

# Proposed Downeast Maine National Heritage Area

Map by: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. National Park Service, and the Maine Office of GIS



Proposed Downeast Maine National Heritage Area Map.



## CHAPTER 4

# Proposed Location & Introduction to the Region

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Chapter 4 evaluates Criterion 9 of the required criteria for National Heritage Area designation.

Criterion 9 - A conceptual boundary map is supported by the public.

## Downeast Maine - What's in a Name?

### *Location*

The term “Downeast” comes from the direction ships sailed from New York and Boston—downwind and to the east. During the late 1700’s and throughout the 1800’s, sailors used their schooners to haul goods to and from the coast of New England. While moving in a northeasterly direction, especially during the warmer months, a strong wind would often be at their backs pushing them along. This was moving “downwind” in the direction that the prevailing wind was blowing, to the East.

The two terms “down” and “east” have been combined over time as an expression of a geographic area used in reference to many coastal



*Downeast Maine is located at the easternmost edge of the continental US and at the 45th Parallel. It overlooks and is exposed to the vastness and fury of the Atlantic Ocean. In some ways, Downeast Maine is at the edge of the world. In other ways, it is at the center of a wonderland of natural resources and scenic beauty.*

geographies along the entire coast of New England and Canada's Maritime Provinces, an area that closely corresponds to the historical French territory of l'Acadie or Acadia. Nowadays the term is relational with Boston as the referent for determining what is "Downeast". In Maine, "Down East" is most often defined as the easternmost coastal section of the state, roughly between the Penobscot River and the St. Croix Rivers and encompassing Washington and Hancock Counties. And, to many, the "real Downeast" begins with the Schoodic region, at the Hancock/Sullivan bridge on Taunton Bay. This is the western edge of a more rural landscape, an economy still reliant on commercial fisheries, and a people who necessarily embody a more "rugged," resilient personality.

Above: West Quoddy Head Lighthouse - West Quoddy Head Lighthouse sits on the easternmost point of the continental US and welcomes the day's first rays of sunlight. The red and white striped lighthouse is the only "candy striped" tower in the Nation. During its lifetime the lamp has been illuminated with whale oil, lard oil, kerosene and electricity. Full automation eventually eliminated need for a resident Keeper. The first floor of the lightkeeper's residence, which housed generations of light-keeping families, is now occupied by a visitor center featuring interactive displays, historic photos and information, and a gallery of local artists. Photo by Jerry Monkman.

The geographic area proposed for designation as a National Heritage Area includes the entirety of Washington and Hancock Counties, from the St. Croix River to the Penobscot River, and from the Bold Coast to the Grand Lakes. The **Downeast Maine National Heritage Area** refers to this two-county region.

The proposed National Heritage Area spans 5,603 square miles of land and ocean between the Penobscot River and St. Croix River, from the Bold Coast to the Grand Lakes. It includes 2 counties, 78 towns, 3 cities, 49 Unorganized Territories, 19 Unincorporated Villages, and 2 Passamaquoddy Tribal Reservations.

The coastline is characterized by bold granite formations, maritime forests that harbor rare and unusual plant communities, an archipelago of islands, and ecologically rich bays and estuaries. Just inland, the forested landscape is pocked with clear kettle lakes and expanses of wild blueberry barrens. A range of bald mountains and a spider web of streams and rivers stretch across sandy glacial plains to connect the inland region and the sea. Many hundreds of miles of land and water trails on tens of thousands of conserved acres provide public access to this relatively unspoiled landscape.



*Porcupine Islands, Bar Harbor – The Porcupine Islands archipelago as seen from the top of Cadillac Mountain is one of the most photographed views in Acadia National Park. The islands reveal how the incredible weight of the Laurentide Ice Sheet sheared off the tops of land formations during its north to south migration and pushed the materials to the downside. During the French and Indian War, French gunboats hid among the Porcupines waiting to ambush British ships; in Prohibition times, rum runners frequented Rum Key on their illegal liquor forays to and from Canada. Today, the Porcupines are known among paddlers as one of the best sea kayaking spots in the United States. Photo by Traci Hosmer.*

The region abuts New Brunswick, Canada to the northeast. South and east of the region, just offshore, is a narrow band of islands, and then the Gulf of Maine, Bay of Fundy and the wide open Atlantic Ocean.

To the west and southwest are smaller cities and larger towns, traditionally bustling tourism hubs and dense service centers, connected to the rest of the nation by US Route 1 and Interstate 95.

The region is bookended to the west by Fort Knox National Historic Site, to the south by Acadia National Park, to the east by Roosevelt-Campobello International Park, and to the north by the St. Croix Island International Historic Site.

## Naming the NHA

Naming the National Heritage Area occurred through a combination of public discussion, working group discussions, and several voting sessions. Name suggestions conjured descriptions of physical place, elements of the “personality” or essence of the place, and aspects of the heritage story. A number of options were offered for a vote – of those options, public feedback and final votes revealed these preferred choices:

- Downeast Maine NHA – 15 votes
- First Light NHA – 5 votes
- Wild Downeast NHA – 4 votes
- Downeast Waters NHA – 3 votes
- Dawnland Waters NHA - 1 votes
- A different variation of these – 3 votes

Much discussion ensued about the name “Downeast NHA.” Differences of opinion about what is the “real Downeast” have occurred for generations. The term “Downeast” has been used to describe the entire coast of Maine. But people from Washington and Hancock Counties have long assumed the term Downeast as an aspect of their unique cultural identity based around the historic maritime heritage and continued economic dependence on marine resources.

