

**Sears Island Planning Initiative
Steering Committee Meeting
Hutchinson Center, Belfast
July 12, 2006**

SUMMARY OF THIRD MEETING

FAIR PLAY FOR SEARS ISLAND'S VISION (Harlan McLaughlin).

The members of Fair Play For Sears Island have a plan to develop Sears Island into a protected public, non-developed, non-motorized, family recreation area. This plan will limit sprawl and retain the island's wild qualities. It will blend nicely with the four existing State Parks in the area. Though not a State Park itself, Sears Island will be the unique centerpiece of a large regional collection of parks. This is an attractive opportunity to elevate the visibility of Penobscot Bay as a destination with a diversity of examples of Maine's geography to visit. This will increase visitor usage and produce revenues.

We intend to develop specific recreational opportunities for as many different groups as possible for all four seasons. We want increased access to the shore for handicapped individuals, seniors and families. We want hiking trails with interpretive signage crisscrossing the island and becoming more primitive as one proceeds south. Most of these trails already exist in an overgrown condition. The main attraction of the trail system will be the existing perimeter trail that will be the longest maintained oceanside trail in New England [4.57 mi]. These trails will be developed and maintained by a group made up of volunteers, including students from local colleges. The trails will double as cross country and snowshoeing trails during the winter [if it ever snows again]. We plan to encourage wild life and bird watching and beach exploration among enthusiasts.

We believe the potential for generating tourist dollars and the accompanying regional growth is far greater when the island is left in its natural condition. If non-consumptive, nature-based tourism is practiced, in a "leave no trace" manner, our island will be the economic engine that drives our local communities well into the future. It will become more valuable each year, as the available sea shore vanishes. [All the available sea shore has already vanished!] This type of resource management is low in overhead/maintenance costs and takes advantage of the current popularity of nature-based tourism. It is also the route to Gov Baldacci's creative economy.

Some local schools are using the island now and others have expressed interest. We have several schools offering courses that pertain to the resources available on the island and it is a natural choice for field study. That demand is growing. The extent of involvement by the educational community will depend on the wildness of the island and unfettered access to the interior as well as the shore.

In addition to the educational component, the recreation area will provide locals and tourists alike with a seashore experience that is not available anywhere else in New England. We expect to persuade many of the people traveling along route 1, [30,000 cars on a typical summer day]

from Camden to Bar Harbor, to stop in Searsport and experience the island in their own way [then go to Searsport to eat, sleep and spend]. The advertising for the recreation area would be added into the state advertising package and budget. The town of Searsport will be so proud as to post information about the island on their official website. The local bread and breakfast establishments already list this as an attraction on their commercial websites [and they say it is a big draw]. The other advertising will be accomplished by word of mouth. None of these advertising methods increase the local cost of promoting the area. The State of Maine must be convinced of the feasibility and profitability of this type of land use, as it is pushing the rest of the state in that direction. We must take into consideration the value of open space and the public access to the water and sea shore and contrast that with the results of commercialization [can you say "the goose that laid the golden eggs"?]. We must look into the future to foresee the incredible value of this proposal 20-30 years out.

Those that favor some unspecified type of port development will admit they don't have their plans fully developed at this time. Their ideas and "wants" seem to run in no common direction. They seem to be agreed on one point though, it will be better for the people of Maine if we allow the island to sit barricaded and vulnerable to capitalistic whims, while they develop the details of their ideas, just in case.

We maintain there is no indication of an increase in shipping traffic that Mack Point will be unable to handle in the foreseeable future. We understand it isn't wise to try to bind the future with exclusionary legislation and that any sitting legislature can change the rules as they see fit.

So therefore, we suggest a compromise. The people of Maine will add Sears Island to their collection of protected public lands as a non-motorized, non-developed family recreation area. This will include a land management plan similar to those required by LMF that includes a state agency [or 2], a local friends type group and a land trust organization. We understand if or when there appears a legitimate need for a different use of the island and that use is approved by the legislature, the use will change [per 277]. We think it would be nonsensical to keep the people of Maine from enjoying this unique resource until the other side can get its ideas organized. They still have a great deal of work to do. The only reasonable thing to do is implement our idea and wait for them to submit theirs.