

## **RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE**

### **Introduction**

When planning for municipal recreation facilities and programs, the key is to understand and balance the needs of the community with availability of recreation opportunities, programs and funds. The Easton Recreation Department provides a very popular recreation program for all ages. The Department strives to compliment and not compete with other public and private programs and facilities. Local recreation partnerships include Easton Recreation Department, Easton School Department, and several private interests including Maine Winter Sports- Nordic Heritage Center, local ATV and snowmobile clubs, Easton Happy Days Club, Power of Prevention, and many others. These diverse recreation interests collectively support recreational facility and program needs of the community.

The 2010 Census indicates that Easton has a slowly increasing population, an increasing demographic in the 45-64 year old age group and a declining trend in the child bearing age group of 25-44. Given the age of the town's facilities and the diversity of the recreational programs, one area of focus is on the 10 year needs for facility modernization and programs that meet changing demographics and recreation preferences. For example, the "newly retired" tend to be more health conscience and desire year round activity. However, efforts to create jobs and attract population are also part of this 10 year picture so interim review of recreation needs is critical. As growth occurs at a greater rate priorities may need to shift.

Municipal recreation facilities are public facilities and as such, the Town needs to plan for needed investments and upgrades over time. Some of these upgrades are mandated by State and Federal laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act. These facilities are public assets that should be maintained for the long-term benefit of Easton's residents. Capital recreation projects are included in the 10-year capital investment plan found in the section on Fiscal Capacity.

### **Conditions and Trends**

#### Recreation Department

Easton has a well-supported recreation program conducted by the Easton Recreation Department. The Department offers a variety of recreational programs year-round for community members of all ages. Popular youth programs include Summer Day Camp, swim lessons, Zumbatomic, youth sports including soccer, basketball, baseball, T-ball, gymnastics, cheerleading, track and field and cross-country skiing. Other programs include Sneakin' in Science Classes, outdoor adventure activities, holiday crafts, cooking classes and a garden program. Children from Easton, Fort Fairfield, and Mars Hill participate in these popular recreation programs.

Seniors activities are gaining in popularity and include weekly nutrition and exercises classes, holiday gatherings and monthly field trips in and around Aroostook County. The adults in the community stay active with our co-ed softball leagues and Zumba. Special events and school vacation field trips are also well attended and popular. Programs include an Easter Community

Breakfast and Egg Hunt, Christmas Gift Making, Winter Carnival, and Easton Field Days, which is held annually during the summer.

The Department relies on volunteers to maintain and support the wide variety of programs it offers and continually seeks volunteers from the community to help. It is this community support of the recreational programs that make them successful. The Recreation Department is overseen by a thirteen member Recreation Committee. Recreation Committee meetings are called for by the Recreation Director as the need arises.

Private “active” recreation programs are generally associated with clubs or businesses that offer activities that are beyond those covered by public programs. There are two private recreation facilities located in Easton, the Francis Malcolm Science Center with its 3.2 miles of trail system and over 5 miles of cross country ski trails located on private land. Private activities available to Easton residents in nearby communities also include cross-country and downhill skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, biathlon, mountain biking, golf, canoeing, kayaking, camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, weight training, karate, spinning, yoga and dance. These are the activities for which a fee or membership is required in most cases. An example of this is the Nordic Heritage Sports Club located at the Nordic Heritage Center in Presque Isle which offers outdoor programs for everyone in the greater Presque Isle area, regardless of age or level or proficiency. Programs include one-day learn-to ski and bike clinics, citizens’ races and events, youth ski and bike programs, geocaching clinics, full-moon ski tours, biathlon clinics, and social gatherings.

All programs, whether public or private, are important to maintaining health and fitness in the community. A Physical Activity Resource Guide supported by Healthy Maine Partnership’s coalition with the Power of Prevention and Healthy Aroostook is available at [powerofprevention.org](http://powerofprevention.org). This is an extensive guide to physical activity sites available in the region.

The Easton School Department school year programming is comprised primarily of team sports for girls and boys. The sports included are cheerleading, soccer, volleyball, and basketball. School Department facilities are utilized by the Recreation Department for program activities.

Easton residents also are able to utilize the University of Maine at Presque Isle’s Gentile Hall facilities. Facilities include a rock wall, walking track, swimming pool, and multipurpose courts, and a fitness center.

