

SPORTSMAN'S ALLIANCE OF MAINE



NEWS

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www.samofmaine.org

SAM Outdoor Education Center Grand Opening

by Amy Marston

On Sunday, October 19, 2025, the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine welcomed hundreds of supporters to the grand opening of the new Outdoor Education Center in Augusta, a milestone years in the making and a proud moment for everyone who helped bring the vision to life. Set on 100 acres off North Belfast Avenue, the Center was created to give families, youth groups, schools, and community members a place to learn Maine's outdoor traditions safely and confidently. The planning, trail development, fundraising, and volunteer work behind this effort were substantial, and the turnout made it clear the investment was worth it. SAM members, first-time visitors, longtime sportsmen and women, young families, and legislators all came together to celebrate what this space represents for Maine's future.

The afternoon was packed with activities. Archery stations drew steady lines as instructors coached kids and adults through their first shots. Trappers demonstrated tools, techniques, and responsible practices. Fishing volunteers helped participants cast into ponds designed with accessibility in mind. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) hosted ongoing safety discussions and fielded questions from curious newcomers. Everywhere you looked, people were learning, laughing, and discovering something new.

"This space is about giving families, children, and entire communities a place to discover the outdoors together," said David Trahan, Executive Director of SAM. "We want people to experience the full range of Maine's outdoor heritage and gain the skills to care for it."

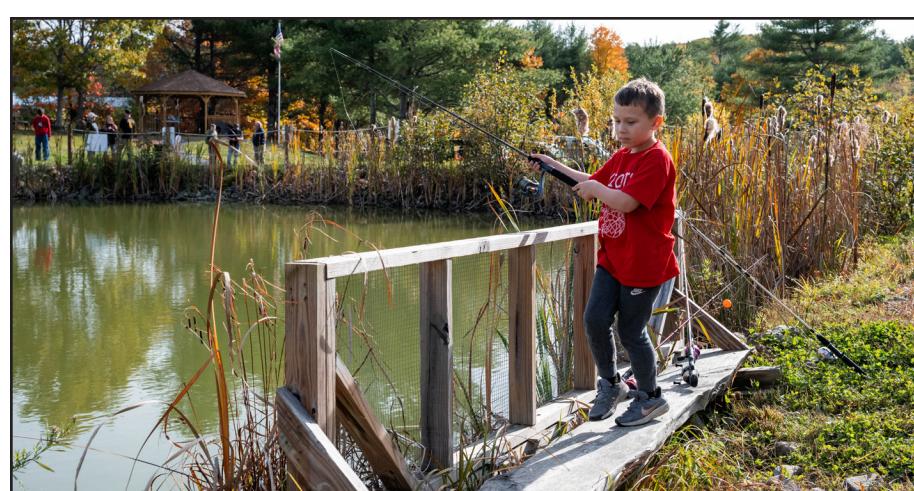
SAM board member Tenley Skolfield, who helped shape the Center's programming, echoed that purpose. "It matters that people of all ages have a place to get outside and learn," she said. "Whether



Executive Director David Trahan (center) cuts the ribbon to officially open SAM's Outoo Education Center.

you're trying archery for the first time or learning how to set a trap responsibly, the goal is to make the outdoors approachable and enjoyable for everyone."

The event also gave guests their first look at the Center's long-term potential: miles of trails, teaching spaces, youth camping areas, and accessible fishing ponds that will support year-round programming. It's a resource built to grow with Maine's needs—and one that will strengthen the state's outdoor tradition for generations. The energy on opening day said it all. Maine values its outdoor heritage, and the SAM Outdoor Education Center is ready to help more people experience it, learn it, and carry it forward. ●



Keegan (6) from Lincoln County, checks out the fishing pond. **See more photos on page 9.**

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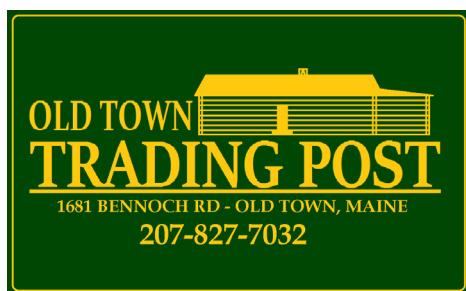
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The Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM) is a non-profit corporation founded in 1975 to promote conservation of Maine's wildlife resources and to be an advocate for hunters, anglers, trappers and gun owners throughout the state.

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THE FOUNDERS OF S.A.M.

In the fall of 1975, CBS News ran a one hour TV show entitled, "The Guns of Autumn". It was an openly blatant attack on hunting traditions and guns in general. Ed Armstrong of Hampden watched that show and was incensed by its content. The next morning Ed called Bud Leavitt, sports editor of the Bangor Daily News and told him that Maine needed a statewide active organization to protect hunting and gun owners' rights. Bud gave him the telephone number of "Doc" Garcelon, an Augusta dentist who was then on the Board of Directors of the National Rifle Association (NRA). Ed called Doc, and they met the following week with the following individuals who, over the course of several months, formed the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine. The rest is history!

Ed Armstrong - Hampden
Maynard Connors - Franklin
Oscar Cronk - Wiscasset
"Doc" Garcelon - Augusta
"Mac" Herrick - Blue Hill
Tieche Shelton - Augusta
Harry Vanderweide - Augusta



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Executive Director's Report

by David Trahan

Gun Control - The Courts May Be Our Last Line of Defense

There is only one way to describe the recent vote on referendum Question 2, whether to pass a traditional "Red Flag" law for Maine: Reckless and devastating! Time and time again, the Department of Public Safety, Fraternal Order of Police, and the State police said, "If passed, this law is unnecessary and will make it more dangerous for communities, the public, police officers, families, and victims of domestic violence." In a debate with Ann Jordan, spokesperson for the pro-red flag Gun Safety Coalition, the moderator asked Jordan if she was concerned with law enforcement's statements that this law would be dangerous? Her answer? "No." That one question and answer summed it up best. The Gun Safety Coalition hates guns more than they care about Mainers' safety.

If the police organizations are correct and this law will make it more dangerous, who is at risk? First, gun owners. This new law targets guns and gun owners. During the debates, Ann Jordan kept saying the law was not specific to guns; instead it uses the word "weapons." If you believe that, I have some ocean front property in Iowa to sell to you. Her claim was that when an officer comes to your home unannounced, they would take dangerous weapons like guns, knives, and machetes. That answer was meant to placate gun owners, to convince them that the gun safety coalition just wants you to be safe.

The simple deception is this: After the police take the guns and knives, they will prohibit you from buying guns by submitting your name to the FBI and National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), where you will be prohibited from owning or purchasing firearms. The real joke is that knives and machetes do *not* require a NICS check. A potential assailant can just walk into the local hardware store to replenish confiscated knives or other weapons. Like most of the Red Flag supporters' talking points, they don't stand up to even the slightest bit of scrutiny.

So, what happened?

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National gun control groups are like ambulance-chasing lawyers. They take a tragic event like the Lewiston shooting and make it only about gun control. They use emotion and the false promise that, if we had just one more gun law, it would have prevented the shooting. We have tens of thousands of state, federal, and local gun control laws; how's that working?

Truth is, other than the Gun Owners of Maine, we got no support from national gun rights groups to fight Question 2. Raising money was nearly impossible; we were outspent 25 to 1. The real crippling obstacle came from our anti-gun Secretary of State, Shenna Bellows, a blatantly obvious Democrat operative who wrote a highly misleading peach of a question for the red flag supporters. It may have had something to do with her desire to attract out-of-state gun control money for her primary campaign for Governor.

Finally, years ago, former State Representative Henry Joy from Crystal,

Maine, introduced legislation to create two Maines. He was widely ridiculed when he said a day would arrive when the heavily populated urban cities would politically overwhelm the smaller rural Maine communities. The vote on Question 2 could not have illustrated more clearly the political differences between city and country folk in Maine. The supporters of Question 2 spent their millions of dollars in our cities, and it showed. In the end, Portland and the surrounding region voted for Question 2 at a rate of 2 to 1, crushing the small towns.

I believe Maine voters have now crossed a line. Up to this point, state groups like SAM have managed to push back and defeat national gun control measures. When they passed laws like the 72-hour waiting period to purchase a firearm, we took our fight successfully to the courts. Perhaps that is our only option left to preserve our liberty.

Stay tuned!

MAINE OPERATION GAME THIEF (OGT)

Maine OGT is a program that asks the public to report known or suspected poaching violations.



Maine OGT works very closely with the Maine Warden Service, the Maine Marine Patrol, and International Wildlife Crimestoppers. Covering the entire state is a big job, so these agencies request the public to also be eyes and ears for poaching wildlife activity. Violations or suspicious activity should be reported to **1-800-ALERT-US (1-800-253-7887)**.

Poaching is a serious and costly crime. Poaching robs sportsmen and sportswomen of fish and game, robs Maine businesses and taxpayers of hunting and fishing revenues, and robs all of us of the beauty of Maine's wildlife. Also, the illegal introduction of non-native fish species in Maine has had, and will continue to have, disastrous effects on our native fisheries. Poachers also take endangered, threatened, and non-game species.

To **confidentially report** acts of poaching, call the OGT Hotline, toll-free within Maine, at 1-800-253-7887. (From out of state, call 207-287-6057.) Calls are received 24/7. It is important to

note that **callers do not have to reveal their names or testify in court.** If a conviction results, a reward is available if previously requested. Rewards vary from \$500 to \$1,000, more in serious cases. All reward monies come from donations and fundraising. Often, a reward is not requested - most fish and wildlife enthusiasts just want the criminals caught!

How effective is Maine OGT? Do phone calls from the public lead to convictions?

In addition to the numerous callers who did not want a reward, **Maine OGT has paid thousands of dollars in rewards!** Do the math! Your reports **absolutely** help Maine OGT's mission of **"Protecting All of Maine's Natural Resources."**

www.maineogt.org



SAM at 50

Highlights 1995–2005

Steady As She Goes

by Ginny Hurley Thompson

In October 1995, SAM's new president was sportswoman Edye Cronk, a key member who had been instrumental with the alliance since the beginning. The board upheavals of the past did not discourage her; every successful organization must weather conflict and growing pains. SAM had bounced back every time, emerging from setbacks a stronger alliance. Exec. Dir. George Smith trusted Cronk's leadership: "She will right the ship." Everybody looked up to Edye Cronk. Literally; she was very tall. A respected leader, she knew how to motivate people, and have a little fun along the way. For one board retreat, she organized a shark fishing trip. President Cronk served for the next 10 years, and under her committed watch, SAM thrived.

To address legal issues stemming from conflicts of interest, Michael Deschaine (SAM past president 1984-85) conducted an internal analysis to elevate operational SAM's professionalism. The new board addressed fiscal practices, conflicts of interest, and chain of command. SAM's principles, which had been "diluted through the transitional nature of staff and board turnover" were re-aligned with SAM's mission with renewed integrity.

