



**Night Skies** - With the rapid loss of dark skies to light pollution, Downeast Maine has some of the last pristine, star-filled night skies in the eastern United States. It is estimated that 99 percent of residents of the United States and Europe live under light polluted skies and nearly 80 percent of the world's population experiences skyglow at night.



## CHAPTER 5

# Downeast Maine's Nationally Significant Heritage Story

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Chapter 5 evaluates Criterion 2 of the required criteria for National Heritage Area designation.

**Criterion 2: Reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that are a valuable part of the national story.**

A proposed National Heritage Area must demonstrate its significance as a **Nationally Important Landscape** according to the National Park Service's Feasibility Study Guidelines. **Nationally Important Landscapes** are places with regional and national stories that, together with their associated natural and/or cultural resources, enable the American people to understand, preserve, and celebrate key components of the multifaceted character of the nation's heritage. This term includes an ecological and cultural context of historic and cultural sites, along with the ecosystems and human communities surrounding those sites.

A **Significance Statement** and list of **Interpretive Themes** are required as part of the Feasibility Study. A **Significance Statement** expresses why and how a proposed area is nationally important and what exceptional values or qualities it holds that demonstrate this. **Interpretive themes**

support the most important ideas or concepts within the Significance Statement and help communicate the area's significance and its relevance to people visiting or living within a National Heritage Area. Together they show how the proposed NHA meets Criterion 2, and they ultimately guide the future direction of a National Heritage Area.

Downeast Maine communities have engaged in well over a decade of region-wide public outreach around heritage tourism planning and development, and more recently around National Heritage Area and Destination Development work. The significant and consistent public input and information gathered over the years underscores that the Downeast Maine study area has a unique and nationally important story beloved by many, as well as the potential and desire to better support interpretation of that story and expand on opportunities.

The Significance Statement and Interpretive Themes of the Downeast Maine National Heritage Area are based on public feedback and ideas gathered over many years of regional collaborations and expressed during more recent public discussions and individual outreach, and the many Working Group committee discussions.

## Statement of Significance

*The rich natural resources of Downeast Maine enabled the Wabanaki to thrive for 12,000 years, attracted the first French settlement in the nation, sparked the first naval battle of the American Revolution, and provided vital building materials and food supplies for growing American cities. The natural resources that supported human population and helped to build the east coast and American nation remain intact and vital to the culture, environment, economy, and identity of Downeast Maine.*



*Passamaquoddy Canoe, Abbe Museum - This birchbark canoe, displayed at the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, represents thousands of years of traditional Wabanaki knowledge handed down from generation to generation. It is nearly identical to the ones used to greet French visitors over four-hundred years ago.*

Downeast Maine is a place and a people shaped by water, bedrock, and climate since the Laurentide Ice Glaciers melted away some 10,000 to 14,000 years ago. The resulting landscape, seascape, and climate have provided plentiful resources for humans to thrive for at least 10,000 years.

Despite several hundred years of substantial change, Wabanaki people remain connected with their culture and continue traditions within their schools, cultural centers, and communities.

This hard, generous, enduring, resilient, and breathtakingly beautiful place has fundamentally shaped the lifestyles, industries, pastimes, beliefs and behaviors, and the way people interact with each other and with the natural splendor around them.

The rich history of this region's role in the nation's formation remains visible because of the uniquely unspoiled character of Downeast Maine, and the lightly developed open views of rivers, coastline, lakes, forests, and wild blueberry barrens. The coastline and inland waterways that provided travel routes for the Wabanaki and enabled European exploration remain navigable and abundant with wildlife. Landscape features that were key to mapping the eastern part of the nation are intact today.

Downeast Maine remained a battleground between European powers for roughly 150 years leading up to the American Revolution. Battles that defined the outcome of the Revolution and the geographic boundaries of the United States were fought here, including the first naval battle of the American Revolution. Passamaquoddy, one of the Wabanaki tribes, and European descendants of those who fought in this and other defining battles of the American Revolution live here today.