### **Local Facilities and Areas**

Easton has four (4) publically owned and 2 privately owned recreation facilities/areas that support a broad range of activities for all seasons. Snowmobile and ATV trails are also discussed separately. Recreation activities and programming that has been described are supported by public and private areas and facilities summarized in the tables that follow.

### Easton's Public Recreation Facilities/Areas

Name	Parking	Restroom	Activity
Oddfellows Hall	X	X	Serves as the community center. Many of the recreational programs are housed in this location.
Prestile Stream Recreation Area	X	X	Picnicking, fishing, kayaking, canoeing. Rails and stairs are in need of maintenance.
Tennis Court, Basketball Court, and Baseball Field	X		Located next to the School. Tennis court needs major renovations. Basketball courts and baseball fields are also in need of major renovations
Easton School Department	X	X	Playground, basketball court, soccer fields. Gymnasium also is utilized by the Recreation Department for programs such as Zumba. Boys soccer field should be brought up to regulation size. Lighting of soccer fields is also recommended.

Source: Town of Easton, 2014

### Easton Private Recreation Facilities/ Areas

Name	Parking	Restroom	Activity
Francis Malcolm Science Center	X	X	3.2 miles of walking and snowshoeing trails. Pets and vehicles are not allowed.
Cross Country Ski Trails	X		Privately owned 5 mile trail system. User Fee basis

Source: Town of Easton 2014

Prestile Stream and Rivere du Chute are well known trout fisheries. However, access is mostly through private land. If fishing is to be promoted, access must be developed and promoted. There is no formal public access to the stream and most access crosses private property. The Maine Departments of Conservation, Transportation, and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife provide programs to help municipalities secure and develop public access opportunities.

Revitalizing the Prestile Stream Recreational area, located behind the Town Office, is a priority for the town. The access point is currently chained off due to past vandalism at the site. However, this recreation facility is located in the center of the community and there is the potential for hosting events during Easton Days and at other times. Town officials will seek grants to update the pavilion, add barbeque grills and picnic tables, upgrade the railings and

stairs, add lighting, and develop a system for limiting vehicle access. There is also the possibility of constructing a hand carry boat launch.

## **Regional Opportunities**

Easton and the central Aroostook region have an extensive network of mapped trails and access points for land and water based recreation during all seasons. Snowmobile and ATV trail information and maps are readily available from the Association of Aroostook Chambers of Commerce, [visitaroostook.com](http://visitaroostook.com) and at most Chamber of Commerce offices. The 2,200 mile snowmobile trail system is maintained by about 40 local clubs and the 1,200 mile ATV trail system is maintained by about 28 local clubs. Hiking, mountain biking and canoe/kayak trails are available throughout the region and include Aroostook State Park, the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, North Maine Woods, Maine Public Reserve Lands and others. There are 31 mapped water trails in the region that comprise about 250 miles for paddling. Trails and trail information is supported by many public and private entities. Detailed information is available on-line at several locations including [GoAroostookOutdoors.com](http://GoAroostookOutdoors.com) and the North Maine Woods and Maine Department of Conservation websites.

Easton maintains an impressive and extensive ATV and snowmobile trail systems. According to the Maine Department of Conservation, there are 25 miles of snowmobile trail and 27 miles of ATV trail located in town (some of the segments are colocated). The Easton TrailBreakers maintains the snowmobile trail system. Interconnected trail systems (ITS) 83 extends northerly through Easton from Mars Hill. There are also local trails (81A, 81B, and 81C) and several small connectors maintained by the club. All of the trail system is located on private land in Easton. The Club maintains a groomer that was purchased by the town and relies heavily on volunteers to maintain equipment and the trail systems.

A majority of Easton's ATV trail system is located to the east of Route 1-A and maintained by the Easton ATV Club. The club maintains approximately 27 miles of local trails, mostly on local roads and private land as well as a small club house/building on the Rivere du Chute area where equipment is stored. There are connections to the Presque Isle system located just to the south of Perry Drive. They receive funding through membership dues and the Department of Conservation (DOC) for trail maintenance. The club applies to DOC every year for expense reimbursement for trail projects.

