

Meeting the Moment

An Environmental Policy Guide for Maine

2026-2031





Introduction

Maine's environment is like no other.

Whether you've lived in Maine your entire life or arrived here more recently, there is no denying the extraordinary beauty of the environment we now all call home. The backdrop is awe inspiring, with mountains, rivers, forests, and coastlines that are simultaneously exhilarating and peaceful to experience. From black bears to butterflies, wildlife is all around us, reminding us regularly that we are part of something bigger. But our environment is also so much more. It's the lifeblood of our communities, our culture, and our economy.

The choices made by Maine's next leaders will impact our environment and our way of life for generations to come.

Like many Americans, Maine people are experiencing difficult change. Groceries, housing, and energy costs are taking a bigger bite out of our paychecks; access to child care and elder care is more difficult; and too often, we are travelling farther and paying more for needed medical services. But here in Maine, we respond to adversity by working hard and working together, often finding creative approaches and innovative solutions.

As we meet this moment, our public policies and government systems can and must reflect our shared values, our changing world, and the challenges and opportunities before us. Together, we can forge new paths that utilize our environmental resources wisely, connect the dots across our communities, and integrate the wisdom and problem-solving skills of the people in Maine.

This policy guide outlines five areas of focus and the specific actions needed to rebalance Maine's environmental policies in favor of fairness, responsibility, sustainability, and collaboration. In taking these important steps, we will be preserving our natural assets and supporting the health and economic prospects of people and communities in Maine for generations to come.



“Maine’s land is essential to our identity and economy, attracting tourism and supporting local industries. By supporting conservation, we’re investing in the future of Maine’s environment and communities.”

—Russell Black, State Senator from Wilton

Land, Water, and Wildlife for Future Generations

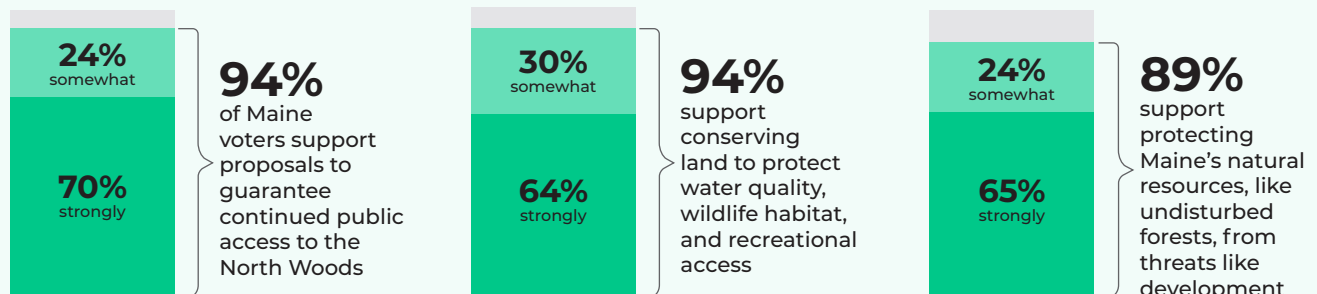
Maine’s natural heritage defines us. Our mountains, rivers, forests, and coastlines drive our economy and create limitless opportunities for recreation and relaxation. The next generation should have the same opportunities to fish for brook trout, watch the sunrise from a mountaintop, follow fresh tracks in the snow, and earn a living off the land. This is the Maine way of life, and it’s worth conserving, protecting, and passing along.

The value of the land, water, and wildlife in Maine extends well beyond our borders. Our environment also plays an important role in addressing two global challenges – climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Maine’s immense forest absorbs and stores well over half of Maine’s greenhouse gas emissions and is home to a wide variety of plants and animals. Maine’s lake and river ecosystems support populations of rare and endangered species while also serving as the backbone of our outdoor economy.

But the pressures on Maine’s natural resources continue to mount. Habitat fragmentation and loss are the number one threats to wildlife in Maine. Climate change is eroding soils, warming waterbodies, shifting wildlife ranges, and spreading invasive species in our lakes while development pressures are causing the loss of farmland, waterfronts, and public access. These concerning trends make it more important than ever to safeguard Maine’s remarkable environmental assets.

Maine’s next leaders must ensure our land, water, and wildlife, and the quality of life they can provide, are available to everyone, in every Maine community, for generations to come.

Maine Voters Strongly Support Protections for Water, Wildlife, and Public Access to Land



Source: January 2026 independent statewide survey

We can act now to protect Maine’s scenic, recreational, and working waters

Clean water is essential to every single one of us. Maine is home to more than 6,000 lakes and ponds that are interconnected with 32,000 miles of rivers, streams, and brooks. Our sporting heritage and outdoor industries depend on clean water and functional lake and river ecosystems that support fisheries and a wide variety of wildlife habitats.

Maine’s beautiful waters attract recreationists, summer campers, home buyers, and many thousands of visitors that support our tourism economy. Our waterbodies play vital roles in local communities by supplying clean drinking water to nearly half of Maine’s water districts and by funding key municipal services through the tax revenue of high-value waterfront properties.

But Maine’s lakes and waterways are at risk. More frequent and intense storms are eroding soils and pumping nutrient pollution into lakes and streams while warming waters are promoting algae growth and the spread of invasive species. Poorly performing septic systems, especially in sandy soils next to lakes and ponds, add to the burden of pollution.

Here in Maine, we are fortunate that lakes and ponds over 10 acres in size are considered public resources. But as the impacts of pollution and climate change accelerate, Maine’s current investment in water protection can no longer keep up with the need. Lake associations and watershed organizations raise millions of dollars each year and provide thousands of volunteer hours to support the state’s work, but they have also reached their limits of capacity.

More funding, staffing, and support for lake and stream protection work will be essential in the coming decade, or we risk losing this valued part of Maine’s outdoor heritage.

We can build on this progress by preserving Maine’s diverse wildlife habitats

The value of Maine’s wildlife to our economy and our way of life is undeniable. Preserving Maine’s diverse wildlife habitats is most certainly an investment in our future.

