

MOOSEHEAD LAKE REGION

Case Study - Pilot Project / [Maine Office of Tourism](#)
2017-2021

Community Destination Academy (CDA) Dates

April 5-May 17, 2017 - four sessions, scheduled a week or two apart, each specifically focused on a local need.

PLACE

- 1.25 million acres in the Maine Woods
- Moosehead Lake region in west central Maine
- Region encompasses roughly a 25-30-mile radius from the center of the Lake
- 1.25 million acres, largely forested, surrounding the lake, is about the size of Delaware.
- Over 100 lakes and ponds, highlighted by the 75,000-acre, 40 mile-long, Moosehead Lake
- Over 16 State agencies have some jurisdiction in the region
- 4.5 hours from Boston; 3.25 hours from Quebec
- To the North: 8 million acres of forest
- To the South: the organized portion of Maine
- Weather and climate are entirely different from Monson, at town just 15 miles south and 500' lower in elevation
- Tourism and the working forest have always provided the economic base for 150 years.
- Most of the region is on its 4th, 5th or 6th forest harvest
- The tourism economy has largely been based upon the allowed use and largesse of the large landowners who share their land with the public.



Greenville, a town in Piscataquis County, is centered on the lower end of Moosehead Lake, the historic gateway and service center into the north country and a popular center for outdoor recreation. Although the loss in population is evident from recent census numbers, the town still services hundreds of miles of unorganized territory as the only organized municipality offering a wide range of services including police, fire, groceries, gas, all season vehicle repairs, search & rescue, health care, shopping, lodging and dining choices.

Population: 2010 - 1,646 / 2019 - 1,501

Elevation: 1,394'

Founded: 1836

Area: 46.13 mi² (42.33 mi² Land / 3.8 mi² Water)

Big Moose Mountain peaks at 3,150 feet over Moosehead Lake and is home to what is thought to be the nation's first fire tower. Once a popular, active ski and resort area, currently the mountain functions as a small recreational hill for local families. The closure of this recreational facility in the mid-90's after a long, slow decline, was the last in a series of economic changes that caused many families to seek jobs and live elsewhere.

Another key Maine visitor attraction is **Moosehead Lake**, a deep, cold-water lake located in Northwestern Maine. The largest lake in New England in one state, and the largest glacially formed mountain lake in the eastern United States, attracts thousands of vacationers every year. Situated in the mostly undeveloped Longfellow Mountains, the lake is the source of the Kennebec River. Iconic **Mt. Kineo** sits on a peninsula in the center of the lake, formerly the largest resort in the northeast, now still offers the challenge of one of the oldest golf courses in the US and a hike to the mountain summit for spectacular 360-degree vistas.

Lake Area: 117.9 mi²

Length: 39.77 mi

Max depth: 246' 0"

Surface elevation: 1,029'



CONTEXT

Population (25-30-mile circle from center of Moosehead Lake)

About 4,200 or 2.5 persons per square mile (federal *wilderness status*)



- Greenville: 1501
- Rockwood: 320
- Jackman: 718
- Shirley: 183
- Unorganized territory: very sparse population
- ½ of region in Piscataquis County, ½ is in Somerset County
- The above counties are two of the least populated and poorest counties and least educated (beyond HS) in Maine

Conservation Efforts

- Through the Plum Creek Concept Plan for 409,000 acres of forest land, 363,000 acres were put into permanent easements allowing for recreation and some limited development in areas close to existing development around the lake.
- The [Appalachian Mountain Club \(AMC\)](#) purchased and conserved 70,000 acres of forest land and began their [Maine Woods Initiative](#).
 - Created over 120 miles of recreational trails.
 - Purchased and transformed three sporting camp facilities, new lodges and amenities that are now available to the public.
 - AMC's marketing efforts and membership have brought new people to the region for back-country experiences.
 - Initiated a partnership with local Piscataquis County schools for conservation education.
 - Practice sustainable forestry to help fund the initiative.
- This investment in conservation has moved the conserved land from less than 10% to nearly 50% in just a few years.
- This conservation effort has retained local values and traditions, kept the working forest intact, and restricted new development to areas already developed.
- Recreation has shifted somewhat from hunting and skiing to activities like hiking, paddling, wildlife watching, fly-fishing, biking and other light adventure.

CATALYST:

Greenville & Moosehead Lake

Loss of Anchor Businesses

- Three lumber mills over 25 years – 1960s - '85
- Decline and loss of ski area/resort hotel - late 80's – mid-90's, marketer for region
- Loss of key whitewater rafting business; significant marketing effort
- Sale of first timeshare lodge in Maine, previously marketed aggressively by 3 realtors
- School and Hospital in jeopardy; two critical institutions for a remote community
 - 25-30% loss in population
 - Three schools closed & shuttered - Rockwood, Shirley, Greenville
 - School enrollment in 1996=374; 2018=216; 2021=172; over 46% loss
- Reorganized the defunct Economic Development Corporation into the [Moosehead Lake Region Economic Development Corporation](#). (MLREDC)
 - Hired [Roger Brooks International](#) to study the situation and offer recommendations
 - Hired [FutureiQ](#) to put the recommendations into a workable Tourism Master Plan to delineate responsibilities for key organizations.



