

Maine

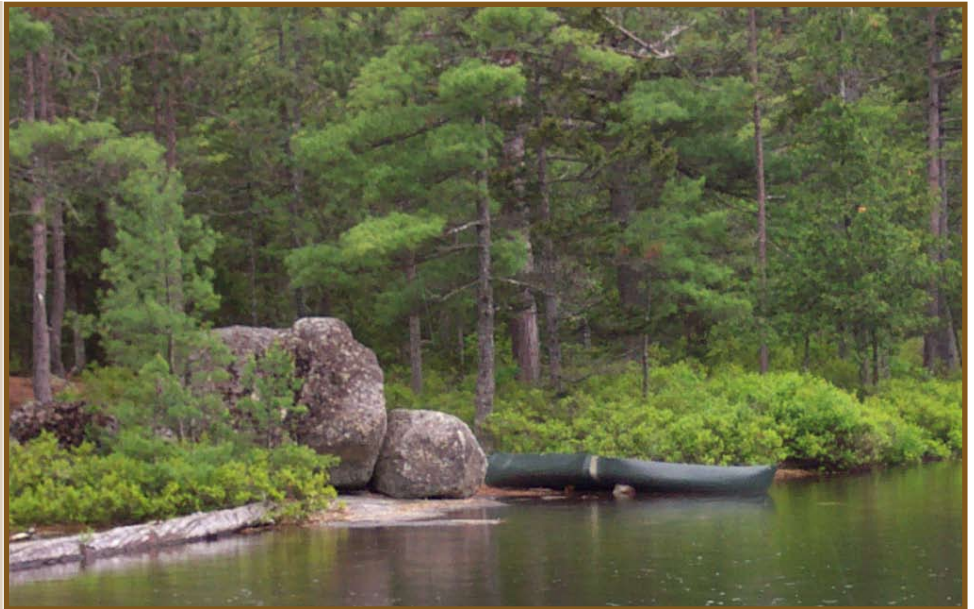
Lower Penobscot Forest

Threatened habitat in Maine's backyard

Maine's backyard - The forests of the Lower Penobscot watershed are an extraordinary resource for the communities of central Maine. Located only a short drive from the major population centers of the region, these forests present great outdoor recreational opportunities for paddling, fishing, hunting and hiking.

Our kids' playground - Because of their proximity to Bangor, these forests serve as an outdoor-activity training ground for the children of the area. Kids come to the Youth Fish and Game Association's headquarters on Pickerel Pond for lessons in fishing, forestry, orienteering and wilderness survival.

Or somebody's new front yard? - *Forests on the Edge*, a 2005 study by the US Forest Service ranked watersheds around the country on the basis of the threat to forests by housing development. The results showed that the forests of the Lower Penobscot watershed are the most threatened private forests in the nation. The forests in Maine's backyard are in real danger of becoming the new front yards of housing subdivisions.



One of the remote ponds within the Lower Penobscot Forest.
©Margaret Pizer/TNC

LESS THAN 15 WELL-PAVED HIGHWAY MILES separate the forests of the Lower Penobscot watershed from Bangor. Less than 10 minutes from these forests, planners have drawn the terminus of an interstate extension. A network of new timber roads throughout the area provides easy access for development. Signs of encroaching subdivisions are everywhere—new houses and “for sale” signs line the edge of Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge to the north and Route 9 to the south.

In the shadow of this looming development lies a natural landscape shaped by ice and water. The retreat of the glaciers after the last ice age left a ridge, called Horseback Esker, where a glacial stream used to run. Groundwater draining through the glacial deposits feeds miles of wetlands, including a raised bog and a kettlehole bog. This land supports acres of old-growth spruce-fir forests and spruce flats, which are becoming rare in the Northeast, and the second largest red pine woodland documented in the state. Hidden trails lead to remote ponds, and Sunkhaze Stream supports a natural trout hatchery. On sections of the Union River, a paddler can go for miles without seeing signs of human impact.



Spotted salamander. ©Pam Wells

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THOUSANDS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN enjoy their first taste of outdoor recreation in these woods and on these ponds. For a dollar each, Maine's Youth Fish and Game Association offers over 500 members aged 15 and under the opportunity to learn about hunting, ice fishing, bird watching—even taxidermy.

“Any day of the winter, you are likely to see more than 100 school kids,” says warden Dave Georgia of the Maine Division of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. “My mission is to get them outdoors and keep them enthusiastic.”



A view of the forests near Great Pond to be protected by conservation easement. ©Margaret Pizer/TNC

Maine Youth Fish and Game Association maintains a lodge and runs educational programs at Pickerel Pond.
©Margaret Pizer/TNC



THE LOWER PENOBSCOT FOREST PROJECT is a partnership between the Conservancy and Forest Society of Maine that will conserve over 42,000 acres. This project is the window to a broader view of conservation in the region—a view that connects the wetlands and woods of Central Maine to the coastal forests and waters of Penobscot and Machias Bays.

The streams of the Lower Penobscot Forests drain into Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge—founded in the late 1980's when the Conservancy purchased over 10,000 acres of raised dome peatlands to protect them from peat mining. The Conservancy will now purchase a conservation easement on more than 12,000 acres along the southeast border of Sunkhaze to establish an ecological reserve.

This reserve will buffer Sunkhaze from development and conserve habitat for its diverse wetland and forest species. The reserve will border Department of Conservation lands and the Lower Penobscot Forest Working Forest Easement, which will be purchased by the Conservancy

for transfer to the state. To the south, the remote ponds and red pine woodlands of the Amherst Tract will be conserved by fee and easement purchases by Forest Society of Maine. To the northeast, Lower Penobscot Forest lands neighbor those protected by the State and the Conservancy in the upper Machias River watershed.

To the west of Sunkhaze, the Penobscot River Restoration Project is slated to remove two dams from the river and bypass a third—reopening the river and its tributaries to eleven species of sea-run fish. The Lower Penobscot Forest Project will preserve the habitat being reopened for Atlantic salmon, shad, alewife and blueback herring along many of the streams and creeks of the watershed.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY is raising public and private funds for this project. Placing these forests under conservation is part of a larger vision of conserved lands stretching from Bangor to Acadia National Park. The opportunity to protect these forests will not be available much longer and the need to protect them from development could not be more urgent.



Black-throated green warbler.
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The Nature Conservancy
14 Maine Street, Suite 401
Brunswick, Maine 04011
tel (207) 729-5181
rvogel@tnc.org
nature.org/maine