Development pressures have long created challenges in habitat preservation. Maine’s extraordinary environment lies within a day’s drive of 90 million people. Maine has also recently experienced a notable in-migration of people who value our quality of life and began working remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. New housing goals and other kinds of development are adding to the pressures of protecting wildlife habitat in Maine.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 1 Establish a secure, long-term funding source** for lake and stream protection work that supports increased capacity at state agencies and broadens the scale and scope of local lake protection projects.
- 2 Research and publish a county-by-county blueprint** for land and water protection over the next 10 years, actively engaging communities in prioritizing high-need, high-value projects that are distributed fairly across regions and funded creatively with local and nonprofit partners.
- 3 Support the implementation and enforcement of common-sense regulations** for improving water quality, including updates to shoreland zone protections, new design standards for septic systems that ensure wastewater is properly treated, restrictions on toxic pesticide and fertilizer applications, and stronger inspection protocols for aquatic invasive species.

Temperatures and weather patterns are shifting, so we need to proactively reassess where and when wildlife are moving, how they are interacting and competing for habitat, and how Maine's soil, plants, and waters are also being impacted by changes in our climate. To be successful, we will need to employ new tools and strategies that protect a variety of geophysical settings, prioritize resilient and connected landscapes, and give wildlife a chance to adapt and restabilize, to the extent possible, amid their shifting environment.

We know that protecting habitat quality often starts with reconnecting fragmented ecosystems. From the acquisition of adjacent forest patches to the repair of culverts and removal of obsolete dams, Maine communities have experienced the benefits of reconnecting habitats that return native species and revive local economies.

We can make lasting change by conserving more of Maine's natural and working lands

Maine's natural and working lands play a central role in the lifestyles and livelihoods of people in Maine. We live in the most forested state in the nation and our North Woods sits at the heart of one of the largest intact temperate forests on the planet. Our natural assets include a tidal shoreline of almost 3,500 miles as well as 1.3 million acres of farmland – more than any other New England state. Agriculture contributes \$11.7 billion to Maine's economy while the forest products industry is an \$8.5 billion sector, followed by tourism at \$7 billion, and the seafood harvest at \$3.3 billion annually.

Despite the sheer scope and importance of land to Maine's character and traditions, only 22% is conserved. This means access to fishing, farming, hunting, and time on the water or in the woods is not guaranteed. Maine is also experiencing unprecedented development pressure, which is putting farmland at risk, limiting waterfront access, and in some cases, making it even harder to enjoy the places we love.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 4 Develop a statewide habitat protection and conservation plan** that sets goals through 2040 for the preservation of key places, focusing on areas that are richly biodiverse, have high potential to store carbon, and are critical habitats for species on Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species list.
- 5 Partner with municipalities to improve habitat connectivity**, from upgrading or replacing failing culverts and stream crossings to supporting dam removal projects.
- 6 Pass a significant wildlife habitat policy package** that updates tax incentives for landowners to manage their properties for the betterment of wildlife, establishes stricter forest management standards to address severe disturbances such as clearcutting, assesses additions to the species and habitats safeguarded under Maine's Natural Resources Protection Act, and allocates resources to conserving the last of Maine's late-successional and old growth forest.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

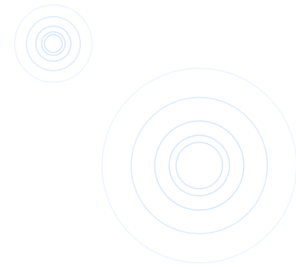
- 7 Ensure permanent, ongoing, and full funding** for the Land for Maine's Future program.
- 8 Prioritize and actively pursue conservation projects** that will achieve Maine's goal of conserving 30% of our natural and working lands by 2030.
- 9 Reestablish cabinet-level leadership** for conservation, which could include the creation of a separate Department of Conservation that contains other bureaus and functions with an overall mission of stewarding Maine's land-based natural assets.

Maine has protected more than 650,000 acres through the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program, which keeps working forests and farmlands open, secures waterfront access for seafood harvesters, and ensures public access for outdoor recreation. But LMF has committed virtually all of its current funding. Without consistent resources for LMF, opportunities will be missed and Maine's goal of conserving 30% of natural and working lands by 2030 will not be realized.

Land conservation and stewardship are our responsibility and our legacy. Conserving land and protecting public access to trails, waters, and Maine's North Woods supports small businesses, strengthens our ability to mitigate climate change through carbon storage, and preserves Maine's beauty and open space for our children and grandchildren. We need to make sure the next generation of young Mainers has the same opportunities to make a living and enjoy their free time in Maine's great outdoors.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▶ Appalachian Mountain Club, "[Maine Woods Initiative](#)"
- ▶ Maine Audubon, "[Conservation Resources](#)"
- ▶ Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, "[Land for Maine's Future](#)"
- ▶ Maine Lakes, "[Valuing the Economic Benefits of Maine's Great Ponds in the 21st Century](#)"
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy, "[Restoring Balance to the Kennebec River](#)"





“No parent wants their child exposed to dangerous chemicals - especially in their water, food, and air. Maine families need policies that prioritize and protect the health of our children and our environment.”

*—Dr. Abby Fleisch,
Pediatric Endocrinologist in Portland*

Healthy and Prosperous Communities

No matter its size or location, each Maine community grapples with complex issues that impact the health of its residents, the quality of its schools, the delivery of public services, and the vibrancy of its economy. Our towns and counties can be seriously impacted by state and federal policy changes, which in turn can make it challenging to maintain services and respond to emerging needs. Fortunately, Maine people have never lost the instinct for coming together as a community to fix what’s broken – all with hard work, kindness, and creativity.

Healthy and prosperous communities require a variety of favorable local conditions, including the availability of affordable housing, health care, child and elder care, transportation options, nutritious food, and safe drinking water. Equally essential is the active engagement of community members of all ages, including small businesses, parents, educators, health care providers, outdoor enthusiasts, young people, and many others with diverse perspectives and expertise.

