding through the privately owned St. Croix Endowment Fund. This fund was setup as part of the 2003 acquisition of approximately 51 miles (2,773 acres) of shoreline and islands within Maine's Spednic Lake/Upper St. Croix River corridor. The lands and campsites on Spednic Lake are owned by the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (DIF&W), while the lands and campsites on the upper river corridor are owned by DACF. The ownership, management, maintenance, and responsibility of the various state and privately owned conservation lands, campsites, boat launches, public access, recreation areas, and portages have been complex and contentious on the St. Croix watershed. Currently some funding is provided to SCIWC through the St. Croix Endowment Fund to look after these various recreation sites along the waterway, however this amount fluctuates depending upon fund performance.

The number of users on the St. Croix River has continued to increase. The global pandemic has shown the public that access to recreational natural resources can provide an outlet to escape from the daily pressures of a modern society, this is reflected in our observations as stewards of the river. More and more people are coming to our watershed to canoe, fish, recreate, and enjoy the surrounding beauty and scenery associated with the waterway. In our yearly survey of local guides, recent years have been their busiest to date, with their observations being backed up by our own. With increased usage comes increased conflict between user groups, increased campsite care and maintenance, and having to increase our presence on the watershed. Starting in 2022 we



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have been diligently working with our state liaisons to secure permanent, public access to the upper river corridor in Vanceboro. The SCIWC has had an increasingly constrained budget to be able to maintain all of our existing programs and work, and has always managed to do more, with less.

The St. Croix International Waterway Commission is committed to working with both the State of Maine, and the Province of New Brunswick in managing our shared watershed, and we ask for your assistance in continuing this great and prosperous partnership in achieving our common goals and assisting in future projects.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter, I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Our doors will always remain open to the people of the State of Maine, and we are always working to maintain our shared vision for this incredible waterway.

Sincerely,

Neal Berry

Executive Director

St. Croix International Waterway Commission