The St. Croix River flows through the middle of the Wabanaki ancestral homeland which they have occupied for at least 10,000 years. The St. Croix eventually became the international



*Indian Days Celebration - Despite several hundred years of substantial change, Wabanaki people remain connected with their culture and continue traditions within their schools, cultural centers, and communities. The Wabanaki communities are among the few Indigenous groups on the eastern seaboard who have kept their Indigenous languages intact. The languages spoken in the Wabanaki communities are Passamaquoddy-Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, and Penobscot.*

boundary between the United States and Canada. This status, as well as being located at the easternmost edge of the continental United States, makes Downeast Maine the place where the sun, moon, and stars rise first in the nation. One of the two Passamaquoddy villages in the region is called Sipayik, which translates to “along the edge” in Passamaquoddy. The Tribal name “Wabanaki” means “people of the dawn land” in the Passamaquoddy tribal language.

Historic villages and ornate homes built in the nation’s infancy remain intact on coves and rivers where timber, shipbuilding, and fisheries industries boomed. Our granite and timber industries helped build the infrastructure of these small towns and many early eastern cities. Canning of wild blueberries and seafood thrived in most Downeast communities, feeding citizens and soldiers across the nation. Forest products, fisheries, and wild blueberries continue to drive the local economy across Downeast Maine.

*Downeast Maine remains one of the last places in this country to be highly developed.*

The land that makes up much of Acadia, the first National Park east of the Mississippi, and now one of the most popular in the nation, was donated to the public by visionary private citizens



St. Croix paper Mill Woodland, 1910 - Sprague's Falls on the St. Croix River was identified as an ideal location for a dam and a paper mill by a consortium of businessmen, who formed the St. Croix Paper Company. The St. Croix River enabled the region's forestry economy to prosper since early settlers cleared the seemingly endless stretches of towering white pines. Thousands of men and horses hauled logs from inland forests and drove them downstream to nearly 140 mills in the St. Croix valley. Remnants of wharves are still visible along the river. A forest products manufacturing facility continues to operate in Woodland, supporting many Bold Coast families in the Calais area. Image courtesy of Penobscot Marine Museum.

The region's unparalleled natural beauty and outdoor recreation assets remain a primary draw to residents and visitors of all walks of life. Franklin Delano and Eleanor Roosevelt summered on Campobello Island, where conversations took place that fueled national and international policy. The Wabanaki summered in Bar Harbor for thousands of years. When the region became well-known by artists, socialites, and outdoor enthusiasts, they sold baskets and other art and crafts to tourists.

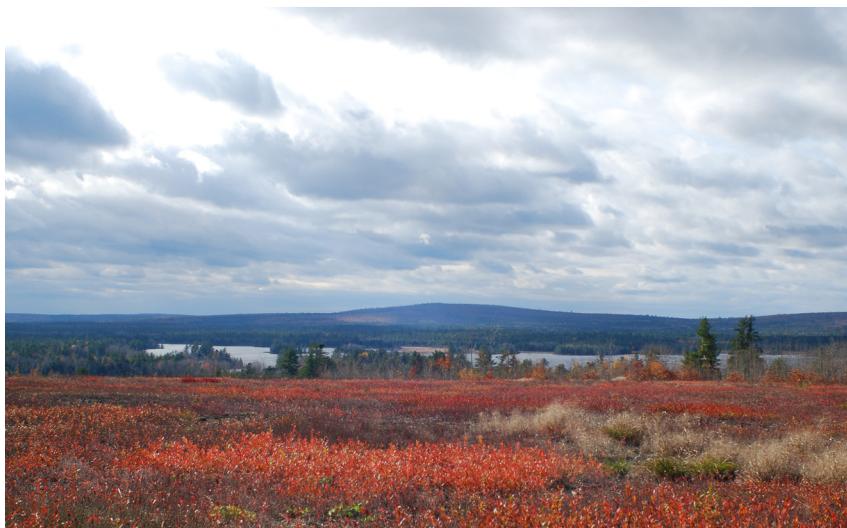
such as George B. Dorr (the founding superintendent), John D. Rockefeller (the founder of Standard Oil) and many others who were committed to securing public access to the nation's treasured lands and who recognized the threat of unfettered private development on Mount Desert Island.

The rich natural resources of Downeast Maine enabled the Wabanahki to thrive for 12,000 years, attracted the first French settlement in the nation, and later provided foundational building materials and vital food supplies for growing American cities.