Strong communities understand intuitively that we are all responsible for each other and for the world around us. Polluting industries should not profit while Maine’s air, water, and soil are poisoned and Maine families are footing the bill. Maine’s next leaders need to hold polluters accountable and make sure our communities have the resources necessary to keep toxins out of food and drinking water, maintain recycling and product stewardship programs, manage growth strategically, and protect Maine’s outdoor traditions for generations to come.

We can act now and create more opportunities for outdoor education and experiences

There are few things more valuable to our children’s growth and well-being than having regular opportunities to experience the natural world. Early activities like building sandcastles at the beach, picking wildflowers in a field, or sledding after a fresh snow can make lifelong impressions. As a child’s more formal education begins, it’s no surprise that hands-on outdoor learning programs deliver many benefits.

In addition to being just plain fun, outdoor education has been shown to improve mental and physical health, support emotional regulation and healthy brain development, build confidence, increase enthusiasm for school and learning, strengthen connections among families and communities, spark interest in ecology and environmental science, and even inspire a new generation of environmental stewards.

We can give more students the opportunity for outdoor learning by assisting Maine schools in training teachers; developing curriculum tailored for local environments, ecosystems, and cultural histories; and installing schoolyard habitat, gardens for food, energy efficient building infrastructure and other outdoor learning spaces.

Young people are not the only beneficiaries of outdoor experiences. When active outdoors, adults of all ages see many of the same positive results, including improved health, lower stress, and higher rates of engagement in community activities. It's no surprise that Maine's outdoor recreation industry employs almost 32,000 people and generates \$3.9 billion toward our overall economy, with boating and fishing contributing \$390 million, guiding and outfitted travel contributing \$114 million, and snow activities contributing \$103 million annually. Supporting outdoor experiences for all ages and locations is an investment that will pay off in better health, a stronger economy, and an enduring outdoor way of life for generations to come.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 1 Embrace and grow Maine's Green Schools Network**, including the creation, promotion, and seed funding for a grant program that can support schools and educators in every Maine county.
- 2 Increase the number and geographic diversity of schools participating** in the Maine Outdoor Learning Initiative and the Maine Outdoor School for All Program.
- 3 Establish a community investment fund** and a Governor's award for small businesses and community partners who are creating innovative ways to offer outdoor education and recreation experiences for youth and adults of all ages, particularly those who have not had outdoor opportunities in the past.

We can build on this progress by ensuring healthy food, soil, and drinking water

Healthy living is important to people in Maine. Clean air, healthy food, and safe drinking water are all essential to our health, our quality of life, and our economic future. Maine lakes provide clean drinking water to about half of the state's population. Maine is also home to more farms than any state in New England, and with that, an opportunity to supply the growing regional demand for sustainable food sources that are closer to home.

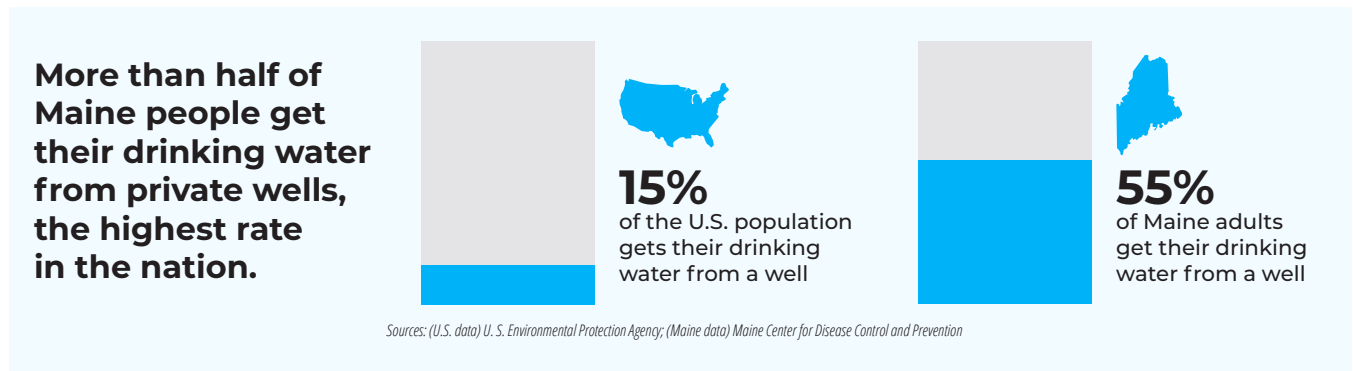
We can do more to reduce local sources of air pollution through the use of renewable energy and cleaner fuel-burning methods. But Maine's geographic location means our air quality also depends on reducing pollution arriving here from states to our west and south. Federal policymakers have a critical role to play in protecting the air we breathe by establishing and enforcing strong national standards for air pollutants, including ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

The presence of microplastics and other toxic pollutants in our water, food, and air puts our health and our environment at risk. Children are particularly vulnerable. Exposure to harmful chemicals in everyday household items, including fabrics, plastic containers, personal care products, and electronics can cause cancer, impact brain development, and harm reproductive and immune systems.

Unfortunately, the use of pesticides is so widespread that every American is almost 100% certain to have pesticides in their bodies on any given day. Exposure levels among farmers and farm workers is particularly high. Pesticides can cause cancer and birth defects, along with many other health conditions. Pesticides are also contributing to a decline in pollinator species, which threatens our farming and food systems. Maine can do more to regulate pesticide use and protect farmers, farm workers, and farm neighbors from the risks of pesticide exposure.

PFAS are man-made chemicals that are effective in repelling water, heat, and oils. PFAS have been used for decades in a variety of household products, including carpets, cookware, food packaging, and even dental floss. PFAS-contaminated sludge has also been used on Maine's farmlands as fertilizer, resulting in thousands of acres of contaminated farmland and even the loss of some family farms. PFAS have been found in Maine's water supplies, farmland, fish and wildlife, and waste materials.

