

KENNEBEC RIVER CORRIDOR

Action Plan *Summary*

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A Report of the Kennebec River Initiative

Prepared by the KRI project staff, under the direction of

The Kennebec Valley Council of Governments.

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The Kennebec River – the Case for Action Now

The Kennebec River was, is, and will continue to be one of the State's most important and extraordinarily valuable scenic, ecological, fisheries, wildlife, recreational, cultural, and economic assets. The Kennebec River is the central and enduring geographical feature that either directly or indirectly, connects the people who inhabit its shores.

The Kennebec is one of the essential elements in Maine's quality of place, that sense that Maine occupies a distinctive if not unique niche in our country and the world. Recent work by the Governor's Council on Maine's Quality of Place confirms that our quality of place is our principal comparative advantage in securing and enhancing the prosperity of our people in the global economy.

Many people believe today that the Kennebec River, in its current state and with emerging provisions for well-reasoned and compatible new uses, is the testing ground for the future of Maine's efforts to preserve its quality of place. If we can preserve the essential and remaining quality of the Kennebec, the lessons learned can be applied across Maine.

We must act now to protect the rich resources and opportunities once lost, and now regained on the Kennebec. We have reached a pivotal moment in the history of the River. For many years the river was neglected and its critical role in the lives of the people living along its shores forgotten. Effectively, the river was lost to generations of Mainers. Eventually, a group of forward thinking people convinced others that a clean and largely undeveloped river was worth much more than the short sighted convenience of using it as a dump for municipal and industrial wastes. The massive investments in improving water quality made in recent decades present us with a tremendous opportunity.

We have now a second chance to invest wisely and strategically in preserving the Kennebec as the key ingredient in our quality of place, and in so doing to underpin our collective prosperity going forward. Fortunately, Mainers and many vacationers and newcomers are more attuned than ever to the need to take bold steps to preserve the quality of place that makes Maine and the Kennebec Corridor particularly, both distinctive and unique.

While many have recognized this need and are addressing important conservation and economic development opportunities along the Kennebec, the future of the Kennebec as the region's key natural and economic asset will only be secured if there is a collective vision and collective action to do so. **The Kennebec River Initiative (KRI)** is an effort to organize and coordinate the work of the many organizations, public and private, and the many people who are working together to preserve the essential values of the Kennebec. It is a call to all interests to support and engage in a comprehensive, coordinated, and strategic approach to protecting the many values of the River, guided by a common vision for the future of River.

The Kennebec River – A National Treasure

The Kennebec is renowned internationally for its fisheries, wildlife, recreational, scenic, and cultural values. The 1982 Maine Rivers Study rated 133 miles of the River as having statewide or greater significance.

Fisheries: The Kennebec River is home to every anadromous fish species found in Maine, as well as many significant freshwater fisheries.

Wildlife: The Kennebec supports a wide range of wildlife, notably, increasing populations of bald eagles and ospreys.

The lower Kennebec River provides some of the best waterfowl habitat on the eastern seaboard. Merrymeeting Bay is the largest freshwater tidal bay on the eastern seaboard north of the Chesapeake Bay, and is the northernmost stopover on the Atlantic Flyway in the United States. This area has been a major focus for public and private land protection activities securing 1258 acres of lands in 2004 and 2005.

Recreation: The northern sections of the Kennebec River, from the Forks to Harris Dam, feature one of the finest big water rafting and kayaking wilderness experiences in the eastern United States. The 40 mile central reach of the Kennebec from Skowhegan to Augusta is one of the best rivers on the East Coast for brown trout fishing.

Corridor lands are increasingly a focus for new and expanding recreational trails. The outstanding examples are the Kennebec Valley Trail – a multi-use trail that begins in Anson and closely follows the River from Solon to Bingham, the Kennebec- Messalonskee Trails in Waterville, Winslow, Fairfield, Benton and Oakland and the Kennebec River Rail Trail from Gardiner to Augusta.

Scenic Resources: The upper Kennebec, from The Forks to Harris Dam, has a significant variety of geologic, topographic, and hydrologic features that offer an outstanding unique diversity of views. The Tidal Reach, from Augusta to the ocean has a unique and extremely diverse combination of land, water, vegetative, and cultural elements. A portion of Route 201 known as the Old Canada Road that closely follows the River between Solon and The Forks is designated as a National Scenic Byway.