Although industrial resource extraction in Downeast Maine started as far back as the 1700's, Downeast Maine remains one of the last places in this country to be highly developed. After the industrial boom periods of the 1800's and 1900's waned, Industry grew more slowly here than elsewhere in the state, in New England, or even in the neighboring provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The gradual and modest level of development allows the relationship between people and land to remain strong and the landscape to retain key elements of our nation's natural and cultural stories.



Codfish Station, SW Harbor - Cod was an ideal fish to preserve with salt, and indeed about 83% of cod was prepared by drying and curing with salt. Salt cod could be distributed overseas and far inland, lasting a year or more if kept dry. Downeast families had the pick of the best fresh and salted cod. Processors divided the rest of the salt fish into two general categories: merchantable and refuse. Photo courtesy of NOAA.



Crawford Lake & Blueberry Barrens - Wild blueberries grow on deep sand and gravel eskers in great swaths called barrens that turn blue with berries in summer and glow brilliant red and orange in autumn. No other landscape like this exists in the entirety of the nation, nor even the North American continent, with the exception of portions of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Canada. Photo courtesy of Grand Lake Stream Chamber of Commerce.



**McCurdy's Smokehouse** - During the peak of the industry in the 1920s, more than 20 sardine canneries and nearly 30 herring smokehouses operated in Lubec. By the mid-1970s McCurdy's was the last smokehouse still curing herring for markets around the country. When it closed in 1991, McCurdy's was the last herring smokehouse in the U.S. still operating. Afterwards, commercial herring smoking completely vanished in the U.S. McCurdy's is one of the only remaining buildings that represent the working waterfronts of the region from this bygone era. The Historic McCurdy's Smokehouse Skinning & Packing Shed Museum preserves and shares that story today. The McCurdy Smokehouse Complex was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 due to its significance as an industrial site where a unique trade was practiced. Photo by Jerry Monkman.

*Fisheries, forest products, agriculture, wild blueberries, outdoor recreation, and tourism are the heart of the region's heritage. Dramatic changes have occurred on many levels over the last few hundred years. But the natural resources that helped to build the east coast and American nation remain intact and vital to the culture, environment, economy, and identity of Downeast Maine. The people of Downeast Maine continue to innovate and grow while fiercely protecting their way of life within the context and spirit of community, history, tradition, climate, land, and water.*

## Interpretive Themes

Four interpretive themes underpin the nationally significant story of the Downeast Maine region.

The thematic framework below presents the significant stories and the natural and cultural resources that best represent those stories.

### *Ice, Water, Land, People – Our Geologic Beginnings*

A landscape formed by glaciers provided the abundant natural resources that allowed humans to survive and thrive here for over 10,000 years. The particular combination of geology, climate, and natural resources of Downeast Maine have, over millennia, created profound connections between people and place. Their fates remain intricately woven together today.

Survival for the people of Downeast Maine has always depended on the health of land and water resources, and thus is reliant on intact ecosystems. This reliance has meant that much of the landscape remains largely undeveloped even while its resources are harvested, and at times on an industrial scale. Balancing habitat conservation and resource management is vital to preserving ecosystems that support forest, farm, and ocean-based economy, including tourism. It also is vital to the highly prized rural quality



of life, including outdoor recreation and hunting, fishing, and wildcrafting. Because of this, glacial influence is preserved and evident today as eskers, rivers, kettle ponds, heaths, granite domes, and shear coastal cliffs.

Coastal Downeast Maine is a rugged, rocky, often steep coastline cut by long coves and shaped continuously by some of the highest tides in the world. The American lobster, scallops, and softshell clams thrive amongst the undersea caves, rocky and muddy bottom. Wild blueberries grow on deep sand and gravel eskers in great swaths called barrens that turn blue with berries in summer and glow brilliant red and orange in autumn. No other landscape like this exists in the entirety of the nation, nor even the north American continent with the exception of portions of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Canada.