Maine has passed a first-in-the-nation ban on the land application of sludge to protect our farmland from further contamination, as well as a groundbreaking law to phase out the sale of consumer products that intentionally use PFAS. Industry attempts to weaken or delay these important laws should be swiftly defeated by Maine policymakers. Maine can also invest in scientifically-sound PFAS destruction techniques to avoid outsourcing this problem to another state.



Maine’s solid waste management system is deeply connected to the health of our people and the strength of our local economies. The rising costs of waste disposal are placing increasing financial strain on municipalities. And when waste is landfilled or improperly managed, harmful chemicals can leach into soil and groundwater, contaminate nearby farms and drinking water sources, and expose neighboring communities to health risks. These impacts are often felt most acutely by rural and low-income communities located closest to disposal sites.

Maine has a long history of managing waste through product stewardship and recycling, going back 50 years to the original “bottle bill” that established a redemption system for beverage containers. A wide range of materials are now managed effectively through Maine’s Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws, including packaging, electronics, fluorescent light bulbs, and unused paint, among others.

By reducing waste, strengthening our recycling systems, and holding producers accountable for the full lifecycle and disposal costs of their products, we can minimize the burden on municipal taxpayers, protect public health, safeguard our natural resources, and ensure that some communities are not unfairly impacted.

Here in Maine, we know safer products are possible. The University of Maine has been a leader in developing new types of bioplastics from wood chips and forest debris that could replace traditional petroleum-based plastics and reduce harmful chemicals in household products. Promoting and incentivizing product innovations isn’t just about better health; it’s about creating new markets and economic opportunities that align with Maine’s environmental values.

There is no doubt that Maine’s clean water, fresh air, and healthy soil are highly valued by those who live here and by visitors from away. Protecting and defending these priceless assets must be a priority for Maine’s next leaders.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 4 Stop corporate polluters from weakening or delaying Maine’s waste management laws** and ensure all municipalities can access recycling and waste diversion resources.
- 5 Protect the health of Maine food and farmers** by phasing out the use of synthetic pesticides and reducing exposure to all pesticides, particularly for Maine’s agricultural workforce.
- 6 Protect Maine children and adults from exposure to toxic chemicals** by maintaining the ban on the land application of sludge and fully implementing the Kids Safe Products Act, the PFAS Products Act, and the removal of all remaining PFAS-laden firefighting foam in Maine.

We can make lasting change by supporting well-planned housing and commercial development

Maine people have a strong sense of place. Our lives are often centered in our communities, where we work, relax, and connect with family and friends. We're proud of what makes our own communities special and this shared sense of place adds significantly to our quality of life and our engagement in community activities.

Collaboration is essential for connecting the dots among local resources and finding the most efficient ways to respond to various local needs, including housing, transportation, affordable energy, safe drinking water, and healthy farm soils and food sources. Communities that work well together are also more resilient and more successful adapting to climate change, protecting wildlife habitat, and preserving access to public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities for all to enjoy.

Every community can benefit from having a comprehensive plan to help chart a course for their future and be ready for the unexpected. Maine's growth management law has recently been strengthened to make the planning process more efficient for municipalities to manage, easier for the public to join, and more likely to deliver better outcomes as communities grapple with growth-related challenges.

The future of Maine depends on the strength of our communities. Maine's next leaders must prioritize local needs, public engagement, and cross-sector partnerships to help every community be healthy, prosperous, and prepared.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 7 Dedicate sufficient resources** to assist municipalities, regional planning organizations, and tribal governments in updating and implementing their comprehensive plans and to support the Maine Office of Community Affairs and the Land Use Planning Commission in serving Maine's communities and unorganized areas.
- 8 Increase state investments in public infrastructure**, such as drinking water and sewer systems, stormwater management, climate-friendly transportation and transit, energy efficient schools, and other adaptations and resilience to climate-related impacts.
- 9 Assess and update Maine's commercial development siting laws** by 2030 and biennially to follow, incentivizing the use of renewable energy sources and ensuring responsiveness to other environmental, economic, and community conditions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▶ Brookings, "[US Pesticide Regulation is Failing the Hardest Hit Communities](#)"
- ▶ GrowSmart Maine, "[Planning 101: Community Planning](#)"
- ▶ Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, "[PFAS Assistance for Maine Farmers](#)"
- ▶ Maine Drinking Water Program, "[Drinking Water Safety](#)"
- ▶ Maine Environmental Education Association [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), "[About PFAS](#)"
- ▶ Maine Outdoor Education Program [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Outdoor School for All [homepage](#)
- ▶ University of Maine, "[Maine Innovation Economy Action Plan for Agriculture](#)"



“Our young Wabanaki people deserve to live in a world where their sovereignty is not questioned, their rights to self-governance do not waiver, and their history and culture are taught in every Maine classroom.”

—Sage Phillips, Penobscot Nation citizen

Sovereign Wabanaki Nations

People in Maine believe in fairness. We take pride in standing up and standing together to do what’s right. Restoring self-determination and self-governance to the Wabanaki Nations must be a top priority for Maine’s next leaders.

Because of serious flaws in the Maine Indian Claims Settlement of 1980, the Mi’kmaq Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation are excluded from the rights, powers, and protections guaranteed to all other federally recognized tribes. As a result of this unfairness, the Wabanaki Nations face barriers to purchasing land, accessing health care, protecting their drinking water, regulating hunting and fishing, and integrating cultural values and practices within tribal laws and court structures.

Restoration of the Wabanaki Nations’ sovereign right of self-determination will build trust between governments and create mutually beneficial opportunities for economic development, environmental protections, and improved health and well-being. Across generations, we can all benefit from learning about and from the people who’ve lived and thrived for millennia in this place we now call Maine.

