

Executive Summary – December, 2007

Mainewatch Institute

### **Rediscovering Forgotten Assets: Trails for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The aim of this project was to develop a model by which small towns and rural areas can more easily identify and develop off-road walking and biking facilities in order to generate a favorable “social climate” for increased physical activity and connection to the natural environment.

The study encompassed the river communities along the lower Kennebec River from Augusta to Bowdoinham and three communities in the Cobbosseecontee Lakes region. The 14 communities that form this region include: Augusta, Hallowell, Farmingdale, Gardiner, Richmond, Dresden, Bowdoinham, Chelsea, Randolph, Pittston, Dresden, Manchester, Winthrop, and Monmouth. The Lower Kennebec River region of Maine is not usually thought of as having significant potential for hiking and biking. An earlier mapping project by the Friends of the Kennebec River Rail Trail (*Lower Kennebec River Trails Inventory*, completed in January, 2005) suggested otherwise for that study found 125 miles of trails or corridors that might have potential as trails. The Mainewatch Institute’s project built upon that earlier work and looked more intensely at what resources may exist in this area.

In addition to existing trails, the project sought to identify forgotten tracks or corridors and determine if these linear features could be located and mapped. If these older, but no longer used, transportation facilities or utility routes could be inventoried, then it becomes possible to explore the feasibility of using the network of routes as the basis for a new interconnected pedestrian and biking system. Using established networks could be more economical to rehabilitate for use as trails rather than attempting to plan and build new facilities, for the environmental permitting required for existing corridors is generally less restrictive than what may apply for a new facility. If landowner permission is needed, owners may be more likely to appreciate the historical continuity that pedestrian and biking trails would have in recycling the use of an old corridor, and consequently more inclined to give their assent.

Mapping was conducted over a three year period between 2005 and 2007. During this period, 126 miles of trails were mapped by Global Position Systems (GPS) and an additional 40 miles were entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS) using existing map sources. The final GIS maps that were produced also feature 99 miles of rangeways and 520 miles of snowmobile trails.

Final maps that were produced for this project include two regional maps showing the northern and southern extents of the Kennebec River Valley as well as individual maps of each town previously mentioned. Because most people are more comfortable and familiar working at the scale of their community, the town-based maps were found to be easier to use than the more complex regional maps.

The results of this study suggest that there are many areas in Maine that should be explored for their potential for developing off road trail networks. There are many miles of “forgotten assets” that traverse Maine’s communities waiting to be rediscovered and explored for future trails development.