We are the Conservationists

When SAM's founders coined this 'brand' back in 1975, did they foresee the far-reaching responsibilities it encompassed? Beyond the continuous battles to defend sportsman's rights, the conservation mission required SAM's involvement in Augusta, wrestling with management policy in forestry, fisheries, waterways, access/land use, endangered species, environment—all the natural resources that wildlife and outdoor recreation depend upon. When Maine's land use and wildlife came under threat from out-of-state group RESTORE: The Northwoods, which proposed to introduce wolves, list Atlantic Salmon as endangered, and create a 3.2-million-acre national park, SAM defeated the referendum, calling out RESTORE's "blatant misuse of the Endangered Species Act to further its goals." RESTORE's stated goal was "to recreate the conditions that existed in the northeast before European

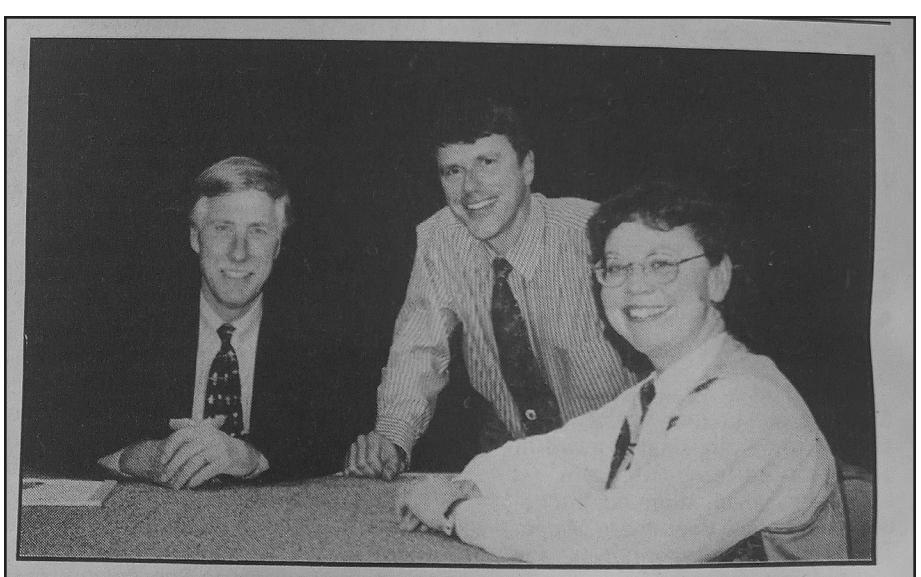
settlers arrived 500 years ago," a preservationist agenda.

When DIFW declared Maine's fish hatcheries were in crisis, SAM's Fishing Initiative Committee (FIC) toured hatcheries and proposed public/private solutions to increase production. DIFW opposed SAM's ideas; the debate continued for years. As a stop-gap measure, Matt Scott (past SAM president, and DIFW Deputy Commissioner at the time) developed the Adopt-A-Hatchery project, enlisting nine paper mill companies to volunteer in making improvements to existing hatcheries, since both industries relied on similar water-flow engineering. It was a big success; hatcheries were upgraded, partnerships were created, and Mainers got more fish.

Wardens, Wolves, and Wildfire!

In 1999 Warden Service had been criticized about their professionalism. The Citizens Complaint Committee had been organized in 1996 by the Warden Service to improve its relationship with the public, with SAM on the committee. A flood of complaints over warden/sportsmen conflicts was responsible for this complex problem. Rudeness, lack of people skills, and presumption of guilt were the main issues, along with the claim that some wardens had never hunted or fished. Three years later, problems lingered. SAM brought this issue back into focus in 1999, pressing Gov. King to urge the Warden Service to make better progress for a full-time internal affairs bureau, and to act upon sage advice from retired wardens; "Look to the intent of the violator. Was the violation willful, or simply an ignorant mistake?" That philosophy was finally put into practice, along with new training, supervision, and education procedures.

The wolves are at the door, but DIFW Deer Biologist and future SAM member Gerry Lavigne says "Do Not Enter!" In 1999, US Fish & Wildlife proposed listing the Gray Wolf under the Endangered Species Act and were working with the animal rights group Defenders of Wildlife towards wolf recovery in the Northeast. Challenging his department's policy on wolf recovery, Lavigne issued



The late George Smith and WILDFIRE guest host Roberta Scruggs teamed up to grill then-Governor Angus King on air.

a memo detailing his evidence-based analysis of devastating predation risks wolves would bring to deer and moose, among many other negative impacts. "Wolves are not endangered, and should be treated just like coyotes if they get to Maine." In response to Lavigne's testimony, SAM planned to propose a bill prohibiting wolves in Maine.

WILDFIRE, a half hour TV talk show became an instant hit after being launched in Dec. 1997 by URSUS Productions from Waterville. Wildfire was hosted by SAM's George Smith, and Majority Leader Paul Jacques (D), later by Maine Sportsman Magazine editor Harry Vanderweide. Its intent was to put Maine's leading political and environmental leaders on the hot seat, and have George and Paul grill them. "We want to get to the issues behind the issues." The show was underwritten by SAM and was wonderful media exposure for the alliance. A frequent guest was journalist Roberta Skruggs, a strong SAM advocate, well versed in statehouse goings-on and up on the latest from DIFW. She was a supporter of SAM and Smith's views on most outdoor issues. Nothing was off the table, and it was all served up rapid-fire. "Expect fireworks!"

SAM Launches Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund & Sportsman's Congress

A highlight among SAM's accomplishments was its 1995 creation of Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund. MOHF conserves wildlife and open spaces through sale of instant lottery tickets, and awards grants twice every year. It was conceived by SAM and initiated in partnership with the Maine Audubon Society, who gathered over 53,000 signatures to get on the referendum ballot. In an unusual move, it was enacted directly by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. King, thus avoiding the high cost of a referendum. The lottery was Smith's brainstorm: "The idea came to me one evening while fishing for wild brookies at Sourdahunk Lake." Since 1996, MOHF has awarded over \$26 million in grants, averaging around \$700,000 a year. Grants are awarded twice a year, selected by a seven-member board of permanent and appointed members. Initially the scratch tickets sold for \$1, the top prize was \$3,000. Today it's \$3 for 1 ticket. You can't win if you don't play! Ask for the \$3 Leaping Loon ticket. MOHF and conservation win every time you play.

Also in 1995, SAM held its first Sportsman's Congress, a day-long conference for Maine's outdoor leaders, sportsmen, conservation groups, state agencies, legislators, key members of DIFW and task groups, SAM's Deer Task Force. A wide range of issues were discussed, focus-

ing on strategies for the upcoming year, and questions from the audience were encouraged. This was a tremendous success, giving sportsmen the chance to talk face-to-face with the agencies and legislators who form the structure and management of wildlife and conservation resources. Lively and energizing, the Sportsman's Congress continues to be held when needed.

2004 – Voters Reject Bear Hunting Ban: The Victory of the Decade

Following the record voter turnout in 2003, Maine Citizens for Fair Bear Hunting announced they had gathered 100,000 signatures on petitions to ban bear baiting, trapping, and hounding. The group claimed its initiative was driven by Mainers, but if you follow the money, it goes back to HSUS. In a battle that was clearly between national animal-rights groups and the sportsmen of Maine, SAM needed a massive war chest. President Cronk rallied the troops, the race was on, and campaign dollars poured in from supporters in Maine and across the country. By February, \$250,000 had been raised, and by April, over \$650,000. Ultimately, SAM would spend \$1.5 million to win "No" on Referendum Question 2. Professional campaign managers were secured and Exec. Dir. Smith devoted most of his time fund raising, traveling throughout New England and beyond gaining support. DIFW hired professional writer/journalist Roberta Scruggs to write their "bear management book" supporting DIFW's need for effective tools managing bear. Since 1995 Scruggs had been a familiar character and voice in local papers and in SAM News, as a strong supporter of sportsmen. The campaign was strong on the ground, but it was the 30-second TV ads that convinced the majority to vote No on 2, by a margin of 53% to 47%.

It was a defining moment in SAM's history, played out in the toughest, most expensive referendum campaign in the history of our alliance. "Victory is sweet," proclaimed President Edye Cronk when the win was official. "Sportsmen pulled together like never before, and there is a lot of credit to be shared for this historic victory." Thanks go out to the Maine Professional Guides Association, the Maine Trappers Association, Maine chapter of Safari Club International, an extraordinary campaign management team, and to the thousands of SAM members and individuals from Maine and away who contributed precious time and money to make victory a reality.

Coming Soon: SAM's New Augusta Conference Center – Stay Tuned!



SAM Executive Director George Smith partnered with The Maine Sportsman's Harry Vanderweide to produce WILDFIRE and two other outdoors-related TV shows during the 1990s.



Notes from the Shooting Shack

by Gerry Lavigne

Where Do They All Come From?

Hunters and trappers in Maine are capable of putting up impressive numbers of eastern coyotes. Here are some examples:

- During the snaring era, one snaresman killed 50 coyotes in the Hinkley Brook deer yard during the course of a single winter.
- In 2015, DIFW deployed dog hunters in the Pittston Farm Deer Yard. They killed 54 coyotes in a few weeks that winter.
- Hunting over bait, one hunter killed 103 coyotes in the Northeast Carry deer yard over a 3-year period when deer were being fed.
- A dairy farmer who butchered domestic and wild game as a sideline, killed over 1,000 coyotes at a single bait site over a 35-year period.
- A couple of hunters entered in the PCWCA coyote contest out of Springfield annually kill 25 to 35 coyotes at a few bait sites over the course of the winter. This contest is entering its 17th year.
- My son-in-law trapped 11 coyotes in a single gravel pit during the fall of 2015. I added 4 more kills over bait at that site that winter.
- Using a thermal scope, a farmer in my area winter-killed 26 coyotes over a single bait in 2024 and 34 coyotes in 2025. Over the previous 10 years, he averaged 12 to 15 coyotes each winter using conventional optics.
- In 2024, I killed 32 coyotes over 3 bait sites while using thermal imagery.

- In 2025, a group of bait hunters I follow killed an aggregate of 84 coyotes in five central Maine towns encompassing 250 square miles.

Where do all these coyotes come from? Coyote research in the Northeast over the past 40-plus years provides some insight into how many coyotes occur over the landscape. Coyotes live in family groups or packs consisting of a mated pair and their surviving offspring. Pack size typically averages around four to six individuals as winter approaches. But most of those young coyotes will disperse from late fall to late winter to seek their own territory. Mated pairs are territorial; they do not tolerate unrelated coyotes in their home range. However, at any given time, there are varying numbers of unrelated coyotes moving about the landscape; these individuals are capable of travelling great distances as they seek a mate and/or vacant territories.

In habitats which provide sufficient smaller prey like snowshoe hares as well as deer, coyotes can attain densities of 36 to 40 coyotes per 100 square miles (think of a square measuring 10 miles x 10 miles on a side). At these densities, a typical Maine town comprising 36 square miles, therefore, would harbor roughly 14 coyotes during winter.

In the examples cited above, hunters were seemingly removing more than an entire township's coyote population! Are coyotes more numerous than the research data would indicate? Maybe.



The late Paul Malicky with some of the coyotes he snared in one winter at the Hinkley Brook deer yard.

But other factors are likely involved as well.

The first three examples are from deer wintering areas in the northern half of the state. Each of them comprised several thousand acres of deer wintering habitat. And they attract deer from a very large acreage of summer range in a ratio of about 20:1. For example, a 5,000-acre deer yard in northern Maine may harbor deer from 100,000 acres of summer range. When all these deer vacate summer range in late November or December, can you guess where the coyotes in that vast area go? Yep. They migrate with the deer. Research done in conjunction with the lynx project in northern Maine verified this coyote migration. Wolves around Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario do the same thing when deer move to winter range south of the park.

I don't know if coyotes occupying an extensive deer yard still establish and defend individual territories. I doubt it, though. Territorial behavior tends to be strongest where prey availability is scarce. And with hundreds or thousands of deer concentrated in deep snow, acquiring supper is not often a problem.

There are a couple of important lessons here.

1. Managing habitat for deer wintering areas in northern Maine also requires effective coyote control to assure deer survival. Predation management and habitat management go hand-in-hand.
2. If you feed deer on a large scale, you must also control the coyotes that inevitably are attracted to this deer concentration. Otherwise, you are just trading predation for malnutrition among the deer which depend on you for sustenance.

Other examples in the list demonstrate a breakdown in territoriality in the presence of abundant food. The farmer/butcher who killed 1,000 coyotes at one site over 3-plus decades is a prime example. Why fight in the presence of so much easily acquired food? Different packs and strays can avoid each other simply by visiting the scrap pile at different times. I have seen this partitioning of access to abundant food at my own bait site, the BoneYard. When I first hunted the BoneYard in autumn 2012, I killed three mature males, each exceeding 40 lbs., and two mature females, among the nine coyotes taken. Three distinct packs were using the BoneYard site that fall.

