Options for Additional Funding for Maine Trails Program

Memorandum
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Subj: Funding Options for Trails +
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Background

- Maine Trails Program funding will be fully committed by Fall 2028, with no new grant round in 2029. By 2031 all MTP projects will be complete
- This assumes $7.5m committed for each of the four grant rounds
- The Trails Bond effort took two years, so 2026 is the right time to develop a plan

Threshold Question

- Is the goal continued funding for the Maine Trails Program, or is it for trails plus other investments (e.g. land conservation, public access, state/local parks, etc.)?
- A larger framing could lead to a bigger, broader, more politically powerful coalition, but it also could make the fund bigger and harder to pass.

Options

<u>All options are difficult!</u>

1. **Secure Funding in the Budget**
   - Secure funding in 2027 as part of the Biennial Budget or in 2028 as part of the Supplemental Budget – but this would be one time money, extending the program by a year or two. Would buy time for a larger strategy
   - Potentially the most achievable option, as part of a Majority Budget, but might end up being less than $7.5m per year

2. **Another Trails Bond**
   - Introduce bond bill in Jan 2027, with the expectation of carrying it over to 2028 session to appear on Nov 2028 ballot – a Presidential election helps with turnout
   - Considerations
     - Bonds are challenging – requiring 2/3ds vote in each chamber
     - For 132nd Legislature, that meant 23 Republicans in House and 4 in Senate; in 131st, it meant 17 Rs in House and 2 in Senate to join all Dems/Independents.
     - Republicans increasingly oppose all bonds, particularly in election years
     - But if you get it to the ballot, it probably passes; Maine voters almost always support ballot measures or bond measures that deal with the environment
   - Ballot Measure Campaign likely will require $100,000 for media

3. **Legislation that Redirects an Ongoing Funding Source**
    - Identify an ongoing funding source that can be directed to Trails, etc.
    - Options include: Real estate transfer tax, portion of the sales tax on outdoor recreation equipment, increase in meals and lodging tax, tax on bottle water extraction, etc.
    - May draw opposition from entities who currently utilize this funding source, or may draw a fiscal note if funding is diverted from the General Fund. Fiscal note can be the death knell for a bill

4. **Ballot Measure Campaign for Ongoing Revenue**
    - Similar to passing a bill, but going to the voters instead of Legislature
        - Nature for Massachusetts example; on November ballot*
        - Vote Yes for Colorado's Land and Water – Proposed Initiative 308
    - When conservation measures are on the ballot, they generally win
    - No different than law passed by Legislature; can be amended by a future Legislature
        - Write the legislation; six citizens take out papers after approved by Secretary of State
        - Need about 67,000 signatures to qualify (10% of most recent Gubernatorial turnout); Have to gather that many, plus 20-25% more – 80,000, for a cushion
    - Petitions due late Jan to be on fall ballot; Jan 2028 for Nov 2028 ballot
    - Absolutely need an election day and lots of volunteers to gather signatures at polling places. 200-400 volunteers could get 25-30k signatures on election day
    - Must be supplemented with paid signature gathering campaign
    - $1m (possibly less) with good volunteer base could be what it takes; good to have paid operation in place at same time as election day
    - Signatures are only good for one year
    - Key question in sizing the campaign and resources is whether there will be active opposition
    - Might need $500k to $1m for a campaign
    - It takes longer than one thinks to get signatures. Getting approved petitions from Secretary of State also takes time
        - Nov 2028: Question approved summer 2027, gather sigs Nov 2027 elections, to get the measure on the November 2028 ballot; or
        - Nov 2029: Question approved summer 2028, gather sigs at Nov 2028 polling places, to place measure on November 2029 ballot