## **Key Regional Facilities and Areas**

**Big Rock Ski Area:** Established in 1960, Bigrock Ski Area was purchased in 2000 by the Maine Winter Sports Center (MWSC) through grants available from the Portland, Maine - based Libra Foundation. Extensive brush clearing, trail reconditioning and cutting, improved snowmaking capabilities, reconditioned and new lifts, as well as new grooming equipment have made the slopes more enjoyable for all skill levels. Cross-country skiing and snowshoe trails, as well as a snow-tube park, add variety to the region's winter sports experience. Bigrock's lodge has been expanded to include a new cafe with hot food off the grill along with homemade soups, sandwiches, and snacks.

Aroostook State Park: Aroostook State Park, encompassing Quaggy Jo Mountain and Echo Lake, has the honor of being Maine's first state park. In 1938, citizens of Presque Isle donated 100 acres of land to the State of Maine, and in 1939 the park became reality. In 2014, the park totals nearly 800 acres thanks to subsequent donations and purchases.

Amenities in the park include 30 campsites that can accommodate tents and trailers, hot showers, a kitchen shelter with lights and running water, and over 7 miles of hiking, cross country, and snow shoeing trails located in the park. The park also contains a handicap accessible lakeside picnic area with picnic tables, charcoal grills, a swimming area and changing facilities. The boating area offers ample space for parking, launching and docking. Canoes and kayaks can be rented at the control station. Activities at Aroostook State Park include birdwatching, boating (motorized), camping, canoeing, cross-country skiing, fishing, hiking (trails), snowmobiling, snowshoeing, swimming, walking (roads and paths), and watchable wildlife. The park is maintained by the State Of Maine.

The Nordic Heritage Center: The Nordic Heritage Center (NHC) is a four-season outdoor recreation facility in Presque Isle which is managed and operated by the Nordic Heritage Sport Club. The facility includes a world class cross country ski and biathlon venue with a stadium and lodge, a team wax building, and 20 kilometers of cross country ski trails and over 20 miles of mountain bike trails. The lodge is open to the public from 6 am to 10 pm and includes kitchen facilities, restrooms, shower rooms, and a sauna. The trails are free to the public.

The mountain bike trails at the NHC include over 20 miles of hand made and machine made single track that crosses most of the Maine Winter Sports property and some adjacent properties. Rich Edwards of IMBA's Trail Solutions designed the majority of the trail system. The trails wind through different forest types and vary from smooth and fluid to narrow and technical. Moderate to expert line options such as log skinnies, exposed bedrock outcrops, and natural drops can be found on some of the trails. A skills/terrain park is available for practicing dirt jumps and other technical features such as skinnies, log obstructions, stairs, teeter totters, etc.

Scopan Public Reserved Lands: Located between Presque Isle and Ashland, the 16,700-acre Scopan Management Unit contains some of the most rugged terrain in this part of the state. In addition to 1400-foot-high Scopan Mountain and 9.5 miles of shoreline on Scopan Lake, it also has low hills, wetlands, brooks, and a small pond. This forested area, bordering a scenic lake, attracts visitors who enjoy hunting, fishing, and camping in a semi-remote setting. Water access campsites on the lake shore and snowmobile trails through the woods are the most popular destinations for visitors. There is a public boat launch facility located on the western end of the lake in Masardis.

Allagash Wilderness Waterway: The Allagash Wilderness Waterway (AWW) was established by the Maine Legislature in 1966 to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural beauty, character, and habitat of this unique area. It is a magnificent, 92-mile-long ribbon of lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams winding through the heart of northern Maine's vast commercial forests. In 1970 the Waterway was named the first state-administered component of the National Wild and Scenic River System. The AWW is most accessible to Easton residents via the North Maine Woods

checkpoint in Ashland or Portage Lake. Most outdoor recreation opportunities are available. Entry fees are required.

The North Maine Woods (NMW): The NMW is a Multiple Ownership - Multiple Use Management Area. The NMW organization is a non-profit corporation contracted to manage the public recreational use of 3.5 million acres of mostly private and some public commercial forest. NMW provides visitors with valuable information on forest resource management and recreational use that is designed to help them have a safe and pleasant trip in the working forest. Fees are charged for day use and overnight camping and seasons passes are available. Access is available at four checkpoint gates approximately one hour from Easton off State Route 11 in Oxbow, Ashland, Portage Lake, and Winterville. Gates are both staffed and automated 24/7 for most of the year.