Historic and Cultural Resources: The Kennebec was an important transportation and trade route in its early history and hosts historic forts – Forts Baldwin and Popham at its mouth, Fort Western in Augusta, and Fort Halifax in Winslow. Bath, Richmond, and Hallowell all have National Historic Districts tied to the River. The historic Arnold Trail follows the Kennebec from Augusta to The Forks. The Kennebec is also part of an international historic trail – the Kennebec-Chaudiere Trail that follows the Kennebec River and Chaudiere River linking to Quebec City.



The Upper Kennebec including the spectacular Kennebec Gorge offers some of the best white-water rafting in the country



Downtown Augusta on the banks of the Kennebec River

The Kennebec River Initiative (KRI) – What is it?

The Kennebec River Initiative will spearhead a well organized, cooperative effort to secure the future of the river as one of the state's most important scenic, ecological, fisheries, wildlife, recreational, cultural and economic assets and to foster revitalization efforts of the river communities.

The Kennebec River Initiative is the work of a collaboration of interests, public and private, that came together expressly for this purpose. The participants include the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments, the Maine Department of Conservation, Sportsmen's Alliance of Maine, Maine Rivers, the Natural Resources Council of Maine, and Trout Unlimited, municipal officials, individuals, regional and municipal land trusts, and business interests.

Success depends on expanding and coordinating the ongoing and future work of the very many interested parties. The Kennebec River Initiative is a principal means to that end. It will help convene, facilitate, and coordinate the work of the early participants and others.

The KRI is the result of several decades of continuous effort by diverse parties to identify common goals and form a collaborative effort to conserve, protect, and use this resource to underwrite our prosperity going forward. Identifying priority sites for conservation, protection, development, and educating the public on the value of the river and its varied resources continue to be goals for advocates of the Kennebec, as they were more than thirty years ago.

In 1971, Bill Townsend, then at the Natural Resources Council of Maine, wrote a detailed appraisal of the river's condition and the surrounding land use as part of a proposal for a river corridor plan. Many of the recommendations to reduce pollution and restrict development on the river banks were addressed by subsequent legislation, notably the Clean Water Act of 1972 and Maine's Shoreland Zoning.

"[...] there has been considerable interest in, and even enthusiasm for, the concept of a corridor plan which would be of benefit to all of the people, not simply to a few speculators and the lucky people who were able to buy a piece of land sold as if it were a piece of cake while the getting is still good" (B. Townsend, Kennebec River Plan 1971)

