

# Kennebec River Initiative Update

## Goal of the KRI:

The Kennebec River Initiative recognizes the need for coordinated action to secure for the future the important scenic, ecological, fisheries, wildlife, recreational, cultural, and economic assets of the Kennebec River corridor. The first phase of the KRI will conclude with an Action Plan that will identify areas best suited for protection, access, or development, and the partnerships needed for ongoing protection and enhancement of the river corridor's assets and resources.

## How the Reach Committees worked:

Kennebec Soil & Water, the KRI Project Director, publicized the Kennebec River Initiative and invited participants through the initial kick-off event in December and subsequent email invitations and news articles. During the month of January, the KRI held three River Reach Committee meetings along the Kennebec corridor. The three Reaches are: Tidal (Phippsburg through Augusta), Central (Sidney/Vassalboro through Skowhegan), and Northern (Norridgewock to outlet at Moosehead Lake). The information gathered at these stakeholder meetings will be critical when we write the Action Plan later in the year. While many of the discussion topics were common among the three reaches some, other themes emerged that were specific to particular reaches.

Based on the information that came out of this first set of meetings, the KRI Management Committee will meet with KRI staff in early March to decide on how best to use the next round of Reach Committee Meetings. After testing the group mapping exercise at the first meeting (Tidal), we found that the mapping should be more focused on a few obvious 'action categories' for identified sections of the river corridor, large or small. In working with the information from the Tidal meeting and with the groups in the other two reaches, we found that areas of land along or near the river could be more or less grouped into four categories for recommended actions:

**1. Protect:** maintain or increase protection of the existing state of an area by a variety of ways: e.g., conservation easements, open space and other credits, special districts, farmland easements.

**2. Remediate:** this could include cleaning up past pollution at a site, repairing damage such as erosion from stormwater flows or heavy use, and/or restoring habitat

**3. Access:** a broadly defined value that includes motorized and non-motorized access, e.g., marinas, boat-ramps, hand-carry launches, viewing areas, and walking or bicycling trails. Off-site access through text, audio and video was also seen as an important activity. The issue of marketing for specific uses (e.g., sport fishing, town visits) is closely tied to access.

**4. Develop:** some areas lend themselves to waterfront development that would attract visitors. Stakeholders who want to see the river promoted for tourism pointed out the need for more lodging, restaurants and other attractions. The idea is to make the best use of built up areas.

Some areas might be priorities for only one type of action. For example, there may already be conservation lands acquired or prioritized by the local land trusts. On the other hand, we have a few abandoned industrial sites that may be great places to reclaim and develop for commercial use. Of course, many areas along the river might be priorities for 2 or more categories. For example, areas identified for "access" might also be closely tied to a need for development - in the case of an urban setting - or better protection in more wild areas. We hope that by identifying specific areas in this way on the maps we will focus the groups' energy on the partnerships and actions necessary to realize the goal of the Kennebec River Initiative. Issues or actions that are not tied to a specific site or area will also be noted.

### **What the three reaches have in common:**

All of the reach meetings were attended by some extremely knowledgeable and passionate participants who share an energy around protecting and enhancing the Kennebec corridor. Many projects fail to generate this energy but there is a passion associated with rivers in general that is certainly present with the Kennebec. As the meetings were concluding, groups were continuing to busily add information to the maps that were provided. A sure sign that we are on the right track with this project.

The project has drawn a wide variety of interests in each of the three reaches. Stakeholders included landowners, town reps, business owners, professional guides, land trusts, State agency reps, and cultural specialists. We are using these contacts as resources to add more information to the maps.

All along the Kennebec, stakeholders stressed the value of a healthy and semi-wild river to local communities and the economy.

There was general agreement that the river was not being used as much as it could be; however, there were differences - both between reaches and among stakeholders in each reach - as to the carrying capacity of the river in terms of scenic/aesthetic enjoyment and profitability of the businesses that depend on the

river. Consequently, the question of how to market the river for sustainable use will be an issue.

The need for connectivity was recognized but has several meanings. Connectivity can mean linking towns together in a joint effort to develop and market the region. It can also mean recognizing the ecological connection between the land and the river and how activities upriver affect quality downriver. Connectivity can also describe how people are connected to the river through their personal or ethnic history.

### **Highlights of each of the three Reach Committee Meetings:**

#### **1/24/07 Tidal Reach Meeting - Richmond Sportsman's Club**

38 people attended the Tidal meeting in Richmond. Originally, this event was scheduled to meet at the Town Office but due to the large number of people who registered the location was changed. Although the Sportsman's Club space was a bit small for the large turnout, the meeting was a success. A special thank you goes out to Darryl Sterling, Economic Development Director for the town of Richmond for helping KRI find a new meeting location at the last minute.