### **Recreational Needs in Easton**

Addressing unmet needs in recreation programming and facilities requires a financial commitment, a sense of community priorities, and an understanding of the benefit-cost relationship. The latter is strongly influenced by the longevity of the program or facility. Easton's focus on traditional and family oriented recreation activities has resulted in many longstanding programs and facilities that have served the Town well for decades. Recreation programming and facility needs identified during the planning process are listed below and detailed in the analyses section.

#### **Public Recreation Programming Needs**

1. Special programs for "at risk" teens that do not participate in sports or existing extracurricular programs.
2. Enhanced safety training for young ATV and snowmobile riders.
3. Establish on-going walk and bike to school program following a Safe Routes to School evaluation.
4. Expand athletic and sports programs for grades 7-12 to improve access and participation beyond what is offered by junior high and high school teams.
5. Host Hunter's Safety courses.
6. Survey high school as to their needs for recreational programs.

#### **Public Recreation Facility Needs (See Capital Investment Plan)**

1. Reconstruction of tennis courts as grants become available.
2. Construction of a hand carry boat ramp on Prestile Pond behind the town offices.
3. Improved access to the Odd Fellows Hall to meet American with Disabilities requirements. Includes the construction of ramps and widening of any doorways.
4. Identify through signage a dedicated pedestrian/bike trail along Station, Center, Conant Roads and other suitable locations. This may also include the development of mapping to show users amenities and trail locations.
5. Explore the development of a new trailhead access points for snowmobilers and ATV riders in the downtown area.
6. Install lights at the soccer field.
7. Construct a regulation boys' soccer field as grants become available.

8. Construct softball fields behind Junior and Senior High School.
9. Designate crosswalks along Center Road where sidewalks change sides. This would be primarily near the school

## **Analyses**

Easton has a slowly increasing population and a demographic shift toward an increasing number of persons in the 45-64 year old age group. Based on these facts, recreation facilities and programs available locally and in the region would meet community needs. Overall participation remains strong in the youth programs that are offered and adult programming is steadily increasing. The Recreation Department's budget has remained relatively stable but Town officials should be watchful for stagnation which could limit its capacity to raise matching funds for capital projects that could be partially or substantially funded by grants. The town is applying for grants to reconstruct the tennis courts and may need matching funds in order to obtain those grants.

Recreation services could be expanded to focus on areas that increase overall participation by all age groups and that foster a healthier community. For example, to better accommodate the "newly retired", ages 58 – 70, new programs that encourage physical and social activity during all seasons would be most beneficial. Examples include everything from chess, travel and dinner clubs to field trips. Fortunately the Town has strong partnerships with surrounding communities and is able to use regional indoor facilities.

To address pedestrian and bike safety issues on multi-use trails and along roads, expanded safety training for young ATV riders, should be developed and required. The Town may also wish to conduct community-wide bikeability and walkability evaluation through the use of UMPI students or volunteers from the community. The town may also wish to consider the development of a "safe routes to school" program. There may need to be some community education regarding these programs in order to establish public support for implementation. Additionally the Town will work with the MaineDOT to designate cross walks in appropriate locations.

Easton has three facilities, the Odd Fellows Hall, tennis courts, and Prestile Stream Recreational area that are in need of updates and upgrades. The Town may be faced with making significant investments in old facilities in the near future. ADA laws may eventually force the issue of accessibility compliance at the Odd Fellows Hall. Similarly the existing tennis court requires complete reconstruction and the town is in the process of obtaining grant funding to do so. It is the Town's intent to bring those courts back to a usable condition.

As stated above the Prestile Stream facility may be required in the near future to improve safety and increase usage. Projects may include, as grants become available, upgrade of the pavilion, add barbeque grills and picnic tables, upgrade the railings and stairs, add lighting, and develop a system for limiting vehicle access.

Easton's open space, including the snowmobile and ATV trail systems, directly support tourism which represents a well-established economic engine for the town and traditional access to

private lands for recreation is still extensive in Easton. Most land is not posted and some landowners support access by permission only. As a result, there is little pressure to use public funds to acquire land for public use. Some land has been closed off as a result of ownership changes, residential development in rural areas and abuses by users. There has not been a great threat of development that may eliminate the landowners permitted use by the public. However, there is no assurance of long term public use of these popular areas.