Some of the above examples involve bait sites placed in a natural travel corridor. The trapping example and the farmer who now uses a thermal scope, are two such locations. The trapper set in a gravel pit carved into an esker (gravel ridge) which is 25 miles long.

These gravel ridges are readily travelled by dispersing coyotes, as many trappers know. The farmer with the thermal sets his bait near a long stream which drains an extensive watershed and empties into the Penobscot river. He could be shooting coyotes that originated miles from his farm in either direction.

The group of bait hunters (me included) who killed 84 coyotes in a 5-town area in 2025 exceeded the expected population size of coyotes in that 250 square mile area (i.e., 70 coyotes). Yet, I am certain we did not depopulate those towns. The towns involved are Alton, Lagrange, Orneville Twp, Milo, and Brownville. Seen on the accompanying map, these towns extend in a 30-mile line from south to north, much of it along the Route 16 corridor. While we definitely reduced or eliminated several packs, we undoubtedly intercepted a large number of dispersing coyotes from beyond the borders of these five towns.

Each of these examples of concentrated coyote removals cited above likely impacted coyote density within an area far larger than the immediate hunting site. How far is difficult to tell. Intensive removal of resident and dispersing coyotes attracted to major food sites, or along important travel corridors, creates something of a population sink over an extensive area that may include multiple townships. And for that year at least, reducing overall coyote populations in a large area can only help improve survival of adult and fawn deer where this phenomenon occurs.

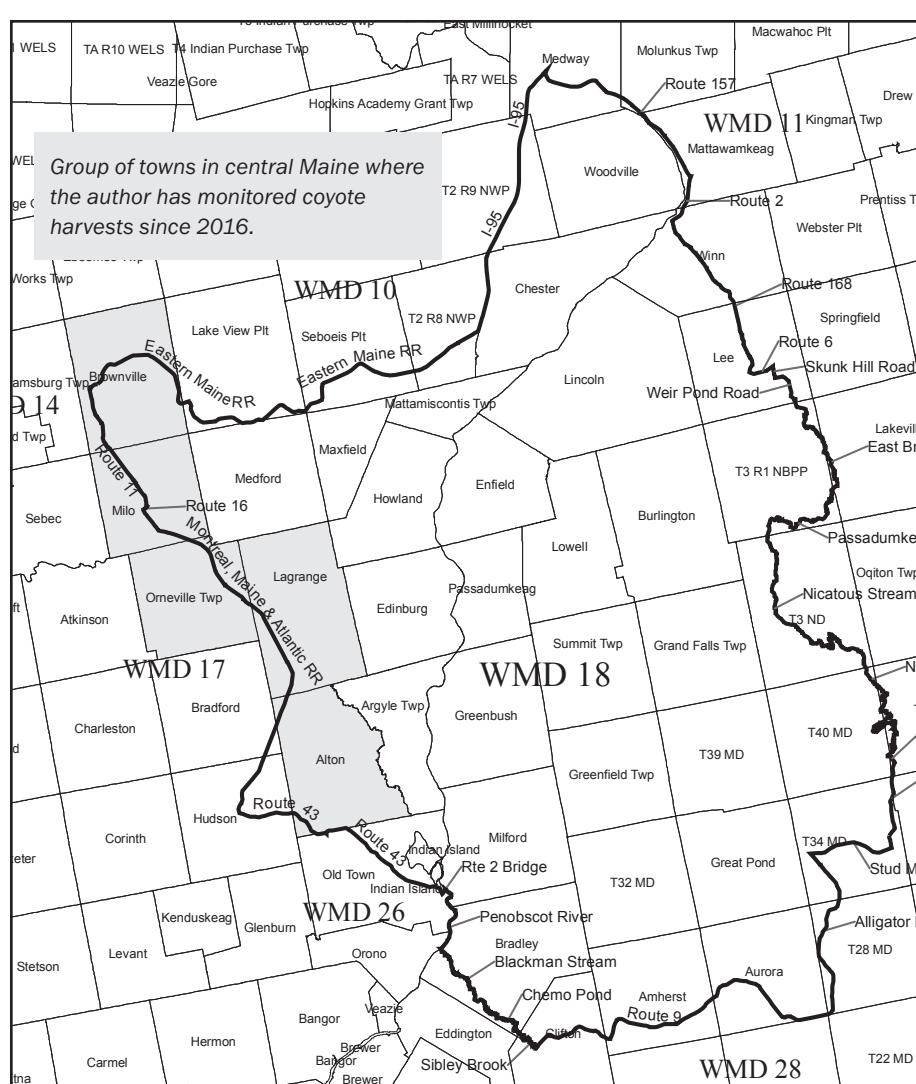
Does the intensive coyote removal cited above result in obvious reductions in coyote abundance? In some notable cases — yes. After removing 54 coyotes from the Pittston Farm deer yard in 2015, dog hunters were deployed there again in 2016. They found far fewer coyotes that year.

After removing 103 coyotes from the Northeast Carry deer yard and feeding area over three consecutive winters, fewer coyotes were noted during the fourth winter.

After killing 32 coyotes at my three bait sites during 2024, I was able to come up with only 7 coyotes in 2025 despite putting in the same hunting effort.

However, some of these examples seem to have produced a similar number of coyotes year after year. It may well be that important travel corridors or butcher middens remain magnets for any dispersing coyote in the region, in addition to mated pairs, regardless of varying coyote density in the region.

Time for some targeted research, DIFW? •





SPORTSMAN'S ALLIANCE OF MAINE - INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Legislative Report

by David Trahan, SAM-ILA Executive Director

Conservation Policy – One of Our Greatest Strengths

I was recently asked by The Nature Conservancy, Maine Coast Heritage Trust and over 40 other land conservation organizations to testify jointly on their and SAM's behalf, in favor of **LD 1312**, "An Act to Provide a Source of Revenue for School Construction and for the Land for Maine's Future Trust Fund". The sponsor of this important bill is Senator Pierce (D), the Democrat Majority Leader.

First, it is an honor to be trusted to deliver testimony on such an innovative idea. More importantly, it illustrates the enormous influence SAM has at the state house. In a moment I will explain this bill, which started as an idea while ice fishing with two friends, Jeff Romano of Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and Tom Abello, former lobbyist for The Nature Conservancy and current policy advisor to Governor Mills.

Long before the Mills administration, the three of us were friends, lobbying and recreating together. For years, we battled together in support of land conservation at the state house, a modern day Three Musketeers, earning our stripes trying to pass policy to fund one of Maine's most popular programs, the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF).

We made significant progress together in 2021 securing a one-time \$40 million appropriation, a monumental achievement. We passed legislation in 2023 converting the LMF program into the LMF Trust Fund, enabling it to retain any interest that it generated. So far, \$3 million in interest has accrued, and by law this will be matched by another \$3 million. This change means \$6 million in new funding is now available to acquire public land for all forms of outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, etc. Oh yeah, this has also reduced the need to seek bond money and incur debt for LMF purchases.

In addition to this dramatic improvement to conservation policy, we added language to the program directing some of the funding be used to acquire and manage deer wintering areas. Together the three of us, in consultation with Gerry Lavigne, SAM's consulting wildlife biologist, expanded the Deer Management Fund under DIFW to include over \$1 million a year in dedicated and protected funding from the new antlerless deer permit fee for the acquisition, management, and improvement of deer wintering areas in parts of the state where intense forest management has

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GENERAL PURPOSE.

The Corporation is organized and operated for the purpose of preserving Maine's Outdoor Heritage, including but not limited to hunting, fishing, trapping, and 2nd Amendment rights and will work within the meaning of 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (as amended) or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue law, including for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations which are recognized as exempt from tax under such 501(c)(4).

MISSION STATEMENT:

- » To influence public policy to preserve Maine's Outdoor Heritage, including but not limited to hunting, fishing, trapping, and 2nd Amendment rights.
- » Develop and provide information on wildlife resources, field sports and conservation programs that will benefit such resources, sports and programs.
- » Educate the public concerning the American heritage of hunting, trapping and fishing.
- » Initiate and participate in litigation in the courts when necessary to protect the beneficial pursuits of hunting, trapping, fishing, and scientific wildlife management practices.
- » Promote and explain field sports, wildlife conservation and scientific wildlife management practices through literature, films, the press, television, and radio.
- » Provide organizations throughout the state with financial and management assistance to achieve these purposes.
- » Defend and protect the right of individuals to keep, use, and bear firearms.

reduced winter deer habitat. The fund is matched 3-1 by federal Pitman-Robertson dollars, and undoubtedly will be protecting critical wildlife habitat for generations. To date, over 10,000 acres of deer wintering areas have been purchased and protected through LMF and the DIFW antlerless deer permit program.

But wait! Our dramatic and positive conservation policy changes don't end there. The three of us, under the SAM banner, passed two important pieces of legislation which protect habitat within and near commercial solar installations. The first requires solar developers to mitigate negative impacts on wildlife habitat by financially penalizing solar development in critical wildlife habitat and prime farmland, while encouraging solar developers to seek compromised, unproductive land like gravel pits and PFAS-contaminated land.

The second bill requires mandatory wetland setbacks for commercial arrays, to mitigate the massive amounts of heat generated from solar panels. Next year, DIFW, in cooperation with the University of Maine, will conduct research on the thermal environment around commercial solar installations and report back to the Legislature. Results of this study will hopefully lead to more appropriate setbacks from wetlands and other sensitive wildlife habitats.

Now on to LD 1312, "An Act to Provide a Source of Revenue for School Construction and for the Land for Maine's Future Trust Fund." LD 1312 is a complex fiscal

policy, the product of decades of experience shared by the three of us, which could solve a problem that plagues land conservation in Maine—long term stable funding for purchasing and maintaining public land. Most Mainers, and I venture to say legislators, are unaware that when Maine collects taxes, most of the money is held in what is called the State Cash Pool, which is invested, and yields an annual return of about 4%. The same is true of Maine's Budget Stabilization Fund. Both funds have well over \$1 billion, with annual earnings of over \$40 million in interest. LD 1312 takes the interest generated in the "Rainy Day Fund" and distributes it monthly to the three programs, in proportions equal to 50% to the Major Capitol School Construction Fund, 25% to LMF, and 25% to the Post Employment Irrevocable Trust Fund (state retirement fund).

This change, if passed by the Legislature, will open a new era in state government. Land conservation programs have mostly depended on bonding to fund them. Bonding creates a General Fund liability to pay debt service on bonds for decades, and by default, there is less money available for ongoing programs. This change would reduce the need for borrowing, and in addition it would compound the positive impacts of accruing investment income from multiple sources. Remember when I said the LMF Trust Fund had accrued interest income of \$3 million? If this change is passed, interest from the Rainy-Day Fund will be placed in the LMF Trust

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Fund. The interest income from the Rainy-Day Fund will generate interest a second time in the LMF Trust Fund, as it will be invested until the land acquisition projects are complete (land acquisition can take years). Further compounding the positive impacts of this change,

and ironically, it raises money a third time by reducing debt service on the General Fund. One last added benefit: This change would reduce the need to raise taxes for this purpose.

I will report on the fate of LD 1312 in a later edition of the *SAM News*. ●

Public Access to Private Land Working Group

by Dennis Keschl, SAM Board of Directors

Maine has established a distinctive tradition of permitting public access to privately owned lands. As stated by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW), "Over the past 200 years, landowners, residents, and visitors have forged a tradition of neighborliness and shared access that is unparalleled elsewhere in the Nation." This enduring relationship is an integral element of Maine's heritage, and remains particularly significant given that approximately 94% of Maine's land is held in private ownership.

