

**Significant Changes to Plum Creek Proposal offer**  
**Exceptional Conservation Opportunity**

Plum Creek's concept plan for the Moosehead Lake region has improved significantly from earlier versions, and its current form presents an extraordinary opportunity for conservation—offering permanent protection to 431,000 acres. The Forest Society of Maine (FSM) feels it is extremely important for Maine's citizens to understand these changes and this opportunity.

The original proposal to the Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC) for 400,000+- acres around Moosehead Lake included only 11,000 acres of permanently conserved land and 382,000 acres in a 30-year, no-development zone. The public reacted strongly against the small amount of permanent conservation, development in the backcountry, and no guarantees for public access. In response, FSM, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), and others began talks with Plum Creek. After many in-depth discussions, Plum Creek's current proposal includes significant additions and improvements.

The amount of land proposed for permanent protection has increased from 11,000 acres to 431,000 acres, an area equal to  $\frac{2}{3}$  the size of the state of Rhode Island, and representing 94% of the total plan area (compared to 2.5% originally). The land will be protected with conservation easements and the acquisition of two tracts of high conservation value: Moose River-No.5 Bog and the Roach Ponds.

There would be two easements, each with similar, strong terms: a 90,000-acre easement contributed by Plum Creek as “balance” to the proposed development, and a 266,000-acre easement acquired jointly by TNC, FSM, and AMC. Easement terms have improved significantly, as well. They guarantee public access and recreation, protect fish and wildlife habitats and other ecological values, protect archaeological and historic sites, and assure sustainable forestry.

Development has also been removed from the far-reaches of Plum Creek’s land, concentrating it near existing development—addressing concerns over wilderness sprawl. The easement lands will surround and permanently contain the development while protecting the natural resource values, remoteness, and opportunities for recreation that exist now.

We find that the choices made in relocating the proposed development maintain the region’s special character and largely avoid negative impacts to natural resources. We recognize the need to minimize the impacts of any development, and are confident the natural resources within and nearby the proposed development areas can be protected through LURC’s final decision and subsequent site-plan reviews.

The conservation benefits of the revised plan are especially noteworthy from a broad, regional context, which is a highly meaningful perspective when working to conserve the values and traditions of Maine’s North Woods. The 431,000 acres proposed for protection

connect with existing conservation lands to form a two million-acre network of conserved lands stretching across Maine's North Woods, linking the St. John River, Moosehead Lake, and Baxter State Park. This expansive conservation landscape would provide unparalleled recreational opportunities and benefits to fish and wildlife, including Canada lynx, brook trout, and pine marten.

LURC requires applicants to include conservation as part of concept plan proposals. When submitting their original application to LURC in 2005, Plum Creek asked FSM to be the holder of their proposed easement, due to our conservation experience in the Moosehead Lake region. Our response to Plum Creek and LURC was that FSM would be interested in holding easements arising from LURC's decision, but we would reserve our decision until after the easements were finalized, and we would expect to work with LURC and the applicant in developing the easement terms and overall conservation outcomes.

We have been doing just that quietly for two-and-a-half years without public fanfare, and can report that the current proposal offers a unique opportunity to bring permanent conservation to a huge tract of land in a manner that will sustain the values, traditions, and character of the region.

FSM was created to serve as Maine's land trust for the North Woods. Our projects have conserved large tracts of forests, lakes, rivers, and mountains, protecting fish and

wildlife habitats, rare and endangered species, and recreational traditions while ensuring sustainable forestry. We currently oversee more than 600,000 acres of conserved land.

We have a long standing interest in the future of the Moosehead Lake region, working with Greenville and other communities on important conservation projects to help maintain the region's special nature. These include Big Spencer Mountain as an ecological reserve and popular hiking destination, Northeast Carry and six miles of Moosehead lakeshore for public access and recreation, and the 329,000-acre West Branch project on the north end of Moosehead Lake.

The real choice before LURC is planned growth with significant conservation or unplanned, sprawling growth with little conservation. The choice is not between the Plum Creek proposal and no further development in the Moosehead region. Growth and development are upon us, whether you think that good or bad. The proposal before LURC offers the planned approach with all attending benefits, including large-scale, permanent conservation. The alternative is the continued fragmentation of forestland and sprawling, piece-meal development of the Moosehead Lake region.

The current proposal, in its much-improved form, presents an historic opportunity we do not see becoming available again to protect a huge tract of land with immense conservation and recreational value. It is an opportunity that must not be missed.

Alan Hutchinson

Executive Director, Forest Society of Maine

Bangor, Maine

[www.fsmaine.org](http://www.fsmaine.org)