

Opening Remarks  
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Good morning. On behalf of AMC, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this panel discussion. My name is Walter Graff, and I'm the deputy director of the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the country. In fact, we've been involved in ecotourism since our founding in 1876. We promote the protection, enjoyment, and wise use of the mountains, rivers, and trails of the Appalachian region. With almost 4,000 members in Maine, and nearly 90,000 members across the Northeast and beyond, we encourage people to enjoy and appreciate the natural world because we believe that successful conservation depends on this experience.

AMC's work in Maine also dates back to 1876. AMC members were the first to map Katahdin, and AMC trail crews built and maintained many early trails in Baxter State Park. We still provide thousands of hours of work each year building and maintaining hiking trails for use by the public on private and public land in Maine. As a regional organization, AMC is known historically for our operations in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, where we built and maintain eight mountain huts and two roadside education centers, but we also manage 50 public facilities across the Northeast that together serve more than 1 million visitors annually.

Two years ago, we made the largest conservation and recreation commitment in our 129-year history when we purchased 37,000 acres of forestland adjacent to the Katahdin Iron Works from International Paper, as well as Little Lyford Pond Camps. AMC's Maine Woods Initiative is focused on the ecological and economic needs of the Moosehead Lake and 100-Mile Wilderness region by supporting local forest industry jobs and traditional recreation, creating new multi-day backcountry recreational experiences for visitors, providing outdoor education opportunities for local school children, and attracting new nature-based tourism to the region while respecting its essential remote character. Our commitment to this region is broad and long-term.

Since we started our Maine Woods Initiative, we have worked closely with the surrounding communities to ensure that our efforts will reinforce the traditions of the natural-resource-based economy of the region. For example, we are managing over 20,000 acres of our land for sustainable forestry and have cut 12,000 cords to date. We have worked with local snowmobile clubs to accommodate critical trails. We created a 10,000-acre reserve in an area that has been described as an ecological treasure trove. We are running an historic Maine sporting camp, Little Lyford Pond Camps. We have also introduced innovations to this economic base--helping to create the first ever 100-Mile Wilderness Sled Dog race between Brownville and Greenville, starting a cross-country ski program for over 300 kids in the local schools, and building over 10 miles of new hiking and ski trails. In addition to these initiatives we plan to build over 100 miles of new hiking and ski trails, additional appropriately sited sporting camps, primitive campgrounds and remote cabins accessible only by foot or ski. This diversity is creating a better future for the long term, and yet remains consistent with the region's heritage and traditions. We believe that expanding nature-based tourism opportunities in the Maine Woods—ecotourism, if you will—in a manner consistent with the character of the region presents an exciting, and challenging, opportunity to us all.

AMC invested in the Moosehead Lake area of Maine after considering possible options throughout the region, and recognizing both the need and the opportunity in this area of Maine. At the foot of the iconic 100 Mile Wilderness region of the Appalachian Trail is the beginning of the largest virtually unfragmented forest in the East. This landscape provides a unique opportunity in the populous Northeast to experience remote and primitive outdoor recreation, a wealth of wildlife, and spectacular scenery that harkens back to the wilderness encountered by early settlers. These are precisely the qualities of the region that hold the most promise for expanding Maine's attraction as an ecotourism destination. In his Maine Woods Legacy Vision, Governor Baldacci also recognized the unfragmented forest and remote character of the region as its most critical asset, saying, "In the past 6 years, we have seen more than 5.5 million acres of forestland change hands. In some cases, new investment patterns have led to new harvesting practices and fragmentation of what were once large tracts of woodlands ... We have before us an all-too-brief opportunity to conserve the natural heritage of the Maine woods in a way that supports diverse economic opportunities for Maine people and leaves an unparalleled legacy to the next generation."

Maine's North Woods is a region of national significance that has the potential to rival Montana or Alaska in size and wild character. We are on the verge of either protecting it or losing it over the next very few years. One future sees landowners selling off the lakefronts, trout streams and mountain vistas for high-priced second homes. The alternative is what we hope to see—landowners including in their business models the opportunity to sell for permanent protection those lands that make up the character and critical wildlife habitat of this region.

Based on our experience in Maine and elsewhere, we believe Maine is best served, and ecotourism best promoted, by maintaining the signature remote and wilderness character of the Maine Woods, where an unfragmented landscape supports natural-resource-based industry and nature-based tourism. The absence of development and the remoteness of the region constitute a high-value natural resource that is, indeed, highly susceptible to being degraded or lost through development of shorelines and of other areas that currently have these values. And there needs to be recognition that since development will be permanent, whether on shorelines or elsewhere, corresponding conservation protection measures should also be permanent, not term-limited or based on already protected resources.

The challenge here is extraordinary, as there are few places like this left in the eastern United States. As with most issues, the answers are not black and white; it is not all or nothing. As development proposals are put forward, we must balance the need to protect the golden goose that lays the golden eggs—the wild and remote experience of an unfragmented landscape—with the need to sustain the region's communities and economic viability. Ecotourism that features the wilderness experience is one important key to success. As Maine landowners and as an organization with a vested interest in the success of nature-based tourism in the region, we look forward to participating in the ongoing effort to chart the course for achieving long-term community, economic and ecological stability in the Maine Woods.