Items particular to this reach:

- The Tidal Reach is unique among the three reaches due to the obvious fact that it is influenced by the tide. This aspect makes the uses of this reach extremely varied. The fishery in this section ranges from bluefish, mackerel, stripers, lobsters and clams to brown trout and smallmouth bass.
- Much of the tourism in this reach is limited to day trips because of the lack of lodging along the river.
- There are numerous archeological sites that have not been fully explored. How do we make sense of the wealth of archaeological sites, i.e. present these in map form, while protecting sensitive areas such as active digs?
- The tidal reach is noted for its very diverse boating use, both large and small watercraft and different types of users. For example: sailing in the Bay, cruise boats south of the bridge at Bath and tour boats upriver; numerous marshes and backwaters best accessed by canoes and kayaks.
- Shopping might be more of a draw in this more populated reach, compared to the Central and Northern reaches. Some towns already have a draw, e.g., antiquing and pubs in Hallowell.
- The draw for tourism in the tidal area is connected to overall coastal tourism.

- Regulation of tidal versus non-tidal guided boating is an issue. Guides must have a Coast Guard approved Captains license to guide from head of tide south. There is heavy and diverse use of this river reach by guides.

#### 1/25/07 Central Reach Meeting - KVCOG Office Fairfield

38 people attended the Central meeting in Fairfield. Several changes in format were made between the Tidal meeting and the Central meeting and these changes made the second event run very smoothly. As at the first meeting, stakeholders were asked to locate places on the maps that correspond to the uses and values from the group discussion. Each location was then placed into one of 3 (or more) categories to help guide the process. Categories include (1) More or improved access, (2) Some level of additional protection or (3) Are suitable for economic development.

#### *Items particular to this reach:*

- Sections of this reach are very undeveloped and are popular with fishing guides who run float trips.
- Some large agriculture and farm operations are present in this reach and include significant shore frontage. There is concern over what will happen to those lands if they are ever sold and the need to look at town zoning ordinances was suggested.
- Access points along the east side of the Kennebec are very limited given that the railroad has ownership of the property along the entire east side from Augusta to Winslow. The railroad is both a benefit and a detriment; it has preserved the remote sense of this reach but has severely limited access to the river.
- Property rights issues were discussed as well as clustering development into appropriate areas near current development.
- Regulation of tidal versus non-tidal guided boating is an issue. Guides must have a Coast Guard approved Captains license to guide from head of tide south. There is heavy and diverse use of this river reach by guides. Guides with only a state guides license must take out in Sidney.

#### 1/31/07 Northern Reach Meeting - North Country Rivers Kennebec Headquarters Bingham

26 people attended the Northern meeting in Bingham. A special thank you to Josh Gray of North Country Rivers for hosting us at their facility on the Kennebec.

#### *Items particular to this reach:*

- The Northern reach is the largest and most remote of the three reaches. The Northern Reach is about twice as long as either of the other two reaches. The fact that LURC is the regulating agency for a large part of this reach also sets it apart.

- Whereas the natural tidal rhythm is the dominant hydrologic force in the Tidal Section, in the Northern Section, water flow management through the dams determines flow. For rafting outfitters this gives them a level of certainty needed to plan their activities and market the whitewater experience.

- The Northern reach discussion focused mainly on the recreational activities of the region and how to keep the area as close to its current condition as possible. Also recognized was the need to improve the recreational experience in various sections of the river corridor.

- Concern over the use of ATV's on trails adjacent to river and a lack of enforcement of unauthorized use. Most agreed that ATV riding would be acceptable if trails were located away from the banks of the river.

- All types of boating occur in various parts of the northern reach with white water rafting being a huge economic asset to the northern portion of the reach.

- Stressed by all groups in this reach was the need to protect and enhance the remote feel of the river corridor. Protection from ridgeline development in the hills away from the river came up several times in the discussion.

- Land ownership differs significantly from the other two reaches. Large timberland parcels characterize the Northern reach. However, there was not much discussion about the kind of development proposed by Plum Creek at Moosehead Lake, even though this might set the pace for development downriver.

### **Next Steps:**

- Add revisions to the maps that were used at the reach committee meetings.
- Develop a plan for the next set of reach meeting. What information are we missing?
- Hold focus group meetings.
- Outline the action plan