We can act now and restore self-governance to the Wabanaki Nations under Maine law

Tribal self-determination is the essential right of Indigenous Nations to govern themselves. Under the U.S. Constitution, federally recognized tribes have a government-to-government relationship with the United States and the power to regulate affairs on their tribal land. This includes the right to sustain their traditional cultural values and practices, establish their own form of government, determine citizenship requirements, enact legislation, and establish law enforcement and court systems.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 1 Implement all remaining recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act**, including enacting all necessary legislation and dedicating appropriate resources.
- 2 Work with Maine’s Congressional delegation** to make all changes to federal law needed to give full effect to the Wabanaki Nations’ sovereignty.

In 1980, the State of Maine and U.S. Congress passed legislation to resolve a dispute between the federal and state governments and the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Nations over the Nations' legal claims to tribal lands. The State of Maine has interpreted this legislation to deny the Wabanaki Nations' tribal self-determination, effectively reducing Wabanaki Nations to municipalities and excluding them from many rights and protections guaranteed by federal Indian law.

Economic Benefits of Restoring Sovereignty to the Wabanaki Nations

 **\$330**
million/year
to Maine's
gross domestic
product

 **\$68**
million/year
in tribal
government
revenue

 **\$39**
million/year
in additional
state and local
tax revenue

 **\$51**
million/year
in additional
federal
tax revenue

 **2,700**
new jobs created,
including **2,000+**
likely to be filled by
non-tribal neighbors

Source: Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, December 2022

Research shows that restoration of tribal self-determination would add about \$330 million annually to Maine's economy, create more than 2,700 jobs (with more than half likely to be filled by non-tribal rural Mainers), and generate \$39 million yearly in state and local tax revenue.

Recognizing the Wabanaki Nations' inherent right to self-govern will create economic opportunities, foster careful stewardship of land and waterways, and strengthen tribal and non-tribal communities. Above all, restoring self-determination to the Wabanaki Nations is about doing what's right, and it's long overdue.

We can build on this progress by expanding the teaching of Wabanaki history and culture

The Wabanaki were the first peoples of this land. Every young person in Maine should have the opportunity to learn about the incredible contributions that Wabanaki people have made throughout the millennia and continue to make today. Our young people must also be given the chance to learn about the colonization of this region and reckon with the attempted genocide, oppression, and erasure of the Wabanaki peoples.

Truthful education about the Wabanaki peoples improves outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students are more connected to the material they're learning when they are accurately represented in it, leading to better educational outcomes and self-esteem. And non-Indigenous students are better prepared to be actively engaged citizens in our democracy when they learn accurate information about our past and present.

A landmark law signed in 2001 requires all public elementary and secondary schools in the state to teach about the Indigenous peoples who have long inhabited the land that eventually became the State of Maine. While this law mandates the teaching of Wabanaki studies in Maine schools, its implementation since

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 3 Develop and fund an Office of Indigenous Studies** within the Department of Education, supported by contracted Wabanaki advisors, to build, support, and coordinate a Wabanaki Studies curriculum and the resources needed by teachers to implement it successfully across Maine.
- 4 Provide funding to school districts** so they have the resources needed to effectively teach Wabanaki Studies.
- 5 Make Wabanaki Studies a curriculum requirement** for high school graduation in Maine.

passage has been highly inconsistent, and more often nonexistent. Teaching the history, economic and political systems, and culture of the Wabanaki people should be a core curriculum requirement for Maine schools. Maine's next leaders must prioritize full funding for this important program.

We can make lasting change by advancing the reunification of Wabanaki people with their ancestral lands and waters

Rematriation is an Indigenous-led process of restoring relationships between Indigenous people and their land. It goes beyond simple land return (known as repatriation) and instead nurtures the complete expression of cultural practices that have been suppressed as an effect of Indigenous people being cut off from their land.

The State of Maine and local conservation organizations have an important role to play in land return and support for rematriation, most notably by returning Wabanaki land and waters freely and without restriction. The work of the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship provides one powerful Indigenous-led model that includes projects like the return of the Kuwesuwi Monihq to the Passamaquoddy in 2021. For the Wabanaki Nations to fully exercise their sovereignty, Maine's elected leaders must respect and support the work of rematriation as willing partners.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 6 Actively support a Wabanaki-led process and timeline** for land return and rematriation.
- 7 Identify potential models and mechanisms** for returning a portion of Maine's public lands and waters to the Wabanaki Nations.
- 8 Collaborate with the Wabanaki Nations to collect data and assess the impacts of rematriation** on human health and wellness, environmental health and stewardship, and economic opportunity among tribal and non-tribal communities in Maine.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▶ Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, ["Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine"](#)
- ▶ Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission ["Wabanaki Studies"](#)
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy, ["An Island Returns"](#)
- ▶ Trust for Public Land, ["Wahsehtekw"](#)
- ▶ Wabanaki Alliance [homepage](#)
- ▶ Wabanaki Alliance, ["What Would Wabanaki Sovereignty Look Like?"](#)





“We can’t sit back and hope that the high cost of electricity will come down on its own. There are clean energy solutions available to make the price of electricity and home heating more stable and affordable for all Mainers – now and into the future.”

*—Emily Rochford,
Maine Community Power Cooperative*

Clean and Affordable Energy

Energy prices in Maine have risen sharply in recent years and we remain overdependent on dirty, out-of-state fossil fuels to generate electricity, heat our homes, and power our vehicles. To turn these trends around, we need to modernize our energy infrastructure and make deeper investments in homegrown renewable energy solutions that lower costs, create good-paying jobs, and end our reliance on imported energy sources.

Maine’s next leaders can help make energy more affordable for everyone by building a smarter, more flexible electric grid; getting more low-cost renewable energy online; holding utilities accountable for producing better results, not just bigger profits; and making sure we achieve the clean energy goals already established in Maine’s Climate Action Plan.

Transportation requires a similar focus and alignment with Maine’s climate goals. Reducing emissions and bringing down transportation costs by investing in a more interconnected, active, and electrified transportation system must be a priority. Redesigning our energy and transportation systems in ways that are accessible and affordable will create a more just and sustainable future for all of us.

