

Comments of Walter S. Graff, Deputy Director Appalachian
Mountain Club
LURC Scoping Session, August 16, 2005, Greenville, Maine



Good evening. I want to thank LURC for the opportunity to speak tonight. 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. 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 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 began this project, we have sought the advice and counsel of local residents and community leaders. We have been heartened by the support we have received. We also have learned a lot since we became a landowner in this region. We believe this region provides one of the best places in the Northeast to experience the remote essence of the Maine Woods and yet still have the services of a rich and diverse community. Since our purchase of the KIW land, we have worked closely with the surrounding communities to create the first ever 100-Mile Wilderness Sled Dog race between Brownville and Greenville. We started a cross-country ski program for over 300 children in the local schools. We have built over 10 miles of new hiking and ski trails. We 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 managing over 20,000 acres for sustainable forestry, and have cut 12,000 cords to date. We believe

these various activities are helping to create a better future in the region for the long term --- sustainable forestry, nature-based tourism, ecological protection, economic diversity and an investment in the quality of life for our young people. As our project grows, our goal is to strengthen our presence in the region and to become more and more a part of the region's community fabric.

While we share Plum Creek's stated goals of conservation, public access and a strong local economy, we believe that the concept plan as proposed does not sufficiently achieve these stated goals. Because of these concerns, we cannot support the plan in its present form. We urge that the plan be changed to permanently protect more of the extraordinary natural resources of this region, as well as better address the long-term economic needs of the community.

Based on our experience in Maine and elsewhere, we believe the greater Moosehead Region is best served by maintaining its signature character as an icon of the Maine Woods, where an unfragmented landscape supports natural resource based industry and nature based tourism. This unbroken landscape is increasingly a rarity, and while we recognize that the region is in transition, it is critical that the long-term benefits of maintaining its essential remote character not be forgotten. This goal should be at the forefront of any pursuit of a revised plan.

As with most issues, the answers are not black and white. It is not the case, as has been suggested, that if you're not for the Plum Creek proposal as initially submitted, you're against all development in the North Woods. That is not AMC's position. We believe it's not "either-or," but instead that community leaders, the concerned public, the state, and Plum Creek need to work together to craft a different plan that does a much better job of protecting the natural resources and character of the landscape that make the Moosehead Region so special, while providing the landowner with a legitimate return on investment, and supporting a viable economy for local communities. If all parties work together in good faith, this can be achieved.

There are several concerns that need primary attention from all groups.

- Conservation needs to be permanent. It needs to be at a scale that's appropriate to the size of the region and the size of the proposed development. Together, we need to identify those values that define this region and find a way that they will be permanently protected. Permanency also is critical to maintaining the historic natural resource based economy in the region, ensuring that timberlands will be protected in perpetuity.
- The remote and undeveloped character of the region is its key asset and must be maintained. The Maine Woods is the last large, unbroken forest in the Eastern United States, with Moosehead Lake at its core. LURC, private landowners and the public need to work together to ensure that any development is at an appropriate scale and location to enhance use and enjoyment of this area without damaging the rare, special qualities that

draw residents and visitors to this region. To help conserve those special qualities, new development should be contiguous to existing development.

• Maine has a long history of public access to private timberlands for recreation and we thank Plum Creek for continuing this access to date. We want the public to be able to continue to enjoy access to the high quality natural, scenic, and recreational assets of the region. LURC's Comprehensive Land Use Plan clearly emphasizes primitive recreation as a key activity, particularly "nonintensive, nonexclusive use of recreational resources." It also notes that, "a major aim of most of these activities is to get away from it all and to experience a wilderness setting; they are therefore very sensitive to intrusions by development and by more intensive activities." AMC is therefore very concerned about the impacts of such a large increase in both private and large commercial shorefront and riverfront development activity in the region. We believe it is critical to retain the region's remote "wilderness" feel to serve as an important economic resource for local businesses as well as an attraction for the new land owners Plum Creek would like to attract to the region.

• Finally, we applaud Plum Creek for putting forward a long-term concept plan for review. Long-term planning and predictability are critical to ensuring the on-going economic vitality of local communities. To be successful, such a plan must reflect the values of local communities, with its primary economic benefits accruing locally. The final plan for this region should provide an appropriate balance of the economic benefits accruing to Plum Creek and local communities and the economic, social, and ecological benefits accruing to the public.

We don't want to see this discussion devolve into a fight between the Plum Creek proposal and nothing at all. We believe a lot more work needs to be done to provide the needed long-lasting public benefits and economic activity which will strengthen the essence of the Moosehead region while still providing good economic returns for Plum Creek and the surrounding communities. We need to avoid polarization if we are to find a positive solution that allows for protection and enhancement of the local economy and traditional land use, permanent protection of the key natural resources of this area, and a positive outcome for the landowner, the people of this region and the people of Maine. The AMC stands ready to assist in any way we can. We are committed to be here for the long term.

Thank you for your time.

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Appalachian Mountain Club