However, shifts in Maine's economy and demographic landscape present increasing challenges to this tradition. For instance, large parcels are now frequently acquired by individuals unfamiliar with Maine's custom, which sometimes results in the restriction of public access. Additional pressures stem from expenses incurred by landowners, due to misuse of access privileges, misconceptions regarding the nature of access as a right rather than a privilege, and growing demand for use of these lands.

In response to these concerns, the 132nd Legislature enacted legislation directing the DIFW, alongside the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DCAF), to convene a working group representing a broad spectrum of Maine's population—demographically and geographically—to study issues related to public access to private lands. The group is charged with identifying opportunities to maintain and expand access, reporting findings and recommendations to the Second Session of the 132nd Legislature by February 15, 2026 (see LD 1308 for details of the law).

Given the substantial interest demonstrated by the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine and its constituency, it was appointed a member of the working group. Established in late summer 2025, the Public Access to Private Land Working Group conducted four public meetings to date.

Although the Working Group's conclusions are pending, preliminary recommendations have been developed across several categories to preserve and enhance public access.

Education

- » Expand public education efforts regarding Maine's unique tradition, emphasizing that access is a privilege and encouraging respect and appreciation toward landowners.
- » Increase awareness of Maine's landowner liability laws, targeting outreach to both new and existing landowners to clarify legal protections and foster confidence in keeping land open for public recreation.

- » Enhance outreach to ATV users, and provide targeted training to Town Clerks to ensure compliance with state registration requirements for ATVs and snowmobiles.

Enforcement

- » Explore the development of an alternative enforcement system for recreational violations, modeled after traffic court, engaging relevant municipal and judicial entities to ensure efficiency and fairness.
- » Address staffing shortages, and strengthen enforcement and prevention efforts for seasonal patrols of motorized vehicle trails, particularly in rural areas, in collaboration with local clubs.

Financial Incentives

- » Establish dedicated funding sources for critical road infrastructure, facilitating maintenance and repair of key public and private routes essential to Maine's outdoor recreation economy.
- » Support private landowners through cost-sharing initiatives aimed at trail and road maintenance, thereby ensuring sustained public access and safety.
- » Create a state program to fund infrastructure upkeep on both public and private lands, including campsites, trails, and access points.

Legislation

- » Implement environmental liability protections for landowners by amending current laws to require recreational users to be responsible for environmental damage, and to bear financial responsibility for repairs.

Other

- » Secure long-term public access corridors vital to maintaining recreation connectivity.
- » Develop a voluntary, incentive-based state program to assist private landowners in managing and maintaining public access, drawing upon successful models from states such as Wisconsin, Michigan, and Montana.

Upon completion of the final draft of the report, it will be accessible on the following link for public comment: www.maine.gov/ifw/news-events/meetings-events.html from January 5-18, 2026, with a final report to be submitted to the Legislature on February 15, 2026.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Sportsman's Alliance of Maine Institute for Legislative Action (SAM-ILA) is accepting letters of interest and resumes from any member who wishes to serve on the Board of Directors (BOD). Each Director holds a term of office for three years. The Board has quarterly meetings to conduct business. The meetings are held at SAM headquarters in Augusta.

If you wish to be considered a candidate for a future Director's position, you must satisfy the following eligibility criteria:

- hold valid SAM membership for the past year
- support SAM's mission
- be at least 18 years old
- willingness to participate in political process
- ability to make quarterly meetings
- participate in fundraising and other events

Please send your resume and letter of interest to:

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Be an Outsider

Did the World Just Change?

by Matt Dunlap

At this writing, we're still awaiting the certified results of the Red Flag citizen initiative vote, but we don't need to see the decimal points to know that it passed, and passed easily. I've heard lots of reasons for that, including issues surrounding the amount of money the proponents were able to raise and spend, to the wording of the ballot question, to everything in between.

Does this mean that the slide has begun? Are we seeing the beginning of the end of our Second Amendment rights as we have known and enjoyed them?

Not by a long shot. Things *have* changed, but our rights are still intact. I think it's fair to say that the shock of the Lewiston mass shooting in October of 2023 has not stopped reverberating across the public consciousness. After all, that proved with clarity that yes, such awful tragedies can happen here, too.

One overlooked aspect of the public discourse around gun violence, however, is the quiet position of any and every responsible gun owner: We don't want gun violence, either, and we don't try to rationalize or justify it. I for one am just as mystified as to what causes a heretofore peaceful and law-abiding citizen to completely break apart and shoot people they don't know seemingly out of the clear blue sky. There are no good theories about why this has been happening, and even fewer obvious pragmatic ways to stop it.

For those firmly in the gun control camp, the solutions *are* obvious: Ban so-called assault weapons altogether, ban high-capacity magazines, and require universal background checks on all transfers of firearms. The reasons why none of these work are multifaceted; most of the mass shooters of the last 30-plus years obtained their weapons from federally-licensed dealers after clearing background checks. Whether a firearm can hold three rounds or 30 is of little deterrence to anyone wishing to cause mayhem, who is skilled in the art of reloading. And as we learned from the first assault weapons ban, all it really did was raise the price of the arms in question. Mass shootings didn't stop.

The law that the Maine Legislature adopted unanimously to address intervention—the Yellow Flag law—was seen by those in the gun-control community as a half-measure. What we learned in the aftermath of the Lewiston shooting is that law enforcement agencies were unsure how to implement and utilize the process, and as a result, they really didn't. The examination of what could have been done better and may have prevented the Lewiston tragedy led to many much-needed internal reforms of the use of the Yellow Flag statutory provisions. Nonetheless, proponents of a Red Flag proposal that would be able to petition directly for surrender of firearms of a family member without going through law enforcement were successful in qualifying the measure for the November 2025 ballot.

I have a couple of theories as to why the initiative passed, despite opposition from law enforcement, the Governor, and SAM, among others. Most prominently, I don't think a majority of sportsmen saw this as a threat to their Second Amendment rights. As a result, the stakes didn't seem terribly high for sportsmen. After all, the proposal didn't purport to *ban* anything. The vast majority of gun owners don't see themselves (and they actually are not) as the type of people such circumstances would befall. In other words, the entire debate was about amending a *process* and not banning a *product*. If the call were to ban semi-auto firearms, I have no doubt the outcome would have been completely reversed, and by a wider margin.

We have discussed in this space things that we could do—maybe do some expanded inquiry when a prospective purchaser is looking to obtain a firearm with additional questions that could probe their intentions, perhaps give authorities more time to examine delayed transactions with a dealer to get a better sense of possible risk—all without questioning anyone's Second Amendment rights, but rather to head off ill intentions and redirect folks to the resources they need before something tragic transpires. Those are ideas that get understandably mixed reviews.

In 2003, though, in response to repeatedly killing bills in the Legislature that would allow a judge to order the surrender of firearms from someone sub-

jected to a temporary protection from abuse order, legislators who were strong Second Amendment defenders began a series of conversations with domestic violence advocates, and came up with a unique solution: Yes, allow the judge to issue such orders, but give the defendant the right to an expedited hearing so as to defend their right to keep their firearms. The resulting legislation, LD 1568, was carried by 94 cosponsors on both sides of the issue and aisle. You probably don't hear much about that, because it has actually worked.

Discussions like that are best informed by sportsmen who can temper the knee-jerk call to simply ban things or take them away—actions that we know not only to be unconstitutional, but that would not work as policy. SAM was founded on the idea of vigorously participating in the public debate about guns and hunting. The careful work we have done over the years defending those rights and privileges should prepare us now to lead in the discussion of innovative processes to help harness the power of agreement in our society to protect one another—and the rights we enjoy under the Constitution.

Matt Dunlap is a sportsman from Old Town and is a life member of SAM.

1

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Outdoor Education Center Grand Opening

More photos from the SAM Outdoor Education Center Grand Opening on October 19, 2025.



Operation Game Thief Wall of Shame.



Tenley Skolfield, David Trahan and Mike Parker.



Amy Marston with Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife instructor Ron Fournier.



Grand Opening attendees gather for the ribbon cutting and presentation.



Archery instruction by Daniel Bell.

Bobbie-Jo Wallace is presented the Maine Trapper Education Instructor of the Year award at the SAM-OEC ribbon cutting event. DIFW photo.

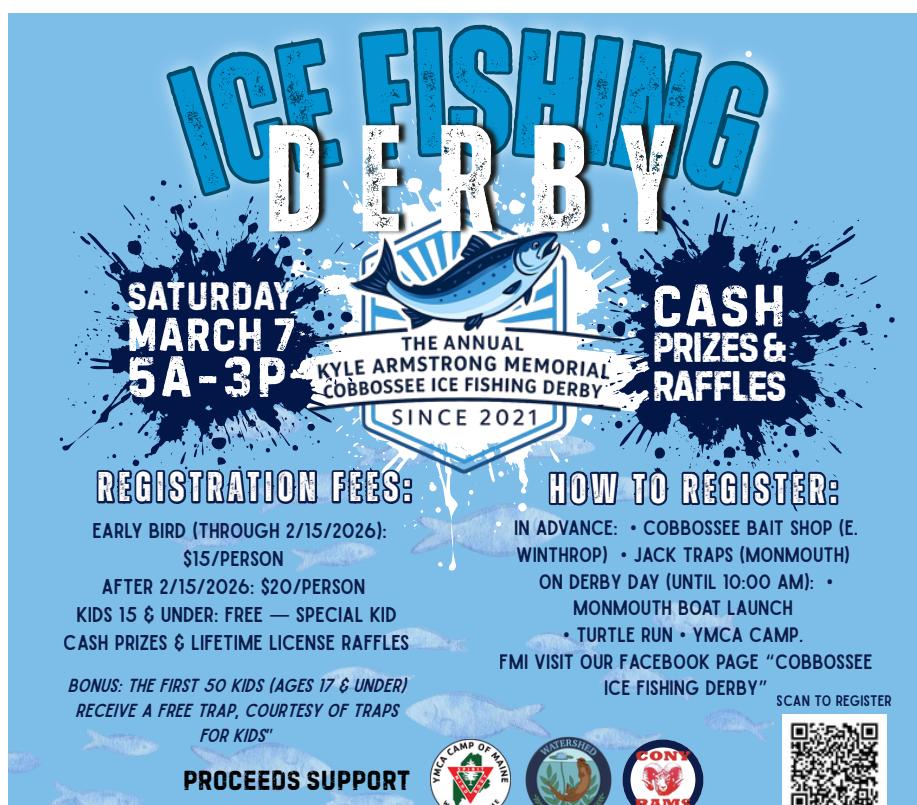


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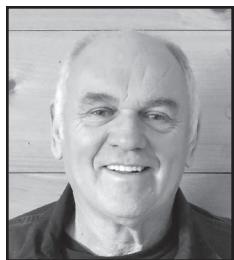
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Noonan's Notebook

by Bob Noonan

Geezer Deer Hunting

Deer meat has always been important for our family, and I'm an unapologetic meat hunter. I've shot some bucks, but only because they showed up first. I have nothing but admiration for hunters who consistently and deliberately shoot bucks, but I don't target them. Any yearling or older deer, regardless of sex, is fair game. The deer and trapping season start almost on the same day, and as much as I love deer hunting, my first passion is trapping. I want a deer soon so I can set traps.

Age is slowing me down, which many deer hunters can relate to. Several years ago I started hunting mostly from ground blinds, comfortably watching. Arthritis kept me from either hunting or trapping in 2024. I had both hips replaced in May 2025, when I was 81. That completely eliminated all arthritis pain, a real miracle. But my lower back started acting up as a result, so when the 2025 deer season opened, I was still using a cane and had trouble negotiating rough ground.

One of my blinds is on the south edge of a rectangular field about 50 yards across to the woods ahead of me, and about 150 yards to the end, on my right. It's easy, flat walking along a farm lane and into the edge of the field to the blind.

The field's knee-high dead grass is thin enough to see and shoot through, and patches of clover are scattered everywhere through it. So are deer dropings. On opening day, 2025, the wind was perfect for this blind—NNW, right in my face. It was blowing 20-30 mph, and the blind shook with the gusts. Some hunters feel deer don't move on windy days, but I've shot many on days like this.