We can act now to lower energy costs for Maine families and businesses

Too many people in Maine are struggling to afford their energy bills. Nationally, electricity prices have been outpacing inflation and here in Maine, we have some of the highest rates in the country. This is largely due to our overreliance on expensive and polluting fossil fuels, the high costs of repairing storm damage, and the profits sent to utility company shareholders.

Replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy technologies will save money. Renewables create stable prices for decades, not highly volatile fuel costs that can spike when conflicts arise overseas. Reining in the profits that utilities are allowed to earn will also be essential to making energy more

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 1 Rein in utilities’ rate of return** to the amount they need to attract investment.
- 2 Expand permanent disconnection protections** for people and families with a medical need for electricity and fully fund the Low-Income Assistance Program (LIAP) that helps Mainers afford their electricity bills.
- 3 Require new data centers to pay their fair share**, invest in their communities and clean energy innovations, protect local water sources, and insulate electric customers from related rate increases.
- 4 Incentivize energy efficiency investments** in Maine homes and businesses to provide immediate relief from high energy costs.

affordable. A growing body of evidence demonstrates these rates of return are almost certainly too high, meaning higher costs to Maine families and businesses. At the same time, utilities' investments in our aging electric grid have lagged behind and customer satisfaction continues to dwindle.



Data center development could strain our already burdened infrastructure and increase electricity costs further. Developers have proposed building multiple massive data centers in Maine, with serious implications for electricity and water use. Before new data centers are developed here, we must institute sensible guidelines that protect consumers against related rate increases and safeguard our water resources. Policies and incentives that guarantee transparency about grid impacts and require data centers to cover the costs of those impacts, accelerate clean energy adoption, and upgrade local water and energy infrastructure can ensure any data center development benefits Maine communities and does not harm them.

Electricity isn't a luxury. It's a necessity in a modern economy. Maine's next leaders need to pursue policy solutions that will keep electricity prices affordable for Maine families and businesses.

We can build on this progress by investing in new clean energy infrastructure

Maine has successfully instituted clear and ambitious climate and clean energy goals. Now is the time to smartly and quickly build the renewable energy projects and infrastructure we need to achieve those goals.

Wind energy is one of Maine's most abundant natural resources. Maine is already a leader in land-based wind, and onshore wind projects in Northern Maine can bring New England's largest low-cost renewable energy resource online while delivering jobs and an economic boost to Aroostook County.

Offshore wind will play an essential role in Maine's energy future—providing

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 5 Begin regular Maine Department of Energy Resources procurements of low-cost renewable resources** to bring more clean power into the grid in pursuit of the state's goal of 100% clean energy by 2040.
- 6 Support the completion of Northern Maine onshore wind and transmission projects**, with high standards for environmental and ecosystem protection, community engagement, job creation, and economic benefits for Aroostook County.
- 7 Responsibly develop offshore wind projects and infrastructure**, including an offshore wind port for turbine construction and regional and international partnerships with labor, industry, and community groups - especially tribal and fishing communities.
- 8 Build a smarter, modernized electric grid** by expediting interconnection timelines, designing rates to incentivize peak shifting, and creating demand-side markets to unlock innovations.

fully half of the renewable energy we need by 2040, according to Maine's 2025 Energy Plan. Under state law, offshore wind projects must be built to high standards for job creation, workforce development, and environmental and wildlife protection. All commercial offshore wind projects must be sited far offshore in federal waters, outside the footprint of Maine's lobster industry. On top of the energy benefits, a responsibly developed offshore wind industry in Maine will result in billions of dollars in investment and thousands of good-paying jobs - boosting the economy and furthering our centuries-old maritime traditions.

Maine's aging electric grid is being strained by new growth in demand and distributed generation, as well as by increasingly severe weather events fueled by climate change. New investments in a smarter grid are essential for responding to these challenges, and every option for lowering costs must be explored, including public financing options.

With strategic investments in a smarter grid and new clean energy infrastructure, we can reduce our dependence on expensive out-of-state fossil fuels, provide affordable clean energy to Maine households and businesses, and meet our climate goals - all while reducing pollution and creating new good-paying jobs and economic benefit for families, businesses, and local industries - not just utility shareholders.

We can make lasting change by investing in a more connected, climate-friendly transportation system

Transportation accounts for nearly half of Maine's annual greenhouse gas emissions and is the second largest expense for Maine families, behind housing. We need to reduce pollution and transportation costs by proactively investing in safer, cleaner, and more interconnected transportation options for Mainers to use across the state.

Maine's Highway Fund is facing a shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars per year, largely because a previous administration stripped critical transportation dollars from the budget by freezing the gas tax. At the same time, construction and maintenance costs are rising while federal funding for transportation is being sharply reduced, particularly for public transit and complete streets projects that improve public safety and community interconnectedness. To keep Maine's transportation system moving, we need to identify new and sustainable funding solutions that do not disproportionately impact low-income Mainers or undermine Maine's progress in reducing tailpipe emissions.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

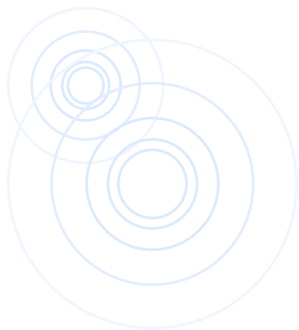
- 9 Establish sustainable transportation funding solutions** that maximize federal and regional resources and create more fairness, including more equitably distributing turnpike toll revenue across modes and geographies, making all road users pay their fair share for road degradation, and creatively identifying new revenue sources that don't target electric vehicle owners or low-income Mainers.
- 10 Prioritize transportation projects that align with Maine's climate goals**, as well as our economic development, housing, and public health priorities, instead of projects that add long-term costs and increase pollution.
- 11 Fully fund Maine's transit and active transportation networks**, including public transit, complete street initiatives, walking and biking paths, and statewide mobility management programs.
- 12 Advance Maine's public EV infrastructure** by pursuing all available funding opportunities for charging installation and accommodation, implementing the Clean Transportation Roadmap for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Vehicles, and maximizing the grid flexibility benefits of EVs by supporting bidirectional charging and managed charging policies.