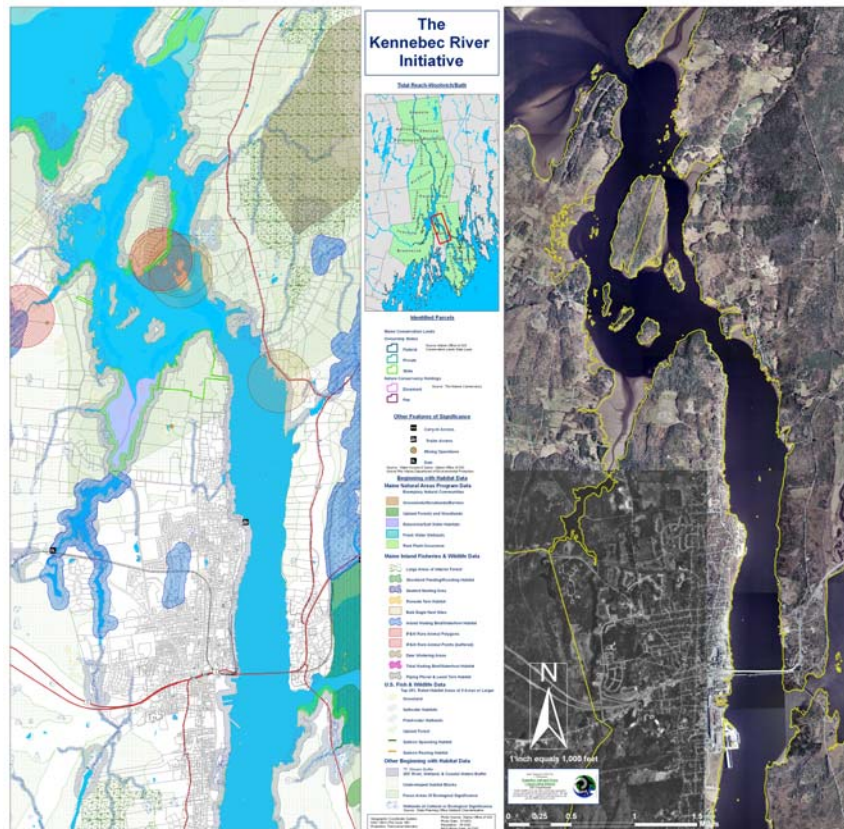
Phase One – Developing an Action Plan

Phase One of the KRI produced an Action Plan which provides a base of information and a compendium of projects and visions for the Kennebec River corridor. The Action Plan lists key features needing protection or enhancement along the corridor identified through a series of grass-roots based forums in which more than 300 people took part. The Action Plan lays the groundwork for a series of real, on the ground accomplishments intended to secure the future uses of specific places in the corridor including those critical to conservation and land protection, downtown revitalization, and public access.

In developing the Action Plan, the Kennebec Corridor was divided into three sections or reaches to aid in mapping, project planning, and community participation:

- Northern Reach (Moosehead Lake outlet south to Skowhegan),
- Central Reach (Skowhegan/Norridgewock south to Augusta) and
- Tidal Reach (head-of-tide at Augusta south to Phippsburg/Georgetown and the sea).

Part of the process was to develop an information base about the lands in the corridor and to identify areas with sensitive resources, recreation and access opportunities, and locations appropriate for economic development. These maps were then used in a set of public meetings to gather additional information on the needs for protection or enhancement.



A large format map of the Lower Kennebec used to identify existing values and project locations

Public Meetings - Mapping Needs Along the Kennebec Corridor

A participatory mapping effort for the Kennebec River Corridor was an integral part of the KRI Action Plan process. Resource maps (shown above) were prepared for each section and used at five public meetings held in 2007 to help locate areas of interest for protection or enhancement projects. These public meetings were held in each of the three reaches to collect local knowledge about the natural resource values, state of public access, recreational uses and economic development potential of each reach. Participants also identified specific areas that fell into one of several categories for possible future action - those important sites that need better protection going forward and / or restoration, sites suitable for improved and expanded public access, and areas that would be good places to focus new waterfront growth and development. The participants included representatives from 20 towns, 11 land trusts, 5 local trail groups, 9 businesses, and several State agencies. The meetings laid the groundwork for future collaboration. It was apparent also that an opportunity exists to combine these and other and new efforts into larger, more focused projects.

The resulting 15 maps detail areas of the Kennebec that need a closer look at access, offer opportunities for economic development or better marketing, provide high value habitat, and are sites that may need protection or restoration work. Many of the sites listed are tied to project proposals in the Action Plan. The Action Plan is effectively a menu of possible projects, and a compilation of ideas and proposals for future action. While the sites identified do not provide a complete inventory of the needs along the Kennebec corridor, the list is a starting point to begin implementing KRI projects.

The full Action Plan displays the 15 maps in a full page format that can also be viewed on the Kennebec County Soil & Water Conservation District (www.kcswcd.org) website. Appended to this summary is set of these maps reproduced in a smaller format. *Note: Projects delineated on the maps represent general locations and project areas. Further investigation / ground truthing is necessary to determine the exact location of a proposed project.*



River Reach Committee Meeting at North County Rivers headquarters in Bingham – stakeholders putting significant locations and project ideas on GIS maps

Summary of the Action Plan

The result was a comprehensive menu of projects contained in the Action Plan. The process revealed how much work is already being done thanks to the energy and commitment of national, state, and local groups. Some of the projects are entirely new concepts while others are at various stages of development.

Program Elements

The projects were organized into six program areas:

1. KRI Coordination, Phase Two
2. River Access Improvement
3. Kennebec Trails
4. Corridor Protection & Restoration (*includes fisheries*)
5. Community-Based Waterfront Development
6. Marketing and Tourism

Program Proposal #1: *Phase Two KRI Coordination*

The first priority is to coordinate implementation of the KRI Action Plan through the creation of the Kennebec River Council. The Council will serve as a convener/facilitator/coordinator to link new and existing partners working on projects in the Kennebec Corridor.