Just before dusk a big doe appeared in the field against the wood line straight ahead, grazing broadside slowly to the right. I was shooting a 7mm-08. I put the crosshairs halfway up her chest, just behind the shoulder, and shot when she stopped. She whirled and bolted into the woods, out of sight.

I felt the shot was good, but when a deer disappears fast after the shot, I always second-guess myself. Did I miss? I calmed down for a minute, and lo and behold, a fork horn appeared where the doe first had. It slowly grazed to the right, as if following her. I had a couple doe tags and my license allows a buck, and I seriously considered shooting him, too. The doe was all the meat Mari and I needed for the year, but my two sons and three grandsons had said they'd love some. But with my physical restrictions I decided to let him pass.

When the buck got to where I'd hit the doe, he disappeared into the woods. With the cane I hobbled across the bumpy field and went in. It was getting dark under the trees but I had a good flashlight. I was hoping for that white belly, but saw nothing. I was staggering a

bit in the thick brush and ground debris; in the dark my depth perception, and balance, is now lousy, and I fell twice. I know how to fall safely in the woods, but I had to pull myself back up using saplings. Frustrating and irritating.

About 20 yards in I came to a deep gully with steep sides. Probably the doe had gone into it, but I couldn't see far in with the flashlight. I once would have easily climbed in and out, but I had to admit that now I'd need help getting out.

After an hour of fruitless floundering I decided to come back in daylight. I could have called my deer hunting brother David, or my trapping partner Jesse, but they both lived almost an hour away. I didn't want to bother them, but there was a strong element of pride in my decision. I used to be the guy nobody could keep up with in the woods.

That night I left a voicemail for the local warden, that I'd left a deer I'd shot in the woods. Then I called Joanne Greer, of United Blood Trackers and Maine Blood Trackers. She and her dog have an impressive reputation for finding shot, lost deer.

The next morning Joanne and I and Viva, her 17-lb. wire-haired dachshund, entered the woods where I'd shot the doe. Viva zigzagged back and forth for a few minutes, then beelined left about 15 yards and stopped to peer into the gully, tail wagging vigorously. We followed.

"There's your deer," Joanne said, pointing. "Coyotes got it."

It was in the gully bottom. It looked like a bomb had gone off inside it, bloody parts pulled around and hair everywhere. Nothing left to tag.

I've shot many deer in the classic "boiler room," the heart/lung area right behind the shoulder. It's a fatal shot, but most ran at least a short distance. Others sometimes go farther. One doe ran over 75 paces, flag waving as if unhit, before collapsing. I've shot deer angling towards or away through a shoulder to reach the lungs, and when I'd hit bone, they'd dropped. I'd read that a high shoulder shot (about 1/3 down from the top of shoulder, through the shoulder blades and the nerve center), anchored deer in their tracks. I'd lost this doe because I'd chest-shot it and it got into the gully;

I felt the shot was good, but when a deer disappears fast after the shot, I always second-guess myself.

maybe I needed to try high shoulder shots. Another concession to age.

Monday, I tried to walk in to another stand back in the woods that had always been productive. But the ground was too rough, and partway in I turned back and went home. I was angry at my body, and discouraged.

Our house sits on 5 acres. Three acres is lawn, and mowed field behind the house. We often see deer on the lawn at night, and during the day Mari sometimes sees one or two feeding on the back lawn or field. She's always after me to have a gun ready nearby. That Monday night I agreed. She took the screen out of the living room window by the couch, I put my Marlin 30-30 and some ammo on the table beside it, and Mari laid out an orange vest and hat. She was excited. I was skeptical. I mean, really, what were the chances?

At 7 the next morning she shook me awake and stage-whispered, "Deer! Deer!" I stumbled out of bed and hustled, bent over, into the living room. I cautiously raised my head and saw a doe, broadside and head down, feeding on the lawn about 30 yards away. I got orange, stuffed two rounds into the 30-30, lay flat on the couch, lifted the window just enough to poke the barrel out, and made a high shoulder shot. The doe dropped in its tracks. Good thing; she was on the edge of our steep gully!

It had all happened so fast we were stunned, unable to believe it had actually happened. For minutes we jumped around, whooping, high fiving, and hugging and pounding each other on the back. Then we calmed down and had coffee in the dining room, admiring the deer through the window.

Mari held the hind legs with the belly up while I gutted the deer. We slid it 20 feet to the hose and washed out the inside, then drove the truck almost to it, loaded it, and took it to be tagged. Woohoo!

I have an electric game hoist in my trapping shed. Back home we hooked the gambrel ends under the deer's hind leg tendons, and I did the knife cuts and hoists as Mari stripped the hide off. She's a good deer (and pig) Skinner. She may have spent most of her life in Chicago and Walpole, Mass., but she became a real Mainer fast.

(NOTE: It's legal to shoot a deer from the window of your home, if you own it, and if there are no other buildings within 100 yards.)

A day later Mari said, "You're not done hunting, are you? Your sons want

deer meat." I didn't need much urging. The next day, at 2 pm, I got in the blind where I'd shot (and lost) the first doe. I had the 7mm-08 again.

At 2:15 a spike buck appeared in the field about 100 yards to my right, grazing excruciatingly slowly towards me, head-on. I was concerned it might leave without offering a good shot, but about 50 yards out it turned broadside, facing right. I cross-haired 2/3 up the shoulder, and shot.

It spun completely around, ran 20 yards to the woods, and disappeared inside. Wasn't it supposed to drop? Did I miss?

Excited, cane swinging, I stumbled across the grassy hummocks and into the woods. I found the deer about 30 yards in, and stood admiring it for a while. It's a view, and a sense of accomplishment, I never get tired of. Gutting it took twice as long as it used to, but I enjoyed every minute. Prolonged job satisfaction.

This time I called my brother Dave. I drove my truck across the field to within 20 feet of the woods.

Dave and I loaded the deer in the Jet Sled, and he got it to the truck before I was even out of the woods.

When Mari and I skinned it, we found the bullet had fragmented and exploded against the near shoulder blade. We had to discard the whole thing. The other shoulder was fine; the bullet hadn't penetrated through.

I'd been loading Speer 130-grain Spitzers to 2,900 feet-per-second. The load has killed half a dozen deer with boiler room shots, but ribs offer little resistance. Further online research told me this bullet is designed for both deer and varmints, and fragmentation on larger game bones has been a problem. I'll load better-penetrating bullets.

My mobility is improving with exercise and chiropractic treatment, and I'm excited about next year. I'll pick easier to get to blind locations, and I discovered that David actually *likes* helping me get deer out of the woods. I suspect it makes him feel a bit smug. (He's younger, and I bossed him around for years.)

I may be slower and less agile, but I'm not done deer hunting yet. ●



Mari with our living room window deer. The high shoulder shot dropped it in its tracks.

before collapsing. I've shot deer angling towards or away through a shoulder to reach the lungs, and when I'd hit bone, they'd dropped. I'd read that a high shoulder shot (about 1/3 down from the top of shoulder, through the shoulder blades and the nerve center), anchored deer in their tracks. I'd lost this doe because I'd chest-shot it and it got into the gully;

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The Salty Side Recent Striped Bass Management Actions Get Mixed Reviews

by Bob Humphrey

Those who spend time on salt water know that striped bass are an important natural resource in Maine. They are our only inshore gamefish, and they support a strong recreational and for-hire fisheries, along with the associated infrastructure like guides, tackle shops, and marinas. However, striped bass stocks have been declining to the point where management action directed toward recovery was warranted and necessary.

That responsibility falls largely with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), specifically, their Atlantic Striped Bass Board (ASBB). The issue isn't new, and they've been working on it for several years now. The most recent effort—Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Striped Bass—was addressed at the ASMFC October meeting, where ASBB members considered the latest stock assessment as well as input from the public as well as the Atlantic Striped Bass Advisory Panel. In some cases, they went with the popular opinion. In others they made some unpopular decisions.

One action that was widely endorsed was implementing a standard method of measuring total length for size limit regulations. Previously, different states required different methods, and several had no specific guidelines. The Addendum specifies that when measuring total length of a striped bass, it must be a straight-line measurement with upper and lower fork of the tail squeezed together. This new definition addresses concerns that the previous lack of a standard definition was potentially undermining the intended conservation, consistency, and enforceability of the coastwide size limits, especially for narrow slot limits.

Another slightly more contentious action will require commercially harvested fish to be tagged at the first point of landing. Previously, states could choose the point of tagging, including tagging at the point of sale. This addresses concerns that waiting to tag fish until the point of sale could increase the risk of illegal harvest. It's not a big deal, as it only applies to three states currently not in compliance with the



With declining populations in the Gulf of Maine, fisheries regulators are weighing options for reducing striped bass harvests by commercial and recreational anglers.

new rules, and they'll have until the end of 2028 to make that change, due to the extensive administrative and programmatic transition needed.

Last, but by no means least, the Board decided to not move forward with a proposed 12% reduction in fishery removals. Sentiment from the public, the Advisory Panel and many states favored this reduction given continued high removals and low recruitment and spawning stock biomass. Lengthy deliberation included Board review of preliminary estimates of 2025 recreational catch through June, which were lower than anticipated, suggesting the projections may have underestimated the probability of rebuilding by 2029 and overestimated the reductions necessary to rebuild. The Board also acknowledged that reductions would likely require some form of seasonal closures, which could have severe economic consequences. Essentially, they're kicking the can down the road for another year, anticipating lower catch rates and improved reproduction.

Bob Humphrey serves on the ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Advisory Panel and is chair of the SAM Fisheries Committee.

Deer Wintering Area Purchases (LD 404 - Progress Report)

by Nate Webb, DIFW Wildlife Division Director



Improving winter survival of deer in the northern half of Maine is the primary focus of lands acquired by DIFW, using funds authorized under LD 404. Photo by Don Beaulieu.

DIFW Deer Wintering Area Acquisitions

Wildlife Management Area (WMA)	Acres	Date Acquired
Rangeley	708	6/12/2023
Caribou Stream	1,040 (total)	to date
Woodland	231	7/18/2023
Woodland	182	11/25/2024
Washburn	622	7/18/2023
Washburn	5	12/17/2024
Macwahoc Stream	6,326	9/11/2023
Lexington	1,490	11/28/2023
Boundary Mtns. Region	403 (under contract)	Anticipated closing Spring, 2026

Land acquisitions for deer wintering habitat total 9,564 acres to date. The initial Caribou Stream purchase was 858 acres, with two parcels totaling 187 acres subsequently acquired in 2024. These additions include a 182-acre parcel in Woodland abutting the initial acquisition on the north boundary and accessed primarily from the Colby Siding Road. The second parcel, in Washburn, was a 5-acre inholding. Acquisition of this parcel consolidates the Washburn unit and enables DIFW to remove structures that are incompatible with management for wildlife habitat.

Biologists have assessed 41,646 acres for wintering deer habitat this year, including five potential land acquisitions. Once acquired, these lands are managed by DIFW as Wild-

life Management Areas (WMAs), with improving winter survival of deer as the primary focus. As with all Department-owned WMAs, these lands are open for public use.