Electric vehicles offer lower fuel and maintenance costs, as well as other health and climate benefits for people in Maine. Policymakers should support the development of a robust public EV charging network and policies that make driving electric vehicles a choice for more Maine residents and businesses.

Maine's next leaders can make our transportation funding go further by aligning our transportation planning with Maine's other public policy goals. This includes investing in public transit and active transportation options where they make sense, instead of allowing costly road expansion projects to monopolize budgets and create unsustainable long-term maintenance obligations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▶ Acadia Center, ["Natural Gas Price Volatility in New England"](#)
- ▶ Efficiency Maine [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Climate Action Now (MCAN) [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Climate Plan: ["Maine Won't Wait"](#)
- ▶ Maine Department of Energy Resources (DOER) [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Department of Energy Resources, ["Factors Driving Electricity Prices in Maine"](#)
- ▶ Maine Office of the Public Advocate [homepage](#)
- ▶ Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), ["Four Ways Maine Can Address the Energy Impact of Data Centers"](#)
- ▶ Smart Growth America, ["Complete Streets"](#)





“Maine’s future shouldn’t just be something our youth inherit - it should be something they help create.”

*—Jackson Chadwick,
Maine Youth for Climate Justice*

A Government that Works for Everyone

The promise of our American government is “of the people, by the people, for the people.” It’s a promise reflected in Maine’s culture of coming together as neighbors and communities to tackle problems and do what’s right. The growing stress on Maine people and our natural environment will make our collaborative instincts more valuable than ever in the years ahead.

We can do so much more to increase satisfaction and civic pride in the decisions we make together. Our government systems can better reflect our shared values, our changing world, and the challenges and opportunities we now face. It’s time to reinvigorate and modernize our methods of connecting, listening, collaborating, and problem-solving – across generations, regions, and life experiences.

Putting people and communities first is good for our democracy and good for our environment. Maine’s next leaders must provide the focus, the infrastructure, and the financial stability to plan and pursue Maine’s environmental priorities. This must include rebuilding and sustaining a fully staffed environmental workforce and dedicating the funds needed to support communities and ensure fairness and accountability in the application of our environmental rules and regulatory frameworks.

We can act now and formalize a structure for Maine youth and young adults to advise and assist policymakers

Government is about all of us, and civic engagement starts young. When given the chance to participate in the process of self-government, youth and young adults offer a valuable perspective to policymakers while gaining confidence and collaboration skills. These early experiences can empower young people to stay engaged, volunteer or work in their communities, and even run for office themselves one day.

Here in Maine, youth are not always engaged in decisions that will directly affect their futures. There is no specific

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 1 Create a new Youth Advisory Council** as a permanent office and cabinet-level advisory body to Maine’s governor, legislature, and administrative agencies.
- 2 Support the new Youth Advisory Council with resources** for hosting multi-generational community conversations, collecting data on the opinions and recommendations of Maine youth, producing an annual report on priority policy issues, maintaining a data dashboard, coordinating a youth ambassador program with Maine schools, and designing other civic engagement and data modernization initiatives.

structure or mechanism for their participation in state policymaking and their voices are not always sought out, despite the fact that they have the most to lose from policies that aren't developed with an eye to the future.

Maine's next leaders have an opportunity to inject new ways of working that reflect the perspectives of Maine youth and the important role they can play in advising and assisting policymakers on issues that impact their health and well-being, their communities, and the environmental legacy they will inherit.

We can build on this progress by modernizing and reinvigorating our democratic systems for connecting, listening, collaborating, and problem solving

Democracy thrives on practice and participation, delivering the best results when people of all ages are empowered, communities are enthusiastic, and there is trust and confidence in the fairness of voting and the openness of the policymaking process.

Like all Americans, Maine people are experiencing many challenges that are making it harder to feel connected to our communities, harder to make ends meet, and harder to be hopeful about the future. But Maine is also a place where neighbors help neighbors, and community problems are often solved when we talk, listen, and get creative. Maine has always been oriented to community self-sufficiency, and now, our natural instincts to work together and solve problems locally could be our biggest asset. It's time to build on Maine's culture of collaboration and modernize our democratic systems with new tools and strategies for community-based engagement and problem solving.

It is incumbent on Maine's next leaders to purposely and proactively reinvigorate the practice of democracy in Maine communities. Doing so will improve transparency and confidence in our government systems, inspire multi-generational engagement, encourage connections among existing community networks, increase the availability of local data in decision making, and result in resources being invested where they are needed most. Perhaps most importantly, it will strengthen our relationships and trust in each other, across generations and life experiences, so we are more prepared to tackle unresolved issues and respond to new opportunities and challenges that may be headed our way.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 3 Design, implement, and evaluate a digital civic engagement demonstration project** in several regions of Maine that allows municipal staff and elected leaders to share information and gather input from residents, such as their budget priorities, observations of local conditions, and willingness to participate in committees or special projects.
- 4 Invest in digital applications, training, and implementation assistance** to make all public-facing government functions online and publicly accessible, including absentee ballot requests, sample ballots and voting information, municipal services, public meetings, community events, volunteer opportunities, and e-filings within the Maine court system.
- 5 Host annual in-person community conversations** in every primary and secondary service center town in Maine that are neutrally facilitated, promoted widely, accessible to all, and cover issues of interest and concern, including issues related to environmental health, community resilience to extreme weather, energy affordability, and local efforts to preserve and protect Maine's water, land, and wildlife.

We can make lasting change by building state-level infrastructure and capacity to support Maine communities and protect Maine’s natural environment

Maine people place a high value on our clean water, healthy air, and natural beauty. These assets are central to our culture, our lifestyles, and our local economies. They are what make Maine a special place and they are worth protecting and passing along. But preserving Maine’s environmental resources and outdoor way of life for future generations will not be possible without dedicated funding and a professional workforce.