Timeline: Northern Forest Center, Maine Woods Consortium, State of Maine

- [Maine Woods Consortium](#) & Northern Forest center lobbied the Department of Economic & Community Development ([DECD](#)) to create a Destination Development position in the [Maine Office of Tourism](#) (MOT). (2015)
- DECD, MOT determined Moosehead Lake region to be the *pilot region* for destination development because of their significant investment in their own future. (2017)
- Community Destination Academy was held – Spring 2017
- MOT hired *Opportunities Unlimited* to accomplish a Visitor Experience Assessment as a pilot project to further support the region. (September 15, 2017)
- Maine Office of Tourism and Northern Forest Center formed a partnership to deliver Community Destination Academies to communities that exhibited readiness to maintain a focus on their own destination development into the future. (2017)
- Northern Forest Center held a Rally in Greenville with FutureiQ to examine the future of the Maine Woods. (May 16-17, 2018)

ACTIONS TAKEN

Community Destination Academy

The pilot Community Destination Academy (CDA) was a four-part program to build destination development capacity in a high potential rural Destination Area that had already accomplished the Visioning and Master Planning processes with Roger Brooks International and David Beurle of Future iQ respectively.

Maine Woods Consortium, Maine Office of Tourism, and Northern Forest Center piloted this new program in the Moosehead area through these activities:

- **Organizational Consulting** (Nov-March)
The Consortium worked with key local tourism organizations to help them address conflicts, better align missions, and work together toward a shared destination vision



- **Skills Development** (April-May)
Delivered a four-part training series to a core group of 25 committed Moosehead area tourism leaders from across the business, municipal, and non-profit sectors. Specific trainings included:
 - April 5 – *Creating Memorable Visitor Experiences*
 - April 26 – *Finding the Money: Destination Financing for NGOs, Towns and Businesses*
 - May 3 – *Selling Your Story: Destination Marketing*
 - May 10 – *How Teams Get Things Done: Turning Plans into Action*

CDA Project Implementation (May-Sept 2018) – provided financial and technical support to enable CDA participants to collaborate on implementation of two tangible destination development projects. These projects included:

1. **Boardwalk:** Engaging local volunteers to rebuild the lakeside boardwalk that serves as a vital downtown visitor amenity
 - Town supplied materials
 - Significant and well-organized volunteer labor
 - Project completed September 2018
2. **Consolidated Event Marketing:** Worked with organizers of 10 local events to identify opportunities to strengthen their ability to attract visitors and related spending to the Moosehead area
 - Hired a local individual to research each event for details, common issues, needs, budgets and recommendations
 - Submitted an [MOT Enterprise grant](#) application to begin a collaborative evergreen marketing campaign for \$2,400



Northern Forest Center Actions

- Piscataquis County Tourism Innovation Program:
 - business façade and signage program – 12 business beneficiaries
 - business innovation grants - financial assistance to 6 area businesses
- Digital Business Assistance: online marketing and e-commerce assistance with social media consultant – 20 area business participants
- Organizational Development: 1.5 years - technical assistance with chamber of commerce board to stabilize organization and build [Destination Moosehead Lake](#) into a strong marketing organization.

MLREDC Actions

- Accomplished a 60 room Hotel Feasibility Study.
- Contracted for public Wi-fi throughout the downtown.
- Downtown visitor experience beautification program: benches, trash receptacles, flowers, Artisan Village; evening entertainment & gazebo concerts.
- Implemented consistent design for wayfinding signs and installed 80 signs on lower half of the lake. Completed the first phase of wayfinding project with installation of kiosks – Visitor Info Center, Indian Hill Trading Post, downtown Greenville and Rockwood Landing.
- Managed Greenville Business Center and made significant improvements for tenant.
- Purchased and resold commercial waterfront property at 35 Pritham Avenue to two local businessmen who will redevelop the site for future retail, lodging and restaurant options.
- Purchased the open green space at 3 Lakeview Street to establish a public park, named Crafts Landing, offering free public docks, access to and from the lake from downtown and other amenities. Site work, landscaping and dock installation to be completed Summer, 2021. Accessed the Environmental Protection Agency’s Brownfields Program through PCEDC to complete the required environmental assessments of the properties purchased above.
- Established a \$750,000+ revolving loan fund program for businesses seeking to launch, grow and to hire additional staff. Frist loan was awarded March 2021 to begin a new equipment business by a young Greenville resident.
- Acquired a 5.5-acre Spruce Street property in Greenville to work with a developer to build approximately 20 affordably priced homes for people who work in the community. A public forum was held February 2021 for community input. Conversations with developers are underway.
- Supported all efforts to restore and redevelop Moose Mountain ski resort into a four-season resort facility, including fundraising for a legal fund to assist the State’s 4-year legal battle, sharing the economic, demographic analyses and market analysis for a mid-priced destination hotel and conference facility with potential redevelopment investors.
- 3 years - Technical assistance with chamber of commerce board to stabilize organization and build Destination Moosehead Lake into a strong marketing organization.



CDA Budget – Maine Woods Consortium:

Workshop Trainers and Expenses	\$12,100
Facilities & food	\$ 2,675
Project Implementation	<u>\$15,000</u>
	\$29,775

Additional Financial Support:

Northern Forest Center:

Tourism Innovation Program	\$120,000
Digital Business Assistance	\$15,000
Organizational Development	\$34,000
Grant Writing & Match	<u>\$20,000</u>
	\$169,000

Maine Office of Tourism - Marketing Support:

Visitor Experience Assessment	\$25,000
MOT Enterprise Grant	\$ 2,400
MOT Marketing/PR Grant	\$10,000
Explore New England Film Series	\$50,000
MOT Marketing Grant - social media	<u>\$10,000</u>
	\$97,400