Specific goals detailed in the Action Plan include the following:

- In the short term, expand the current KRI website. In the near future, give KRI a permanent internet home with a stand-alone website.
- Establish the Kennebec River Council.
- Convene and facilitate place-based action networks.

Program Proposal # 2: *River Access Improvement*

Increasing access to the river through improvements in existing boat launch facilities and establishing new access points is critical to expanding public involvement in river based recreation and building support for the KRI Action Plan. The Action Plan contains 10 proposals for new or improved boating access sites at specific locations. This program also includes working to better promote the recreational opportunities found in the Kennebec River Corridor.

Program Proposal # 3: *Kennebec Trails*

This program will: (1) assist in the connection of more places in the Kennebec Corridor through a series of land and water trails; (2) assist municipalities and trail groups in acquiring, building and stewarding their trails; and (3) assist in promoting trails to visitors, residents and vacation companies and linking these routes to waterfront development and broader regional planning. Grants for public health and recreation may be available for these projects.

There are seven proposals detailed in the Action Plan.

Program Proposal # 4: *Kennebec River Protection & Restoration*

The Protection and Restoration program includes projects that will promote and assist in riverfront and stream restoration and protection through land acquisition, easements, and voluntary landowner programs. Specifically these projects should include public input, increase or maintain access where appropriate and utilize partnerships among conservation and other groups. Restoration of valuable fish and wildlife habitats is a large component of this program and the development of a Kennebec River fisheries management plan is a critical first step.

In all there are 10 project proposals detailed in the Action Plan.

Program Proposal # 5: *Community-Based Waterfront Development*

The Waterfront Development program will help revitalize the downtowns of municipalities in the Kennebec Corridor through site redevelopment and increased investment in high quality public amenities. Projects will need to have strong community support and control, fit the character of the river, bring revenue or jobs to the local economy and utilize regional coordination (where possible), linking areas up and down the river corridor.

Program activities will include: (1) assisting towns in identifying parcels best suited for development or redevelopment; (2) helping to coordinate riverfront development projects with larger tourism and marketing efforts as well as land conservation and trail building; and (3) assisting interested towns in coordinating and scheduling their various riverfront festivals for maximum exposure and attendance.

There are six proposals in the Action Plan for Community based waterfront development.

Program Proposal # 6: *Marketing and Tourism*

The Marketing and Tourism program will help promote the Kennebec Corridor as a tourist destination and help coordinate recreational and touring activities.

Initial program work will include an inventory of activities and attractions to help attract tourists and help the hospitality and touring businesses plan tours and outings. Another priority will be to convene a group of key service providers to develop some guiding packages. Model this effort on the "cooperative competition" by the large resorts in the North who operate in this way for snowmobile touring.

Some assurance of quality is needed for all tourist related businesses throughout the Corridor.

This program also includes recommendations for the production of marketing material and the hosting of activity specific promotional events.

Six project proposals are detailed in the Action Plan.

Action Plan Appendices

The full Action Plan contains seven appendices that detail specific topics and resources.

Appendix A: A site chart of the 58 priority areas identified for protection or restoration projects.

Appendix B: Summary of policy recommendations based on stakeholder input. In addition, a table with recently enacted bills of Maine's 123rd Legislature that may influence KRI goals and projects is included.

Appendix C: The Kennebec fishery. This section promotes the idea of a detailed, species by species management plan for the entire river. The recommendations for specific species and sections of the Kennebec are from the feedback, ideas and concerns voiced by stakeholders during Phase One of the KRI.

Appendix D: A brief look at marketing and tourism in the Kennebec Corridor and the challenges to making the Kennebec a destination for tourists coming to the area. Linking three common threads (fishing, boating and history) present in all sections of the corridor together with other amenities to form tour packages has proven to be a successful model in many places and is recommended for the Kennebec.

Appendix E: Stakeholder recommendations for the management of Swan Island located in the Lower Kennebec in the towns of Richmond and Dresden. Swan Island could be worked into a number or tour packages for families and visitors to come and enjoy this spectacular island.

Appendix F: A funding catalog with 22 pages of potential funders for KRI projects, including a wide variety of state, federal and private sources for many different types of KRI projects.

Appendix G: A catalog of partners that provides contact information for participants from state and federal agencies, businesses, non profits and other businesses.