Management Activities

Wildlife Management Plans have been drafted for all properties acquired, with a primary objective being deer wintering habitat management and enhancement. Additionally, on-site management activities are under way. Almost seven miles of road have been assessed, and are currently in varying stages of improvement to facilitate public access. This includes two bridge construction projects at Macwahoc Stream WMA, one bridge replacement over Juniper Brook, and a significant bridge repair over Macwahoc Stream. Biologists have assessed approximately 500 acres of softwood-dominated habitats for pre-commercial thinning (PCT) treatments, including both primary and secondary shelter, at Macwahoc Stream and Rangeley WMAs. DIFW WMA signs have been installed at Lexington, Macwahoc Stream, and the Caribou Stream-Washburn parcel. Caribou Stream WMA's road improvements were started this year, and will be completed next season when conditions allow. The Macwahoc Stream WMA road and bridge improvement projects are currently out to bid, and are planned to commence next summer. Lexington WMA improvement projects completed to date include creating a parking area just off the Last Roundup Road and brushing out and preparing the Schoolhouse Brook Road for improved public access. ●

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President's Corner

by Mike Parker

Building on 50 Years of Strength – Together

The key to any successful membership organization is unity of purpose—a shared commitment to a mission. The Sportsman's Alliance of Maine has a clear mission statement: "To interact with the Legislature, government agencies, and the public to enhance and preserve Maine's outdoor heritage." Fulfilling that mission takes all of us—leadership, staff, and most importantly, our members.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of serving as SAM President is meeting with members at events throughout the year. I've heard wonderful and entertaining stories involving hunting, fishing, and the many experiences people treasure in the Maine outdoors. I've enjoyed recollections of first hunts, time spent around the campfire, and the excitement of annual New Year's Day ice-fishing trips. Think back to your own experiences—chances are they include a tradition that is uniquely Maine and worth preserving. If we don't pass these stories and experiences on, we risk losing the last (and most important) piece of our Mission Statement: *preserving Maine's outdoor heritage*.

As a SAM member, you have a powerful ability to influence others to join and support our work. While growing membership and fundraising are important responsibilities for our staff and Board of Directors, nothing compares to the authenticity and enthusiasm that comes from our members themselves.

In the coming year, one of our primary goals is to reignite the level of member involvement that defined SAM's first 50 years. With numerous events across the state, we hope to see as many members as possible participate—because you are our best voice.

Each year, SAM attends four Sportsmen's Shows and Outdoor Events. Members who volunteer at these shows consistently tell us how rewarding it is—not only in strengthening our organization, but in building camaraderie with like-minded volunteers and show attendees. If you live near Orono, Presque Isle, Augusta, or Fryeburg—or simply want to spend some time in those communities—your help at these events can make a tremendous difference. To volunteer, please email your name to office@sportsmansallianceofmaine.org. We will follow up with dates, timeframes, and volunteer needs.

We have also launched a committee to organize and host SAM's annual fundraising banquet. If you've ever served on a Friends of NRA, Ducks Unlimited, NWTF, or Trout Unlimited committee, you already know the fun and satisfaction that comes from being part of something like this. To join the Banquet Committee, you can also email office@sportsmansallianceofmaine.org. Meetings can be attended via Zoom, so no matter where you live, you can help shape this annual event that draws more than 400 attendees.

Another great way to get involved is by sharing your stories and opinions with fellow members. Beginning with this issue, *SAM News* will devote two new columns in every issue to member contributions. One will be reserved for your letters, thoughts, and comments—much like a traditional "Letters to the Editor" section—called *Thoughts from the Field*. This is your chance to weigh in on current issues and share your perspectives with the membership.

The second column will feature your stories—the ones that remind us why Maine's outdoor traditions are worth defending. Maybe it's a day spent on the river with your grandfather, or the first buck your son or daughter harvested. Perhaps it's the one that got away or the opening-day traditions you share with friends at deer camp. It might even be about the perfect plate of home fries at your local hunters breakfast, or a feed of cornmeal fried trout over a campfire. If it's part of your Maine outdoor heritage, we'd like you to share it in our new column: *Maine Outdoor Traditions (and Occasional Tall Tales)*.

Email your submissions (stories or letters) to SAM News Coordinator Gerry Lavigne at dunlatrfarm@gmail.com. All published stories will receive a renewal on their membership (life members will receive a Life Member cap).

As we enter our second 50 years, it's time for all of us to step up and ensure that our traditions stay strong and uniquely ours. While our membership reflects great diversity, we are united in one mission: Ensuring that future generations enjoy the same outdoor experiences and memories we all cherish. Together, we can ensure that Maine's outdoor heritage remains not only preserved, but alive and thriving. ●

Thoughts from the Field

A sampling of membership comments from the 2025 SAM survey.

The following opinions do not necessarily represent the positions of the SAM Board of Directors. They are for discussion purposes only. Members' names are omitted for privacy purposes.

SUNDAY HUNTING

PRO: "Sunday hunting is a priority to me—my thought is hunting on private property land with written permission only. I am 100% against introduction of wolves—HORRIBLE IDEA! Extra antlerless permits are a necessary part of managing our private acreage for doe to buck ratios. We manage 500 acres, and these permits are a great tool. Private landowners should be able to apply for extra permits specific to their property."

CON: "I am not for Sunday hunting, many people would end up posting land and we would lose more than gain. Electronic tagging I kind of like, but it takes away the small tagging stations which brings in more sales and camaraderie in the sport. Not to mention competition."

MISCELLANEOUS

"I support the electronic tagging of deer and allowing the average hunter to place minimum amounts of bait (such as a dozen apples or a quart of corn) to attract deer, to compete with the affluent hunters who have large bait sites (food plots)."

"Thank you for not asking for out-of-state parity for the residents' day (deer hunting). Residents' day is for residents only and should stay that way."

"I am very worried about removing the dams on the Kennebec. We have good fishing there now; it is crazy to endanger losing SAPPI so a few salmon can get up the river. SAPPI is one of the biggest economic drivers in the state—if we lose the loggers, then we will lose the sawmills because of the lack of loggers."

"I believe that gun control, etc., is our biggest threat to the Second Amendment. It is like dominos, one piece removed (rights), and the others follow. The Second Amendment solidly cements in the other rights. We must fight strongly any attempts to destroy it. God bless America!"

"I want SAM to continue to fight in court to repeal the waiting period for firearm purchases, and repeal the newly passed "Red Flag" law. Yellow Flag was working. Law enforcement should handle this issue."

"Best to raise dues in small increments."

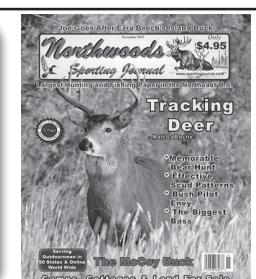
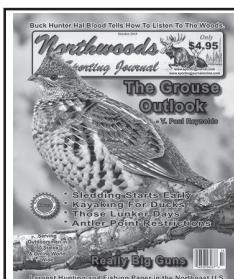
"Glad to hear you and Board, plus team will propose restructuring SAM and SAM-ILA to streamline resources and enhance your political activities. Thank you for doing your best to help preserve our rights in this beautiful state."

"As of mid-November, WMD(?) had over 5,000 antlerless tags remaining. Other WMDs had more. We should start archery season earlier in these areas and offer an extra deer (antlerless) in these WMDs. Help with this. We have WMDs so we can manage on a smaller scale; use them."

"I am a lifetime NRA member; I am in favor of the Red Flag law. However, I am not pleased about the 72-hour background check. Maine has a lot of hunters; hunting is a privilege. I am a strong believer in the Second Amendment. The only way I will give (away) my rights on guns is when I am dead. I will always be behind the Second Amendment. Only way I see it is prying it from my cold dead fingers. Hunting is fun, being smart with guns is key. We have lots of work to do."

"I put a lot of trust and faith in SAM; I have been a member since I moved to Maine back in the early 1980s and I think you do an outstanding job! Keep up the good fight."

"Don't let the bastards get you down, keep fighting!"



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Recreational Safety at DIFW

by Ron Fournier,
DIFW Recreational Safety Supervisor

December always brings a time of reflection as we start to wind down our hunting seasons and shift gears towards winter activities like ice fishing, snowmobiling, and spending time in the Maine woods in all its winter splendor. Fall is always a very busy time for the Department with the various hunting seasons underway, last-minute safety courses, and requests for replacement certification cards. We also try to squeeze in a bit of vacation time to enjoy getting in the field as well. It always seems that hunting season just flies by, and if you don't make the time to get out there, you don't get those days back.

This season I was fortunate enough to draw an antelope tag for Montana in early November. My youngest son and I spent a week in the remote regions of eastern Montana learning and patterning pronghorn, which is a new challenge for us. The experience was something that I've looked forward to since I was a child. Growing up, my uncle did taxidermy for a while and he had a pronghorn on his wall that a hunter failed to pick up. I looked at that mount for years as a young boy and knew early on I wanted to hunt for them one day. Pronghorns are a strange animal, with eyesight like no other, a running speed second to few, and their coloration and horns are both quite unique. We hunted public land and did well for a couple of

country bumpkins from western Maine, each tagging out midweek after gaining a ton of appreciation for these majestic animals. It was the last week of the season, and the animals we did see were extremely skittish. It took patience, strategy, and some long and tactical stalks through minimal cover to get into a good position.

This is my fifth time in Montana, having had the opportunity to hunt for elk twice, mule deer twice, and now pronghorn antelope. My advice to all of you is this: Hunting in Maine is an exceptional experience; from a robust whitetail deer population with great buck potential and a well-balanced herd, black bear tags over the counter, a chance to hunt moose, upland game, and so on. If you have the opportunity to hunt out-of-state, do it. Don't wait until you are unable to, don't put off the opportunity to explore a new ecosystem and learn about a new species, and travel to an unfamiliar place at least once. You will likely be inspired to do it more frequently. You can do so quite affordably,

and don't be afraid to DIY on your next hunt. Hiring a guide or outfitter will certainly make it easier, but you'll have to balance the costs with your budget. For me, the planning, preparation, poring over maps, and studying the state requirements is all part of the hunt, and the sweet reward is making memories of new challenges and new experiences, and maybe coming home with a cooler full of fresh game meat.

My Maine deer season went well with a doe during archery season in October, and a few glimpses of a buck during rifle. I'm now in good company with all the late-season muzzleloader hunters as we wind down to the last week here, and we finally have some snow on the ground. I have no complaints—I was

able to hunt with my sons, my wife, and my grandson and granddaughter each at different times. I hope I can keep this up for decades to come.

Incident-wise, Maine experienced a safe hunting season with only a few reported incidents. Most were self-inflicted and minor in nature, with a few

two-party situations. This brings me to a few points I'd like to highlight. In my role, each season I am optimistic that we will experience a safe and successful hunting season with as few incidents as possible. The potential risk is never zero, but hunting is statistically one of the safest outdoors activities in Maine. This is something that we need to continue to draw attention to by highlighting the coexisting nature of hunters and non-hunters on state and public lands, as well as private land.

Once again, upland bird season saw the most incidents—three—with a few scenarios where two people were hunting together and one person swung to shoot a ruffed grouse and either did not see their hunting partner in heavy cover, or misjudged the shot and struck their partner with birdshot, and one incident where a loaded gun was stowed in a side by side and due to carelessness, resulted in a close-range discharge/injury. This is a very unfortunate incident, and several laws and basic gun safety rules were ignored. Overall, though, Maine continues to lead by example with fewer and fewer incidents. All this all comes back to three things: the dedication of our long-standing hunter education instructors, and varied delivery methods we now use for hunter education; the change in hunting culture, and; laws and rules that focus on safety such as

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SAM Thanks Bob Howe for His Service

The leadership of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine extends its heartfelt gratitude to Bob Howe of Somerset County for his years of dedicated service on our Board of Directors.

Bob stepped down in October after a long tenure marked by unwavering commitment to SAM's mission: protecting Maine's sporting heritage, outdoor traditions, and natural resources. His steady leadership and common-sense approach helped guide SAM through organizational and political challenges, ensuring we remain strong for future generations.

As founder of Pine Grove Programs, which provides outdoor experiences for veterans and first responders, Bob truly embodies Maine's outdoor values. His common sense insight, professionalism, and willingness to serve were deeply appreciated by fellow board members and staff alike.

Although Bob has left the board, his support remains unwavering. Upon announcing his decision, Bob reinforced his commitment to SAM, stating—as he has many times before—"I'll (still) do whatever you need." Stay by the phone, Bob—we'll be taking you up on that!

