

Recreational Inventory, Assessment, Community Engagement, and Mapping of Western Maine Waterways

Project Lead: Noah Pollock, Stewardship Director, Northern Forest Canoe Trail

Project Description:

This waterway recreational inventory, assessment, community engagement project will identify stewardship needs, cultivate new partnerships, and improve online resources that guide citizens in their water-based activities. This multi-year, phased project will focus on waterways adjacent to the Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT) corridor. In our first year, we will focus on the Androscoggin watershed and the “High Peaks” region. Working with local college students, community partners and volunteers, we will:

Inventory existing water based recreational resources for paddlers and anglers, including access points campsites and portage trails. We will assess these points for stewardship needs and to increase safety for users (i.e. mitigate site erosion, provide recommendations for signage, site control, site adoption by community groups, etc).

Conduct community outreach through meetings and individual communication to refine the inventory and assessment and gauge interest in site upgrades, formalizing new water trail routes and local management.

Create maps and online resources to guide users on their journey. Using existing GIS-based data along with that collected during the inventory and assessment process, we will update both the Northern Forest Canoe Trail’s Trip Planner and the Maine Trail Finder with information on these recreational routes and share any information with local groups interested in managing and promoting the resource. We will also develop trip descriptions and look for ways to connect communities with recreational users where appropriate.

Project Need:

Maine’s extensive waterways provide an incredible range of opportunities for recreation. Yet off the most popular travel corridors and state managed sites, usage remains light, stewardship needs go largely unaddressed, and information for visitors is sparse. For many years, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail has been working to manage a 740-mile water route traversing New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. We have found our role to be as a catalyst for collective, community engagement. In Maine, we see an opportunity to expand this work beyond the confines of our trail corridor. Our goal will

be to help nurture a more coordinated approach to waterway stewardship while creating new trip planning resources for the public.

Project Urgency:

Thanks to impressive river restoration and dam removal efforts, Maine has more opportunities for water-based recreation than in recent decades. In addition, interest and enthusiasm for paddlesports continues to rise. With an aging population, low-impact outdoor activities such as paddling are increasingly sought after. Through this project, we hope to expand an appreciation of our home waters, creating a user base supportive of ongoing watershed conservation and restoration efforts.

Project Objectives:

Our objects are three-fold:

1) Complete an inventory and assessment: Working with student interns from local colleges, we will gather existing data and complete an inventory and assessment of select reaches within the Androscoggin and Kennebec watersheds. Our focus will be on areas with emerging community interest and identified need. Student interns will visit all formal and informal access point, portage routes, and campsites, collecting data on site conditions, stewardship needs, and GPS coordinates. This information will be refined through community meetings. Interns will compile trip planning information and draft narratives, and collect photographs describing the character of the studied reaches. We will summarize the results of the assessment in written reports for each studied reach, and will create a GIS based database to aid future mapping efforts.

2) Community outreach and engagement: The initial results of the inventory and assessment will be shared at community meetings and other outreach efforts held in the watershed. The goals of these meetings will be to fill in gaps, better understand usage patterns and identify community priorities. Equally important, we hope this outreach effort will identify potential volunteers for site stewardship, monitoring, and water trail planning.

3) Mapping and Trip Planning Resource Development: The results of the inventory and assessment and community engagement will be used to develop new trip planning information for potential users of the studied waterways. Using online trail planning resources developed with prior MOHF support, including the NFCT Trip Planner and Maine Trailfinder, we will provide information recreational routes, identify safety hazards, provide user etiquette guidelines and develop supplementary trip itineraries to

guide exploration.

Project Outcomes

Project Outcome	Measurement
Inventory and Assessment	Final Report; GIS database
Community Engagement	Number of community members at meetings. Recruited volunteers.
Mapping And Trip Planning	New reaches added to online map and trip planning resources hosted on the NFCT Trip Planner and Maine Trailfinder

Project Timeline.

This project will be completed over a twelve-month period:

- **Fall 2018:** Meetings with community partners. Identification of priority reaches. Compilation of background information (existing GIS data layers, management plans) and community contacts.
- **Winter 2018-2019:** Develop base planning maps. Advertise and recruit interns. Complete website upgrades to host other water trails on NFCT website.
- **Spring 2019:** Hire and train interns..
- **Summer 2019:** Complete inventory and assessment. Complete community outreach with project partners. Develop GIS database. Draft report. Populate Trip Planner, create itineraries and downloadable maps.
- **Fall 2019:** Hold public meetings to share results. Refine and finalize report.

Key Personnel

Noah Pollock (Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Stewardship Director) – Noah has worked on water trail projects for over ten years. He has completed similar assessments, community engagement, and mapping exercises for the other rivers. He has worked with the NFCT’s intern program since its conception in 2007. He will serve as project manager.

Ferg Lea (*Androscoggin Watershed Council, Board Chair*) *Ferg* will be our primary liason for work within in the Androscoggin Watershed. He will help identify priorities reaches for study as well as community groups and individuals to engage in the project

Rex Turner (*Maine BPL*) Rex will help provide base data (existing inventories, management plans, community efforts). We will work with Rex to ensure data collected would help BPL and other agencies in their planning process

Nicole Growhoski (*Community Center For GIS*) We will work with Nicole to ensure trip planning resources developed can be shared on other platforms (i.e. Maine Trail Finder) increasing the impact of our work.