Recreational trails in the community are well maintained because of a distinct combination of public and private efforts. Financial support including staff time comes from the Town and the Maine Department of Conservation at the State level. Cooperating landowners and volunteerism ensures that maintenance work on the trail systems is completed. The snowmobile club may find it necessary to consider looking at alternate funding sources in the future if State funding for trail maintenance tightens any further. This would be a sensible move and may even help improve maintenance of the local club trails. The ATV club has relied on the extensive use of public roads to access trails on private land and in neighboring communities. This helps alleviate the trail maintenance responsibility.

## RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

### Policies & Strategies

#### State Goal

Promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities including access to surface waters.

#### Local Goal

Improve existing recreation facilities and expand opportunities for all forms of recreation to benefit residents and as a tool to attract visitors, new residents and to enhance the local economy.

#### POLICY

Maintain and upgrade existing recreational facilities and Parks as necessary to meet present and future needs.

Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe
Support and seek grant funding for the reconstruction of the tennis courts, basketball courts lights for the soccer field, a regulation sized softball field and to address ADA compliance issues at the Odd Fellows Hall.	Town Officials and Recreation Dept.	2016-17
Continue to budget for building repairs and maintenance and transfer budgetary surplus to recreation reserve for capital improvements.	Town Officials and Recreation Dept.	2018
Continue to request capital improvement funds in the annual recreation budget to be used as matching funds for capital improvement grants.	Recreation Dept. and Town Officials	On-going
Consider the development of public recreational facility “adoption” programs to the local scouting organizations, clubs, groups and civic organizations to support maintenance and beautification of these assets.	Town Officials, Recreation Dept. and Planning Board	2016-17
Construct a playground located in the village area or around the subdivisions.	Planning Board, Highway Dept., and Town Officials	2017

**POLICY**

Implement recreation programming that fills service gaps and that is complimentary and collaborative with the Easton School Department.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Continue to support athletic and sports programs that create greater opportunity for participation at all grade levels	Town Officials	On-going
Continue to seek public/private grant funds for programs that support the needs and interests of all youth.	Recreation Dept., and Town Officials	On-going
Maintain recreational programming to meet present interests and needs of all students.	Recreation Dept. and Town Officials	On-going
Continue to develop programming to meet the older age groups through the adult education program	Town Officials, and Recreation Dept.	On-going
Form partnerships that help develop programs for teens that do not presently participate and that help deter risky, inappropriate or unproductive behavior.	School Dept., Recreation Dept., and Town Officials	On-going 2017

**POLICY**

Maintain, expand and improve walking and recreational trail systems and open space as an asset to the community and in support of economic development, private businesses and recreation organizations.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Continue to contact landowners at least once annually for appreciation and recognition.	Clubs and Town Officials	2016 and annually
Study feasibility of the development of ATV and snowmobile trailer parking and trail access at appropriate locations.	Clubs and Town Officials	2017
Continue to seek grant funding and to raise private matching funds for parking including trailers and service facilities at trailheads	Town Officials	On-going
Raise funds through grants, club fundraisers and private donations for the development of shelters that serve all trail systems.	Clubs, Town Officials, and Recreation Dept.	2016 and on-going
Continue to participate in the new Maine ATV interconnecting trail system (MATS) and support its growth.	Clubs, Planning Board, and Town Officials	On-going
Continue to be responsive to trail neighbor and owner concerns regarding noise, dust and other issues.	Clubs and Town Officials	On-going

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Through the local clubs, implement an annual landowner awareness program to educate existing and perspective trail landowners on tax incentives and insurance benefits available to them. Seek funding for the purchase of a new snowmobile trail groomer.	Recreation Dept., Clubs, and Town Officials	On-going
Seek the input and support of the MaineDOT and the Nordic Heritage Center to construct paved shoulders along roads that have high bike and pedestrian usage.	Recreation Dept.	2019

## **POLICY**

Maintain, expand and improve recreational access to waters as an asset to the community and in support of economic development.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Continue to budget for maintenance and apply for grants for capital improvements at the Prestile Stream Recreational area.	Recreation Dept., and Town Officials	On-going
Work with interested groups, landowners and the Central Aroostook Soil and Water Conservation District to map all known access points to the Prestile Stream, Rivere du Chute, and other water bodies. These should include both public (secure) and private (unsecure) locations	Town Officials	2016 and on-going
Develop a plan to secure access to these water bodies when the opportunity arises.	Town Officials	2019