On behalf of the entire SAM community, thank you, Bob Howe, for your time, effort, and meaningful contributions to our organization. ●



hunter orange requirements, prohibition of deer drives, and similar.

I'd like to take a moment to thank our hunters for raising the bar on themselves by being safe, ethical, and responsible, as well as our volunteer instructors who selflessly give their time and knowledge to promote safe hunting. I'd also like to thank our team of Recreational Safety Coordinators and Administrative staff who support this work in ways we only imagined just a few years ago. The future is bright for Maine's hunters, and I am proud to have the privilege to be in this role.

In the last issue I reported that DIFW was launching a new Archery Hunter Education Addendum course in September, with a pilot program of three classes. I am pleased to report that the pilot program exceeded our expectations and resulted in the first three full archery hunter safety classes in a long time. The modernized approach allows for less time in the classroom to be able to hunt with a bow or crossbow, and builds on the skills and standards gained through hunter education certification. The feedback is very positive and the demand for future classes has increased greatly in just the past few weeks. There's a lot more coming down the pike as far as archery hunting opportunities, so please stay tuned if you are interested in getting started.

Programs at the SAM Outdoors Center

I first want to thank David Trahan, the SAM staff, and the SAM Board of Directors, for initiating a very successful ribbon-cutting and open house event in October. The program was an exceptional way to showcase all the hard work and passion put into this great resource, as well as providing an opportunity to experience some of our programs offered through DIFW there. This unique partnership continues to evolve and grow, as evidenced by the growing number of people who have participated in recent programs. This winter we have a slate of programs scheduled there that will appeal to a wide audience, such as our Women's Winter Skills event on January 25, Winter Skills Family Day during February vacation week, and several specialty programs focused on trapping,

angling, archery, and shooting sports. If you have yet to experience any of these programs, please feel free to join us. We are also looking for more volunteers to grow our program model so please reach out to me at the contacts below.

Snowmobile Safety Education Update

For many years the Department has offered Snowmobile Safety as an elective safety course. While it is not mandatory, we've offered this as a proactive way to better educate future snowmobilers on the safe use and operation of snowmobiles. Statistically speaking, snowmobiling is one of the most dangerous activities enjoyed in Maine. Sadly, speed and alcohol, followed by inexperience and harsh or changing conditions, continue to be the root of most accidents. Due to the snowmobile course being elective and not mandated by law, we saw fewer than 300 annually choosing to gain this valuable educational experience. To improve the safety and ethics of today's snow riders, we decided to implement two opportunities to reach a wider audience. Now, after two years, we are seeing a sharp increase in participating students. These changes included offering most of our ATV Safety Courses as combination courses, covering both ATV and Snowmobile. This is more efficient for students, and the feedback has been very positive. We also launched Maine's official ATV/Snowmobile Safety Course online for anyone ages 12 and up, which is easily found on our website and accessed by visiting: www.offroad-ed.com/maine/ In just the past two years, we have reached over 3,500 students. The impact on overall safety will take years to see the real benefit, as the course is still elective for anyone over the age of 15, but it is a huge step in the right direction. (For clarity, ATV Safety Certification is required for anyone 10-15 who wishes to ride an ATV.)

Trapper Education Update

Maine was highlighted nationally by the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports by inviting us to be the subject of a case study. This project highlighted some of the innovations and changes that we have implemented in

2026 – Recognizing SAM Life Members The Backbone of Our Organization

Would it surprise you to learn SAM has nearly 2000 life members? This group of dedicated, lifelong sportsmen and women make up the backbone of our organization. It is not to say annual memberships aren't important, they are, but SAM life members are the safety net and glue that hold our organization together.

Decades ago, the SAM Board created the Life Member Endowment Fund and offered life memberships with a goal to help protect SAM from downturns in the economy and the relentless pressures of the political world that threatened our traditions and outdoor way of life. This Life Member Endowment was built with the life member dues and now has nearly \$400,000 dollars invested that generates monthly disbursements of \$1500.00. Our SAM bylaws protect the principle in this fund and the interest is becoming a very important support for our work.

Over the last 10 years, SAM Members helped us with our "Burn the Mortgage" campaign. They helped us build a state-of-the-art outdoor education center and when faced with destructive citizen referendums they came to our defense and helped us win. Life Members are our silent heroes. Without them, we would be a severely diminished organization.

For those reasons, in 2026 we will recognize our Life Members and conduct a life membership drive with exclusive Life Member raffles and prize drawings.

Exclusive Life Member Raffles

Become A SAM Life Member

In 2026, becoming a Sportsman's Alliance of Maine Life Member means joining a 51 year legacy of supporting conservation of Maine's outdoor heritage.

To honor the lifelong commitment of both new and existing Life Members, SAM is proud to offer two exclusive Life Member drawings as a special thank you to those who stand with Maine's sporting traditions forever.

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the past four years that have shown success in Maine. Other states are taking notice, and I am very proud of how far we've come in just a few short years. At a time when trapping has seen national declines and various roadblocks, we have demonstrated a new approach to better serving our students and the public. This was a heavy lift and took many hands to start moving the needle, and we're still actively working to keep this momentum. Programs like our Next Steps programs and workshops, Fur Shed Fridays, and more frequent classes being scheduled, we are serving our new trappers in ways we never have before. This work will continue to evolve, but for right now, I take pride in the national recognition of this program and greatly appreciate our furbearer biologists and wildlife team, our dedicated volunteer instructors, MTA partnership, and all the folks that have supported this work.

Speaking of trapping, I would like to publicly recognize DIFW's Trapper Education Instructor of the Year Award recipient, Bobbie-Jo Wallace. Bobbie-Jo has been a dedicated instructor for years and she demonstrates all of the qualities of a true leader. Her dedication to education is evidenced by her teaching style and willingness to contribute in

meaningful ways. She was instrumental in the creation of the Fur Shed Fridays program, and she regularly fields questions from the public as well as new trappers. Bobbie-Jo continues to raise the bar, has a positive attitude, and handles challenging situations with grace and constructive conversation. This award was presented to her at the SAM OEC ribbon-cutting ceremony, after several failed attempts to catch her in her busy schedule at other events. Thank you, Bobbie-Jo, for your great contributions to Maine's trapper education program!

In closing, I hope everyone has a wonderful and safe holiday with family and friends. Soon enough we'll be welcoming in 2026. I hope that you take some time to get outdoors and bring a family member, a friend, or young person with you, as the heritage and traditions depend on each of us to share and pass along. Double check that ice thickness whether you're beaver trapping or ice fishing, wear your helmet on the side by side or snowmobile, and always let someone know where you are going and when you will return. Thanks for a great season.

Yours in conservation
Ronald Fournier
ronald.fournier@maine.gov
207-441-6562

Lakes of the Penobscot River Watershed

by Matt Scott, Lloyd C. Irland, and Paul Johnson

The Penobscot, including all of its tributaries, is the largest watershed in Maine. The summit of Katahdin was not trodden by a white man until 1804, so it was left to the Indians for thousands of years before that. When Thoreau visited in 1846, the region was still a "grim untrdden wilderness," except for the surveyors, loggers, and occasional white hunters and fishers.

The Penobscot River is the largest in Maine, and second largest in New England, after the Connecticut. It comprises five sizeable sub-drainages: the East Branch, West Branch, Mattawamkeag, Piscataquis, and Passadumkeag. There are 630 named lakes and ponds, the largest being Chesuncook Lake (22,975 acres) and the Pemadumcook Chain (18,300 acres). The largest lakes on the Piscataquis are Sebec (6,803 acres) and Schoodic (7,168 acres); on the Mattawamkeag, Mattawamkeag Lake (3,300 acres) and Wytopitlock Lakes (1,132 acres). Notice all the Indian names! Chesuncook, the largest in the list, is some 19 miles long.

Management and Regulation

Many of these lakes were impounded for hydroelectric storage. These large lakes associated with current warming trends do not bode well for Atlantic salmon recovery efforts. A consequence of the popular term "climate change." As a generalization, this is not productive water. The huge fish on camp walls come from a vanished age.

The Penobscot comes close to the headwaters of the Kennebec at the northern end of Moosehead Lake. In fact, a good while ago it drained that way. The evidence has been found at the mouth of the Kennebec where a large deposit of Penobscot River silt lies.

Lakes and ponds are very popular as tourist retreats and a new form of development for year-round homes. Recent University of Maine research (2024) has placed the annual economic value of Maine lakes to be \$14.5 billion. If northern Maine lakes are valued at their pro-rata share (25%), that would be \$3.6 billion.

Yet, development pressures are low. But they are concentrated in key locations and must be managed. More than we know are being converted to "private kingdoms"—large, gated properties managed solely for the friends and family of their wealthy owners.

Measurements of water quality on many of these lakes are under the stewardship of Lake Stewards of Maine via their volunteer lake monitoring program. These data are filed with the combined resources of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Lake Stewards of Maine (LSM). Quality assurance and quality control are pro-

vided by the DEP's lake staff. Historically, the Penobscot River was considered a "working river," with pollution from at least five paper mills with large waste discharges into the river. At one time the mid to lower reaches of the Penobscot were known as one of the dirtiest rivers in the country.

After the 1972 Clean Water Act was passed, the paper mills came under compliance to clean their wastewater discharges under licenses granted by the Maine DEP, in concert with the US Environmental Protection Agency. Now there are no longer any paper mills on the river, all gone due to economic reasons. Primarily, the markets went away for their paper. Newspapers are dying like flies, and fewer magazines remain viable. And those that do are buying their paper from China and Finland.

The Mattawamkeag was traditionally a major rearing area for Atlantic salmon, but it thus far has attracted little attention until waters to the south are freed up. A large wildlife management area occupies some marshy ground near Kingman. And the tribal recovery of towns near the junction with the Penobscot is a good thing. As to the Piscataquis, it has received relatively little scrutiny by the conservation community so far.

All lakes and ponds in the watershed are classified as GP-P. Waters less than 10 acres are naturally occurring, of which there are about 3,000. These are all classed as GP-A. No new direct discharge of pollutants into these waters is allowed.

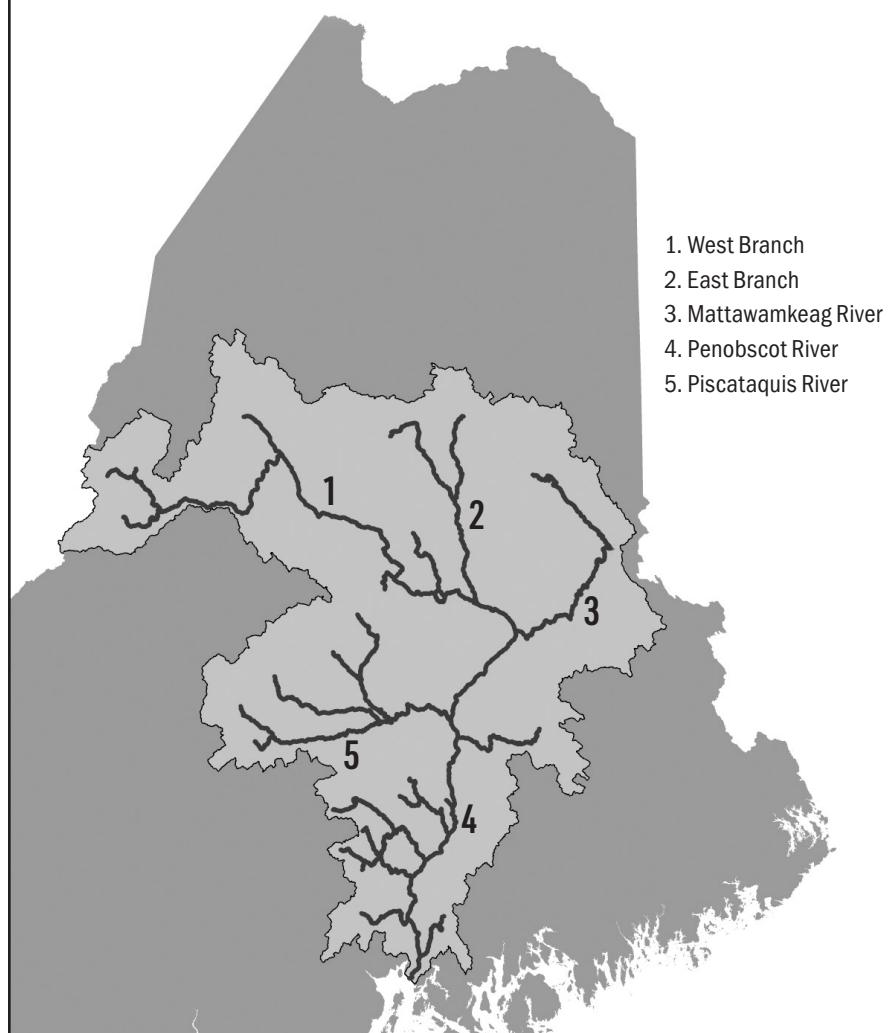
Sebec is one of four lakes in Maine that have original stocks of landlocked salmon populations, created by glacial activity about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. It is the opinion of many fishery scientists, based on evidence and fact, that landlocked salmon populations arose from sea-run Atlantic salmon, and therefore are the same species.

