**Maine Trails Coalition**
**Strategic Convening on Long-Range Trail Funding**
**July 20, 2026**
**90 Blossom Lane (Deering 101), Augusta**

**Attendance:** ~40 participants representing nonprofits, trail clubs, land trusts, and state agencies; nearly 40 key leaders and partners from across Maine's outdoor recreation and conservation sectors, including local clubs, regional land trusts, statewide advocacy non-profits, and state agency leaders.

**Purpose**: to bring key players to the table, listen closely, and help support a collaborative framework that serves everyone

**Anticipated outcomes**:

1. **Understand current work** and existing initiatives happening across this sector.
2. **Gauge future strategies** that could successfully secure permanent, long-term funding for Maine's outdoor spaces.
3. **Identify how the MTC can best support** this collective effort over the next year of foundational groundwork.

## Meeting Notes

### Part 1: Small Group Discussions

**1. What are the urgent, shared needs across our sectors right now?** (Asterisks indicate more than one breakout group prioritized these in their summaries to the group.)

- ***Expanded & inclusive access:** Access to info, intel, trails, parking, non-driver access, water trails, municipal parks, and state parks; balancing local access with the TPL framework (e.g., 10-minute walk to a park, even in rural communities).
- **Comprehensive data & inventories:** Agglomerating data; conducting inventories of trails, land ownership, and trail usage (especially high-traffic "charismatic megafauna" spots like waterfalls and scenic views).
- ****Stewardship, operations & maintenance:** Capital improvements, ongoing upkeep, and addressing life/limb safety hazards versus long-term maintenance needs.
- ****Coalition & unified vision:** If there is a consensus to work collaboratively across sectors (trails, outdoor rec, conservation, state parks) we will need an inclusive coalition or "umbrella voice" (whether a new entity, MTC, or an adapted version) to champion the unified vision and make organized decisions together.
- **Funding & local autonomy:** Directing more funding toward local self-determination ("give us the resources, don't tell us how to spend it") to support staffing capacity, acquisition, and management.

- ****Capacity & technical assistance (TA):** Building staff and volunteer capacity while improving diversity, infrastructure resiliency, managing visitation expectations, and securing private land access.

**2. What are the primary barriers or fears when it comes to partnering across sectors?**

- **Possible "turf" & organizational identity threat:** Protecting organizational boundaries and a lack of mutual understanding across individual orgs (reinforcing the need for a larger umbrella).
- **Competing local priorities:** Communities balancing outdoor rec against urgent needs like housing and healthcare.
- **Sector resistance & over-tourism:** Navigating opposition (e.g., anti-housing stances from innkeepers/restaurant associations); avoiding the "reckless course of tourism" where amenity density overburdens communities, ages infrastructure, or outpaces existing maintenance funding.
- **Private land vulnerability:** High reliance on un-conserved private lands for trail access in certain regions (e.g., as low as 13% conserved in Franklin County).
- **Historic prejudices:** Overcoming legacy political or cultural friction around traditional conservation issues.

**3. Where might our future strategies naturally overlap or align?**

- ***Creative cross-sector partnerships:** Partnering across outdoor recreation, conserved land, parks, public health, housing, and economic development.
- ***Collective impact & shared purpose:** Activating together for access and stewardship; recognizing that outdoor rec is an economic engine in Maine (employing ~5% of the state's workforce and growing faster than national averages).
- **Broad public benefits:** Aligning strategies around social, health, economic, transportation, and overall quality-of-life impacts (which directly influence workforce retention and where people choose to live).

## Part 2: Large Group Discussion & Action Plan

**1. Based on the alignments identified so far, what is the most critical bridge we can build together over the next 12 months?**

- **Clarify the "Why" messaging:** Craft a unified narrative showing why trails matter (health, economy, transportation, quality of life, rural development).
    - *Impact:* Helps expand partnerships, build legislative support, demonstrate Maine Trails Bond impact, and tap into hospitality-related taxes.
- **Early industry & unconventional engagement:** Engage early with tourism, hospitality, and non-traditional partners to show how trails directly benefit their industries and local housing needs.
- **Build a formal "big tent" coalition or other partnership structure:** Establish an organized structure that explicitly brings in diverse user groups (sportsmen/hunting/fishing, youth, urban/suburban demographics, and water trail users) without overextending single organizations.
- **Balance growth with stewardship:** Maintain focus on economic drivers while proactively managing overuse, strain on state resources (e.g., BPL capacity), and long-term care of public/private lands.

- **Center equity & shared victories:** Keep equity at the forefront of access decisions while actively celebrating win-wins across the entire sector.

**2. To keep this momentum moving forward over the next year without overextending any single organization, what are manageable ways our organizations can advance a piece of this foundational groundwork?**

- **Align with existing State plans:** Prioritize understanding and mapping organizational efforts directly to the **SCORP** and the **Outdoor Recreation Roadmap** to present a unified front to legislators when requesting funding.
- **Establish regular convenings:** Create a shared platform to coordinate strategy and share progress.
    - *Action item:* Leverage MTC leadership group plans for a statewide in-person convening and possible quarterly MOOR Roadmap meetings (starting in October).
- **Synthesize data & mapping resources:** Coordinate existing tools (e.g., Maine Trail Finder, TPL infrastructure studies, IF&W workgroups, Oxford & Somerset trail mapping) to answer critical legislative questions and map statewide coverage gaps.
- **Cultivate unconventional partners:** Intentionally invite groups not currently in the room (e.g., emerging outdoor leaders, next-gen urban/suburban user groups, municipal park representatives, and local business leaders).

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