Appendix H: includes the full page maps that detail the entire corridor and identify general locations of proposed projects.

Where to find the full Action Plan

A limited number of the full 140 page Action Plan are available. The entire document will be available on the KRI webpage accessible through the Kennebec County Soil & Water District website at www.kcswcd.org.

Copies of the full Action Plan will be available at the Patten Free Library in Bath, Maine State Library in Augusta, Lithgow Public Library in Augusta, Skowhegan Free Public Library, and the Bingham Union Library in Bingham.

The full Action Plan and all of the maps will also be available on a 2 CD set available through the KRI webpage.

Next Steps: Where Does KRI Go From Here?

There are a myriad of organizations, national, stateside, regional and local, and individuals working on conservation, land protection, and downtown revitalization. Many commercial interests have similar and related interests. In many cases, coordination among these parties and the riverfront municipalities and businesses can be improved.

State and municipal governments, large and small land conservation and resource protection organizations, landowners, businesses, and individual lovers and users of the river have made an incredibly valuable start on the work described in the Action Plan. KRI will build on this work and the resulting momentum.

The key to doing more now and in the future is our ability to organize and coordinate the work of these and other organizations more effectively and efficiently. The level of coordination required to be successful is unprecedented in the history of the Kennebec.

Any plan for the Kennebec must focus, organize, coordinate, and carry out the actions identified in the Action Plan and the ongoing and future efforts of other actors by assisting the various partners to work more effectively together.

Coordination is the to key action step if the keen partner interest and momentum built over the last year is to result in implementation of important projects. Ultimately, the success of the KRI depends on expanding participation to include each of the 47 municipalities in the Corridor as well as the several dozen public, private, and non-profit organizations that are already working in the Kennebec Corridor. The reach committee meetings proved that interest in protecting the river's natural assets and in using those assets to support increased and compatible development is very strong.

KRI Phase Two

Phase Two will roll-out all the Phase One accomplishments and give the public an introduction to Phase Two. Updates will be added to the website as they become available. A schedule of upcoming KRI events will be posted as well. The website can also be a place where appropriate corridor related events can be advertised and promoted.

Phase Two of the KRI has two main objectives. The first is to develop a Self-Sustaining Institutional Framework for coordinating work on KRI projects identified in the Action Plan as well as related and new projects that are presented. The second is to work with interested parties to initiate and complete work on these and other projects.

The Self-Sustaining Institutional Framework will take the initial form of a Kennebec River Council to coordinate the work of the many parties interested in implementing the Kennebec River Initiative Action Plan.

The Council will help form place-based action networks of public, private, national, state, regional, and local conservation and land protection interests, commercial and development interests, and riparian municipalities. These groups will work to accomplish the conservation and protection of sensitive resources and for investing in recreation, public access, and downtown-related improvements.

An Invitation

A large number of organizations, national, statewide, regional, and local, public and private, and individuals work on conservation, land protection, and downtown revitalization in the Kennebec Corridor. Truly effective coordination among the many participants and the municipalities and businesses is not as well developed or productive as is necessary to get the job done. Improved coordination and expanded partnering is a critical ingredient for expanding and extending the successful efforts to date.

This effort must be funded adequately with public and private money and have a multi-year implementation timeframe. It must have a coordinating body that drives the effort and staff to support the many tasks. Protecting the river today is what will create new opportunities and increased value for tomorrow.

KRI Phase Two Coordination is a key first step if the keen partner interest and momentum built over the last year is to result in implementation of the projects. Ultimately, the success of the KRI depends on expanding participation to each of the 47 municipalities in the Corridor as well as the several dozen public, private, and non-profit organizations that are already working in the Kennebec. The reach committee meetings proved that interest in protecting the river's natural assets and in using those assets to support increased and compatible development is very strong.

The challenge is to corral this passion and energy into an effective action agenda. The Kennebec River Initiative is poised to continue to convene, facilitate, and coordinate the work of the various interests.

Phase Two of the Kennebec River Initiative begins right away with implementation of the Action Plan. Funding has already been secured for a host of Phase Two activities. Outreach, increased website access, and most importantly, working with our long list of partners to help facilitate on the ground projects and assist with regional planning in the Kennebec Corridor are top priorities.

People all along the river and throughout Maine are clearly ready to move beyond discussion to action. We hope you will join us.