Conservation

For many years this crucial watershed was ignored by the public. When Governor Baxter tried to get the Legislature to buy Mt. Katahdin, they refused. When he tried to make it a National Park, they refused again. So, over 30-some years, he bought it with his own money and gave it to the State, with an endowment to boot. The legacy camp development of the post-1945 period has increased water pollution issues as septic systems age, and increased the fishing pressure on a resource that is scant at best. Why? Well, people thought that nobody had much disturbed the place and weren't likely to. In the 1930s there was little demand for cottages. There were few roads. Those who could afford it could get to the Allagash by way of Moosehead Lake and to Katahdin by rail (almost).

Would that more governors had Baxter's foresight. Baxter Park is managed by a triumvirate consisting of the State Forester, the Attorney General, and Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Since 2015, the area is protected to the east by the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, and to the north by the T6 R11 WELS and T7

Penobscot River Watershed



R8 WELS Public Lands towns. So far, so good; but the increasing interest in the Katahdin area by the Wabanaki tribal nations has created a new source of conflict that has yet to be resolved.

In the early 1980s, a lengthy public debate occurred over Great Northern Paper Company's decision to pursue the Big A hydroelectric project on a stretch of the West Branch of the Penobscot. At the time, this would have generated power for two mills owned by Great Northern. I heard two fishermen once say that they wish the dam had been built, as it would cut down on the interruption of their fishing by the whitewater rafters who ply these waters. The entire Great Northern corporation is now gone, and the developers at Millinocket are scrambling to replace the vanished paper jobs. Ironically, the Big A Dam would be generating clean power for the grid today, had it been permitted.

Prior to the construction of major dams on the river and its tributaries in the early 1800s, it is estimated that some 75,000-100,000 salmon swam up the river each year to spawn. Scott Hall, a former Bangor Hydro employee, now the Environmental Manager for PPL-Maine, and others estimated that prior to dam building in the 1800s, 17 billion (!!) diadromous fish spent part of their life cycle in Maine's salt water and part in freshwater. American shad were the most abundant migratory fish in the Penobscot before the dam era, with estimated populations of 3-5 million shad, and 14-20 million alewife and herring. Thoreau mentions a Shad Pond near Millinocket.

Following a decade of controversy over dams blocking passage of anadromous fish, beginning in 1999, there was a round of negotiations among a diversity of parties until an agreement was reached. With the signing of the Agree-

ment, a Trust began raising the funds needed (over \$60 million) to acquire the dams, remove two of them, and build the fish bypass at Howland. After six long years of work, funds were in hand for the initial purchase, and in December 2010 the Trust acquired the three dams. Fundraising continued for the costs of implementation. Using a combination of public (primarily federal) grants and private contributions, the Trust was successful in completing the project in 2016 with the opening of the Howland bypass. The Great Works (2012) and Veazie (2013) dams had been removed previously. The project improved migratory fish access to 1,000 miles of river and tributary habitat that was previously unavailable. Removing the lowest two dams and adding the fish lift at Milford and bypass at Howland meant that fish would only have to pass one or two passages (Milford and Howland) to have access to much of the upper river watershed. Today we can see that it succeeded (Table 1). But salmon remain scarce, because much of the potential rearing habitats lie upstream of the remaining dams.

Fishery Management Challenges

Significant changes in fish assemblages will occur in lakes and ponds of the Penobscot over the coming decades, due to efforts in removing major dams or providing fish passage in other ways. Perhaps the greatest change will come from Northern pike that are present in Pushaw Pond. The Piscataquis has significant potential for Atlantic salmon, based on historical surveys, but is threatened by Northern pike seeking new habitat.

Invasive fish have been problematic for fish managers, as dam removal continues to be a priority for restoring native fish populations in Maine. Removal of the Edwards Dam on the Kennebec River

Table 1. Fish Counted at Milford Dam 2015 to 2024

	2015	2024	Percent increase
Salmon	729	1,378	89
Shad	1,806	10,776	497
River Herring	589,645	5,476,107	829



Maine Outdoor Traditions (and Occasional Tall Tales)

In My Opinion ... Maine's Best Deer Rifle

by Warren Winslow



Family heirloom. The Winslow family's Winchester Model 94 (pre-1964) lever action 30-30 deer rifle.

Maine's best deer rifle is the iconic and classic Winchester (pre-1964) Model 94 30-30. I'm speaking from experience as I own a pre-'64 that has a serial number substantially south of 1,000,000. This rifle, which functions flawlessly, is multi-generational in my family, and it is over 70 years of age. My grandfather, father, and I have all taken deer with this arm. A living legend and legacy, the Winchester Model 94 has been the most popular deer rifle since 1894. Over 7.5 million have

been sold, and its reliability, performance, effectiveness, and price have created a nostalgic tradition in firearms that is likely second to none. A pre-'64 is made of high-quality machined parts, not the pressed, stamped ones of later year models. Its stock is select black walnut, and its metal is polished blue. Sling swivels are included, as is sometimes a saddle ring.

Historically, many writers refer to it as "The Gun That Won the West," and many different commemoratives of the Model 94 have been marketed. The Model 94 30-30 is particularly suited to deer hunting in the woods of Maine. Lightweight and short in length (7½ lbs. and 37½ inches long), it hunts well in the woods and brush country so common in Maine's outdoors. A close-to-medium range rifle, it is most accurate between 50 and 100 yards, and the 30-30 can digest a broad array of brush buck-

A living legend and legacy, the Winchester Model 94 has been the most popular deer rifle since 1894.

ing bullets that are both flat and round nosed. Not well suited to scoping due to top ejection, the open iron rear, and often hooded front sights, perform well in most of the state's hunting conditions.

The 94 is a lever action repeater, with a half notch or cock safety hammer. It is effective and popular with 150- to 170-grain bullets when used on Maine's whitetails. It handles 180- to 220-grain bullets well when used on bigger game. The cartridges for the 94 are widely available commercially. Most have a muzzle velocity in excess of 2,000 fps. Further, reloaders can choose from a wide variety of bullets, powders, and other components, all compatible with the 30-30 Model 94,

whether the shooter is just plinking targets or hunting for Maine's black bear or moose. The 30-30, as previously stated, is very accurate between distances from 50 to 100 yards. Most Maine woodsmen and deer hunters have no problem scoring in the black on 50- and 100-yard standard rifle targets, and they report that the 94 is well balanced, points well, and acquires quickly to a target.

So, I think that the Winchester Model 94, (pre-'64) 30-30, a most loved carbine, is the epitome of what is Maine's best deer rifle. It has stood the test of time for 131 years, and if it is in excellent condition today, is likely worth in excess of \$1,000. ●

in Augusta is a prime example. Removal of this dam has been huge success in restoring river herring, shad, and alewives. A few Atlantic salmon have been captured from the Lockwood fish lift in Waterville. These fish have been transported to upper reaches of the Sandy River, where suitable habitat exists for the species. At the same time, non-native fish are below Lockwood and at the Benton Falls fish lift on the Sebasticook River. European carp that were illegally stocked and naturalized below Augusta are now common from Winslow to the Benton Falls Dam.

Conclusions

We can draw several challenging conclusions. The Penobscot drainage is huge, and conditions vary from its headwaters to its junction with the sea. First, protecting water quality and overfishing from legacy camps will be an ongoing if not growing problem. Second, fish assemblages will continue to change, especially due to dam removal. Third, more work needs to be done on land conservation, instead of the random patchwork that has occurred so far. ●

Teamwork Leads to a Moose for Kelly

by SAM Staff

Kelly Reardon of Poland was able to fill her cow moose tag on Thursday, October 30, 2025, despite a challenging start. The R&R crew had the best team, including longtime friend and guide Kenny Coslet, who led the crew to a promising clear-cut. The fog was thick, but there stood a "keepah" of a cow moose. Nate Her-

rick, also a great friend, placed shooting stick for Kelly to take the first shot. Once Kenny gave the go-ahead, Kelly fired her .308. The adult cow moose spun around and was then hit by Zach Rickard's 30-06. Zach is Kelly's sub-permittee and boyfriend. Kelly's moose weighed in at 675 lbs. dressed. ●



Kelly and crew with their hard-earned Maine moose.

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Do you have a story and photo that would inspire others? Hunting, fishing, trapping, camping? Get it published in the SAM News!

Email your stories and pictures to SAM News Coordinator
Gerry Lavigne, dunlatrfarm@gmail.com.

Don't hesitate—Everybody's got a good story or photo!

Include your name, address, phone number, and email address if any. (Entries will be screened by the SAM staff for appropriateness for the SAM News.)

Photo submission: Photos should include people; please no shots of just landscapes or animals. Be sure to identify the people in the photo. Photos should be as large/high resolution as possible so they will reproduce clearly. The best way to send them is as jpgs attached to the email, not copied into the email.

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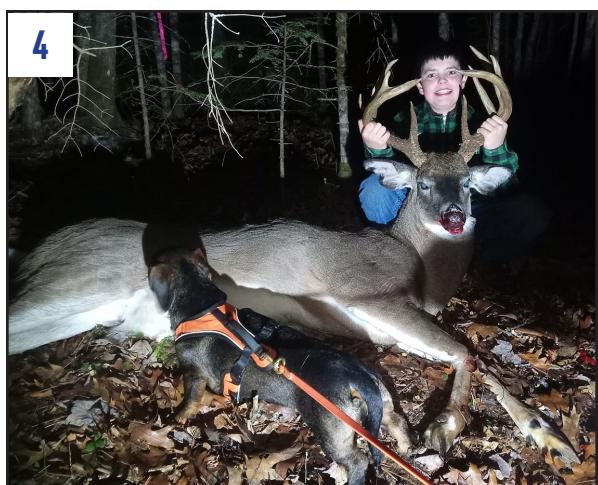
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Sportsman's Alliance of Maine News

Youth Hunting and Fishing Gallery



1. Eben Olson (12) of Winslow and his pepere Jeff Pelletier with Eban's first buck, a six-pointer.
2. Logan Heal (12) with a 188-lb. deer harvested in 2025.
3. Kaylee Harris (12) with her first deer Nov. 5 2025 while hunting with her Mom and Dad before school in Sebec. One shot at 176 yards.
4. Elijah Braley (12) with his first deer, 189 lbs., 12 point.
5. Davis Downs (10).

Got Photos? Do you have any great photos of your kids hunting and fishing in Maine's great outdoors? We'd love to share them with other SAM members. Please include your child's name, age, and where and when the photo was taken. Send them to us at office@samofmaine.org.

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