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Allagash Wilderness Waterway Working Group on Structure, Management and Oversight: Choosing Common Ground and Moving Ahead (Executive Summary)

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**ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY
WORKING GROUP
on STRUCTURE, MANAGEMENT and OVERSIGHT**

“Choosing Common Ground and Moving Ahead”

A Report to Governor John Elias Baldacci

January 31, 2007

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (see sections IV. and V. for details)

In his June 19, 2006, Executive Order, Governor John E. Baldacci directed the Working Group to “offer its best guidance and advice to the Governor respecting the long-term governance, management, and oversight structure for the Allagash Wilderness Waterway” (AWW).

In the intervening six months the members of the Working Group have engaged in an examination of the forty-year history of the Waterway and an analysis of the conditions and circumstance that led to the Governor’s Executive Order. We have reviewed documentation of the AWW history, taken testimony at numerous public meetings and hearings, conducted correspondence with members of the several Waterway constituencies, engaged in an on-site examination of part of the Waterway, and sought advice from experts within and outside the state.

FINDINGS: We have identified a number of serious and continuing problems related to the governance, management, and oversight structure of the Waterway, if it is fully to achieve its promise for the people of Maine and the nation. Most importantly, these include:

1. Conflicting Constituent Expectations of the AWW. There are a number of passionate Waterway constituencies with very different perceptions of the range of intended uses of the Waterway.

2. Loss of Public Confidence in Management. Policy and management practices have contributed, often unwittingly, to the loss of public confidence in the state’s management of the Waterway. That lack of confidence has persisted in spite of survey evidence suggesting a high level of satisfaction among current Waterway users.

3. AWW’s Diminished Administrative Status. Repeated government reorganizations have resulted in shifting the Waterway from the status of a separate, unique state conservation and recreation entity to that of another state park, under-resourced in terms of its special requirements and vulnerable to further cuts as spending reforms apply comparative measures related to cost per visitor day and similar metrics.

4. Lack of Long-Range Strategic Planning. There has never been an attempt to establish an ongoing strategic planning process for the Waterway. The absence of a strategic vision and effective implementation plans confounds opportunities to obtain sufficient outside funds to support operations, management, capital investment, and any needed land acquisition or investment in general enhancement of the Waterway and its ecosystems.

5. Need for a Common Sense of Purpose. Members of the Working Group agree that the success of our recommendations on the governance-management-oversight structure for the Waterway will depend in large part on the achievement of a common sense of purpose and direction by the several constituencies that have a strong interest in the Allagash.

RECOMMENDATIONS: To address the issues and challenges identified, the Working Group offers seven recommendations for administrative and legislative action, and a concluding observation addressed to the general public. The recommendations aim to strengthen the Waterway's capacity to preserve and enhance the natural environment of the Allagash, support a variety of wilderness recreation experiences, and respect and protect the cultural heritage of the area. The seven members of the Working Group voted on the recommendations, and the recorded vote on each is indicated in parentheses.

1. AWW Status. The Working Group recommends that the AWW remain within the Department of Conservation/Bureau of Parks & Lands (DOC/BPL) for purposes of management and administration, and that it be restored to its pre-1995 status as its own, separate "region" within the BPL, sharing its central services. (7-0)

2. AWW Mission. The Working Group recommends that the BPL adopt a mission statement as the basis for its future strategic and management planning and operation of the AWW and offers the following as a stimulus for discussion, based upon the 1973 AWW management plan developed by the Bureau of Parks and Recreation with the help of a distinguished citizens' advisory body:

Protect and enhance the wilderness character of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway and ensure its optimum public use through its careful management as a wilderness area, with priorities placed on offering wilderness experience to its primary users, the canoeists and fishermen.

Preserve, protect and interpret significant artifacts that reveal the life experience and impact of the native peoples, the settlers, and those who came to use the forests and waters of the region for harvesting and transporting timber from the forest;

Support and facilitate low impact recreational and educational uses of the Waterway that respect the integrity of the natural areas and history of the region, and are consistent with the Waterway's natural and historical conservation and enhancement programs. (6-1)

3. AWW Superintendent. The Working Group recommends the creation through legislation and General Fund appropriation of the new position of Superintendent of the AWW, who will have immediate responsibility for strategic planning and advancing the mission and goals of the Waterway; report directly to the Director of the BPL; supervise the day-to-day manager and other staff of the Waterway; work to secure federal, state and private funding to advance the Waterway's purposes; encourage and enlist private volunteer efforts to these ends; and build the public constituency of the Waterway through effective management, marketing, and public information and education. (7-0)

4. AWW Advisory Council. The Working Group recommends creation in statute of an AWW Advisory Council of seven members, to include:

1. a representative of the National Park Service (NPS);
2. a public member;
and five persons with knowledge and experience in:
3. sustainable forest management, from a private landowner abutting the AWW;
4. wilderness recreation;
5. natural resource planning and management;
6. fisheries or wildlife conservation; and
7. cultural and historic preservation.

Members 2-7 will be nominated by the DOC Commissioner and subject to approval by the Legislature's committee of jurisdiction. Terms will be for five years, renewable one-time only, and initial terms of the non-NPS members will be staggered to ensure continuity. The Advisory Council will annually elect its own chair who will schedule, set the agenda for, and preside at Council meetings; meet at least twice annually; work with the Superintendent to develop and maintain a strategic plan and to advance the AWW mission and goals; and report at least annually on the state of the Waterway to the BPL Director, and at such other times as it may deem necessary or desirable. The Working Group strongly recommends that, while a variety of perspectives should be included in Advisory Council membership and it is desirable to have at least one member who resides or works in the Allagash/Upper St. John River region, all Advisory Council members will serve to represent the larger public interest in the Waterway, its mission and goals, rather than any narrow constituent interest. (7-0)

5. AWW Technical Committees. The Working Group recommends that the AWW Superintendent be authorized in statute to appoint, as needed, members and chairs of Technical Committees to assist him/her in such matters as strategic planning, AWW Permanent Endowment Fund management (see 6. below), personnel management and training, private landowner relations, watershed planning and management, marketing, public education and information, historic preservation, forest and fisheries management, campsite management and fees, etc. (7-0)

6. AWW Permanent Endowment Fund. The Working Group recommends the creation in statute of an AWW Permanent Endowment Fund, to receive funds from federal, state and private sources that will be expended for needed capital acquisition and improvements, any needed land acquisition, cultural and heritage programs and facilities, public and visitor education and facilities, and other purposes to advance the AWW mission. Every effort should be made in the statute to insulate the Endowment Fund from diversion to non-AWW uses. Disbursals from the Endowment Fund will be made by the Director of the BPL in accordance with an approved AWW management plan and with the advice of the AWW Advisory Council. (7-0)

7. Legislative Oversight. The Working Group recommends that the DOC Commissioner be required in statute annually to report to the Legislature's committee of oversight on progress in managing the AWW, in terms of its mission and goals, finances, administration, public educational and historic preservation efforts, natural character enhancements, and current challenges and prospects. This report will include the DOC's original General Fund budget request for operation of the AWW for the coming fiscal year; any leveraging of federal and private funds to advance the Waterway mission and goals; and a full accounting of the current operation of the AWW Permanent Endowment Fund (if established) in terms of its income, disbursements, and management, (7-0)

Concluding Observation. Finally, the Working Group urges a new beginning of careful listening, respectful communication, and energetic collaboration among all persons and groups with a stake in the future of the AWW. Only in this way, we believe, may the original and continuing promise of the AWW become a reality.