Many feel the term is overused and even “adulterated” by those outside of Washington and Hancock Counties. Maine’s largest monthly magazine, which often focuses on upscale living in southern and mid-coast Maine, is titled Down East Magazine. Amtrak named its passenger train service between Boston and Brunswick, Maine the Downeaster.

Ultimately, **Downeast Maine National Heritage Area** was chosen for the following reasons:

- The name is closely associated with the area and recognizable by both visitors and locals.
- Downeast often connotes a vision of the hardy and adaptable people and the authentic, enduring fishing villages of Washington and Hancock Counties.
- Assuming the name for the National Heritage Area reinforces the region's "claim" to the term as part of their geographic and cultural identity.

## Winds of Change

Downeast Maine is poised to explode in popularity as a destination for travelers seeking untrammeled rural living and accessible outdoor activities. Visitation trends captured by the Maine Office of Tourism and regional visitor centers have shown for years that visitors are moving away from crowded Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park in search of more



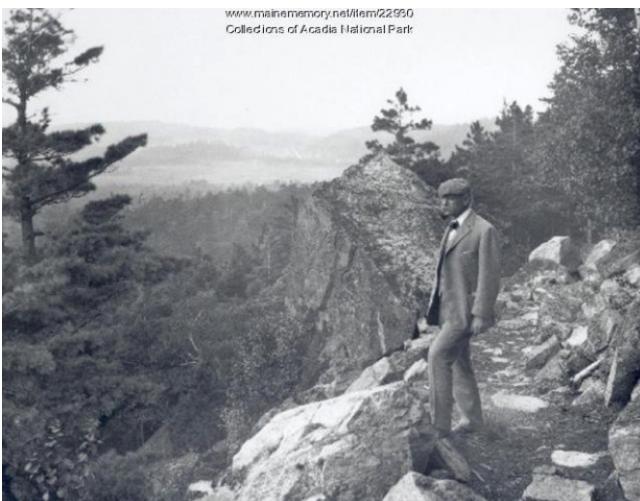
*Biking the Bold Coast National Scenic Byway - The Bold Coast National Scenic Byway skirts the easternmost edge of the United States along the Gulf of Maine and Bay of Fundy. The Byway connects travelers with the nation's last vestige of a natural resource-based maritime culture, where turning tides and changing seasons dictate daily survival and people have influenced the nation's formation since glaciers receded. The Byway connects a network of public conservation lands abundant with natural resources, coastal and riverine villages with well-preserved historic districts and working waterfronts, and the people that inhabit, value, and depend upon these landscapes. Photo courtesy of BikeBoldCoast.com*

peaceful experiences in the less populated areas to the east. Visitor awareness about the area's unique and accessible natural assets, welcoming communities, and lack of crowds is growing. Development and promotion of the Schoodic National Scenic Byway, Black Woods Scenic Byway, and Bold Coast National Scenic Byway and Bikeway, and the tens of thousands of open space and recreation areas held by land trusts contribute to this change.

DownEast Acadia Regional Tourism is the Destination Marketing Organization charged with marketing and promoting Washington and Hancock Counties, known collectively as DownEast Acadia, one of the eight tourism regions designated by the State of Maine.

A main goal of DownEast Acadia Regional Tourism, Maine Office of Tourism, and other regional destination development, destination marketing, and land management agencies across the region is to help visitors find the less-visited places. Moving visitors to underutilized places helps relieve pressure on Mount Desert Island and spread economic benefit to other parts of the region. It also helps more people to learn about and connect with the unique and often overlooked stories of Downeast Maine.

Maine Office of Tourism 2020 visitation data shows that the DownEast Acadia region experienced some of the greatest growth in visitation across Maine, despite Covid-induced travel restrictions,



George Dorr, the “Father of Acadia National Park” – George Dorr was an American preservationist. Known as the “father of Acadia National Park, he spent most of his adult life bringing the park into being, caring for the park, and expanding it. It was Dorr’s vision and passion that ensured these lands would be set aside for preservation and protection for future generations. Acadia was the first National Park in the eastern United States, one of the first in the entire system, and its establishment helped spur the national land conservation movement. Photo courtesy of Acadia National Park.

and perhaps because of it. Second-home owners arrived early and stayed late. Maine residents who previously weren’t aware of the assets and quality of life right in their own backyards flocked to DownEast Acadia. Registered Maine Guides, wildlife boat tours, and bike/boat rentals were booked solid. Inns, rental homes, cabins, and campgrounds were full. For these businesses, increased visitation was critical to their survival. But increased visitation in natural areas brought management challenges that conservation organizations were unprepared to handle at such a rapid pace of change.