The path to sustainable funding for our environmental priorities must consider new sources of revenue that create more fairness and accountability in who benefits and who pays. It’s time to fully assess the financial impacts of polluting and poisoning industries and establish a cost-recovery plan that can be invested in the people and programs that will protect Maine’s environment for decades to come.

KEY POLICY ACTIONS:

- 6 Hold polluters accountable by establishing a system to recover costs**, impose penalties, and redirect their profits into financial support for Maine’s clean water, public lands, and the environmental workforce that protects our resources, enforces the rules, and keeps our communities healthy.
- 7 Match the size of Maine’s environmental workforce with the needs in our communities**, including the capacity to fully implement regulatory frameworks that prevent exposure to toxins, manage municipal waste, extend produce responsibility, and enforce common-sense protections of our air, water, and land.
- 8 Address the interconnected issues of environmental justice and the affordability of energy, food, and other basic needs** by ensuring that the scope and capacity of the Maine Office of Community Affairs is sufficient to support local collaborations and partnerships, especially in rural areas.

Maine’s state agencies have been chronically underfunded and experience high turnover in staff because of low salaries. This makes the important work they do more difficult in general, and in some cases, it makes widely supported regulatory frameworks impossible to fully implement due to staffing shortages. The Kid-Safe Products Act, designed to remove the most dangerous chemicals from children’s products, is just one

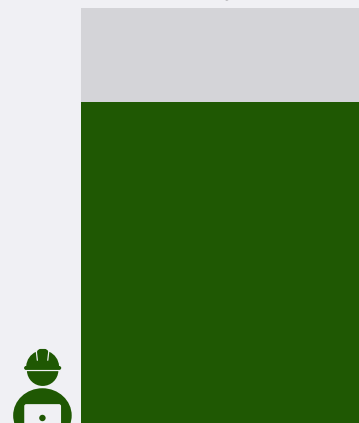
1 in 6 state positions remains vacant.

In the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), the vacancy rate is even higher.

14.7%
Overall vacancy rate



22.4%
DACF vacancy rate



Source: Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services,
*Vacant Position Information as of February 13, 2025

example. Maine's next leaders can reinvest in our environmental agencies and professional workforce by restructuring their workloads and offering better jobs with competitive wages.

Building a government that works for everyone also means using our financial resources wisely and maximizing the effectiveness of our programs and community supports. We need cross-cutting agencies that can connect the dots among communities and encourage regional collaborations on interrelated issues, such as land use planning, clean energy production, waste management, cooperative food systems, housing, and transportation. These community issues are also environmental justice issues, and better outcomes will result when they are addressed through participatory, intergenerational approaches that prioritize the meeting of everyone's basic needs. The Maine Office of Community Affairs is one example of an agency that is likely well-suited to spearhead this type of integrated approach to Maine's environmental priorities.

When government is structured to put people and communities first, our policy priorities will mirror our environmental priorities and the shared values they are built upon.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▶ AAMC Center for Health Justice, ["Get out the Vote: Cultivating Civic Engagement in Youth and Adults"](#)
- ▶ Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS), Bureau of Human Services [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN) [homepage](#)
- ▶ Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ) [homepage](#)



Summary of Key Policy Actions





Looking Ahead

Maine's next leaders will most certainly face challenges, opportunities, and legislative proposals that are not fully anticipated in this policy guide. The following framework provides a lens through which new proposals can be assessed for their alignment with the values reflected in this document and for their impact on the health and vibrancy of Maine people, communities, and natural environment. These questions are not intended to be a litmus test for each potential policy, but rather a guide for thoughtful deliberation.

When considering future environmental policy proposals, we encourage Maine lawmakers to ask the following:

- 1** Does this proposal recognize the inherent value of land, water, and wildlife and seek to preserve and protect Maine's outdoor heritage and way of life so they can be enjoyed by future generations?
- 2** Does this proposal protect clean air, safe drinking water, healthy food and soils, and the well-being of Maine children and families?
- 3** Does this proposal require polluting and poisoning industries to pay for any harms they cause and dedicate those resources to the health and prosperity of impacted people and communities?
- 4** Does this proposal benefit communities whose voices have historically been overlooked or excluded from decision-making spaces, including communities of color, rural Mainers, youth, and Indigenous peoples?
- 5** Was this proposal created with the understanding that harm to our immediate natural environment also brings socio-economic consequences, impacting the health, cultural practices, and ability to produce, farm, and harvest food for various communities?
- 6** Does this proposal enhance the sovereignty and self-determination of the Wabanaki Nations?
- 7** Does this proposal benefit Maine families, today or into the future, with lower energy bills, protection from energy price spikes, and access to affordable energy options?
- 8** Does this proposal invest in clean and sustainable energy options that put money back in people's pockets, lead to lower costs, or create greater energy efficiency?
- 9** Does this proposal support communities in collaborative planning, problem-solving, and smart growth?
- 10** Does this proposal strengthen Maine's democratic systems and community engagement opportunities across generations, whenever possible?

A Message from Partners

This policy guide highlights five areas of opportunity and 46 specific actions that can be advanced in the years ahead to respond to our changing world, reflect our shared values, and ensure Maine's extraordinary environment and outdoor economies can be enjoyed by everyone in Maine for generations to come.

Maine's next leaders will be stepping into a critical moment for our environment. The policies and investments outlined here reflect a generational opportunity to protect Maine's land and waters, support healthy and prosperous communities, recognize inherent Wabanaki sovereignty, generate clean and affordable energy, and make sure our government works for everyone – now and into the future.

We have developed this guide together, drawing on the expertise and experience of over two dozen partner organizations, including conservation, environmental justice, youth advocacy, and community health groups. Each recommended action has been selected based on its overall environmental impact as well as its advancement of sustainability, responsibility, fairness, opportunity, and collaboration.

We recognize that some of these policies will be easier to implement than others, but we are confident they reflect the most important, highest value actions that can be taken to meet this moment. We hope the reader is inspired to join us in tackling Maine's most serious environmental challenges head on and working toward a more just, equitable, and sustainable future that we can pass along to our children and grandchildren.



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