

December 8, 2011

Town of Bethel
Attention: Conservation Commission
19 Main Street
P.O. Box 1660
Bethel, ME 04217-1660

Members of the Conservation Commission,

Mahoosuc Pathways, Inc. is a Maine nonprofit corporation based in Bethel. We are dedicated to connecting communities through the development, maintenance and promotion of a multi-use recreational trail network. The Board of Directors of Mahoosuc Pathways, Inc. is pleased to provide input concerning the Bingham Trust lands held by the Town of Bethel. We thank the Water District for the decades of stewardship and care they have dedicated to this parcel. What is now before the community, a large tract of undeveloped land available for public recreation, is a rare opportunity to promote economic development, provide increased opportunity for local outdoor recreation while at the same time complying with the consent decree for the lands.

Mahoosuc Pathways envisions a network of non-motorized, multi-use recreational trails in the heart of Bethel. Well-designed and managed trail networks are a marketable driver for economic development. Providing opportunities for varied and diverse forms of recreation will bring people to the area and benefit local residents and businesses. Local examples of trail-based economic development are Kingdom Trails in Burke, Vermont, and the snowmobile trails in Pittsburg, New Hampshire. Because this parcel is in a central location between downtown Bethel and the Sunday River recreational area, it holds the potential for connecting these two communities more cohesively and tying together the pre-existing opportunities for swimming, hiking, biking and winter activities.

Several Board members have had an opportunity to tour sections of this land. The varied terrain holds the potential for compatible-use roadside recreation, such as mountain biking, hiking and walking trails and winter activities like cross country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. These activities will appeal to a wide audience of local residents and visitors from serious outdoor enthusiasts to families with young children. There are also opportunities for hunting and potentially fishing. This multi-season recreational use would enhance the Bethel community's reputation as a year-round destination and add to the rich texture of our recreational landscape.

More broadly speaking, the central location and easy access to this property would provide increased opportunity for local outdoor recreation for residents with associated health benefits. Our scholastic cross country and mountain bike teams could use the trails for practice and events.

We recognize the unique nature of the property and the need to abide by the consent decree. We support activities compatible with the consent decree, such as the opportunity to integrate low impact recreation on an actively managed woodlot that provides revenue and contributes to the local wood supply and at the same time protects the watershed area.

Mahoosuc Pathways is excited about the promotion of public access to these lands and local management driven by recreational interests and needs in Bethel. We are looking forward to participating in the public comment period and process regarding this parcel.

Sincerely,

Mahoosuc Pathways, Inc

Peter Southam, President

cc: Bethel Town Manager