The 2020 season brought, for the first time outside of the main section of Acadia National Park, an over-extension of capacity at many recreation areas despite

the relatively large number of trails and parks dispersed across the region. State, federal, and regional land managers report increased amounts of litter, human waste around parking areas, illegal camping, trail deterioration on fragile soils, and unsafe parking along roadways. The famed Cutler Coast trail on the Bold Coast was observed to have over 100 cars parked along the gravel shoulder of the public road - the official parking lot has a true carrying capacity of 15- 20 vehicles. Trail rescues and injuries increased - most being visitors with little experience in active outdoor recreation.

Acadia National Park's Mount Desert Island (MDI) division is among the top ten most popular national parks in the United States. Visitation has surged almost 60 percent in a decade to over 3.5 million per year, leading to severe crowding and unsafe conditions. The National Park Service is developing a transportation plan and new visitor welcome center to reduce congestion and conflicts among people traveling on park roads and protect park resources.

The popularity of Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor has negatively affected various aspects of local life on MDI, even as businesses rely on the high volume of customers. Housing is scarce, and costs are out of reach for summer workers, year-round renters, and first-time home buyers. Recreation areas frequented by locals can be inaccessible during the peak season. Streets and sidewalks are congested, daily commute times increase, and restaurants are full.

Organizations and communities across the region have, for decades, collaborated in assessment of natural and cultural resources and creation of tools that promote economic and community development through connection with and continuation of heritage. Much has been learned through concerted efforts to collaboratively develop, manage, and promote what people hold dear. Regional efforts have gathered momentum in recent years, but communities suddenly find themselves required to take a large leap forward in the capacity to grow to meet a sudden surge in demand. Given the anticipated continued trend of heavy use, communities do not have the same luxury of gradual change they have traditionally worked within.

*Now more than ever it is imperative for the region to collectively guide growth and development to preserve the most important aspects of local heritage and engage residents and visitors in being good stewards of what the people most value. National Heritage Area designation will enable thoughtful, coordinated, sustainable management of the current growth trends, right when the need is most critical.*

## Mapping Boundaries

People who live in Downeast Maine are very clear that rural living is important to their identity.

***Their entire way of life is built within the context of intact natural resources, open spaces, and long-standing cultural traditions.*** The idea to form a National Heritage Area began with a group of wild blueberry farmers in Washington County committed to preserving a landscape and economic sector inherent only to this part of the world, and a lifestyle deeply valued by the people who live here. As the process ensued it became clear that wild blueberries are intricately connected to and do not stand apart from the greater story of our glacial landscape, intact natural resources, community values, and outdoor recreation resources.

People do not want their communities to become crowded and the rural aspects of life to become degraded. A common refrain across the region, especially further east, is “We don’t want to become Bar Harbor.” Another common concern in Washington County is that, as the traditional primary attraction for tourism, Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park receive the majority of attention - from visitors, developers, funders, promotion entities, and more. Because Washington and Hancock Counties are linked together as one of the eight tourism regions designated by the State of Maine, known as DownEast Acadia, even the most reliable economic information is skewed toward what happens on Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park.

Many people assume this is because of Acadia National Park and ignore the significance of a shared French history from Castine to Calais and St Croix Island. Designation of the region as the Downeast Maine National Heritage Area is designed to promote all of the two-county region and spread attention, visitors, and resources more evenly throughout.

**Washington and Hancock Counties differ greatly from each other in population density and the personal wealth of residents. However, their history, economy, landscape elements, cultural and natural resources, transportation routes, and community members are inextricably bound together. And people at both ends of the region are interested in collectively shaping the future of Downeast Maine in ways that protect these elements.**

*People at both ends of the region are interested in collectively shaping the future of Downeast Maine...*



*Above: Bastille Day, Picnic en Blanc - Bastille Day in Castine pays homage every July 14th to the French roots of the community. The French National Day is the anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, a major event of the French Revolution, as well as the Fête de la Fédération that celebrated the unity of the French people on July 14, 1790. Photo by Susan Adams.*

a line based on political boundaries or concerns over resource allocations would be a disservice to telling a cohesive and accurate story. The possibility of excluding everything west of the Schoodic region was also discussed. Ultimately, people agreed that a **National Heritage Area boundary inclusive of both counties will bring more strength to all communities to connect residents, manage visitors, and leverage opportunities.**

***During the second stage of NHA development – Management Planning – priority areas of focus for financial and other support will be identified based on locations and integrity of existing heritage resources, contributions these resources can make to the story and goals, opportunities to expand upon these resources, and the local need for assistance to do so.***

In October 2019 a Summit was convened to broaden the conversation with a wider group of stakeholders and to consider all the stories of Downeast Maine. The Summit was attended by 40+ participants from local businesses and non-profit organizations in both Washington and Hancock Counties. The Summit did not attempt to define a geographic scope for the proposed NHA, but participants agreed that important framing determinants for the boundary are the glacially influenced landscape, natural resources economy, and shared history.

The necessary decision about where to draw the NHA boundary raised questions about whether or not to include Mount Desert Island, or indeed any of Hancock County at all. Some people expressed adamance that doing so would rob Washington County of much needed assistance and long overdue recognition. Others strongly believed that the region's heritage is so intertwined that to draw