*Atop Tunk Mountain - Inland Downeast Maine is a landscape of evergreen forests stretching north from the ocean. The forests are broken by a network of deep, cold lakes and rivers lined with glacial erratics and flowing to the sea. Glacial influences are preserved and evident today as eskers, rivers, kettle ponds, heaths, granite domes, and shear coastal cliffs.*

Inland Downeast Maine is a landscape of evergreen forests stretching north from the ocean. The forests are broken by a network of deep, cold lakes and rivers lined with glacial erratics and flowing to the sea. The same sand and gravel eskers that support the wild blueberry also provides a deep aquifer feeding the waterways with clean, cold water. The rivers of Downeast Maine are the last American stronghold of wild Atlantic salmon. Alewives and shellfish that have fed the Wabanaki for millennia continue to be an important part of our seasonal fishery.

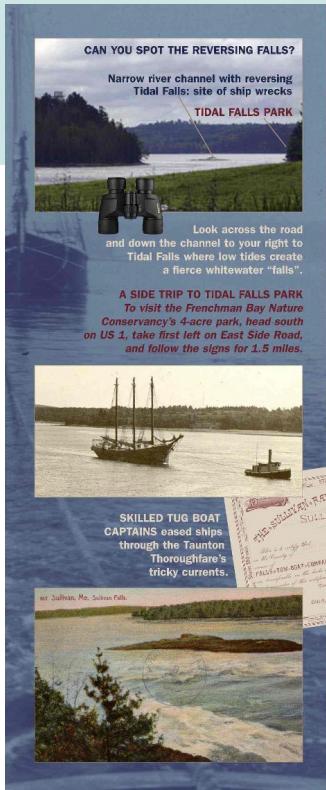
Located at the 45th parallel, halfway between the equator and the north pole, this region is the interface of southern and northern limits of many species of plants and animals and supports several rare and unusual species and plant communities. The convoluted coastline with its archipelago of islands, long bays and estuaries, coves lined with deep layers of silt and clay, and clean fresh waters provide critical feeding and resting habitat for migratory birds along the Atlantic Flyway.

# Abundant Natural Resources – How We Survive and Thrive

Human habitation and economies in Downeast Maine were and continue to be centered around natural resources – especially water. The land, water, and climate have created a culture of people known for their ingenuity, innovation, entrepreneurship,

and resilience - requirements for surviving in a landscape where elements beyond human control dictate choices made in daily life.

Rivers provided transportation routes for indigenous Wabanaki people, who migrated



## Strong Tides and Dangerous Currents



Opposite page: Tidal Falls, Hancock – A tidal discrepancy between Frenchman Bay and the inland Taunton and Hog bays causes the Tidal Falls, which reverse direction twice each day. The area's underwater ledges constrict the tide and causes water to move in as an extended wave as the tide rises, and flow out when it falls. Twenty Native American grave sites of the Red Paint People have been excavated at Tidal Falls, dating to 5,000 years ago. In the 19th century, Tidal Falls was the first site for a railroad and ferry terminal that transported passengers to Bar Harbor. In the 1950s the Hodgkins family operated a lobster pound and later a seafood take-out restaurant at Tidal Falls. Illustration from Schoodic National Scenic Byway Interpretive Panel.



Frontier Canning, Robbinston - Employees of the Frontier sardine cannery in Robbinston, 1929. River herring were historically harvested with a variety of different gear types, including weirs, seines, dip nets, drift nets, and set nets. Although river herring populations in Downeast Maine have been seriously impacted by human activities, many restoration efforts are underway to restore their populations to historic abundances. Photo courtesy of St. Croix Historical Society.

seasonally between their coastal and inland homes to follow food supplies (fish and game) and other resources. Places and communities carry Wabanaki names based on landscape features and natural resources.

The eastern part of Downeast Maine is within the Bay of Fundy, home of the world's highest tides. Intense tidal flows carve the rocky ocean shores, and filter immense amounts of water through the long narrow coves such as Cobscook Bay, creating rich habitat for marine life. Fresh waterways and coastal waters fed by deep, cold sand and gravel aquifers support fish and shellfish that still feed people around the nation. Wild blueberries grow lushly on eskers left by glaciers and still provide a food resource to an extent found nowhere else in the world.

Major water-dependent industries like shipbuilding, quarrying granite, logging, and mills afforded the wealth to build vibrant and architecturally distinct villages, some of which are National Historic Districts today. The streets and buildings of Eastern cities were built on the abundant lumber and granite extracted from Downeast Maine and transported via river and ocean. The swift rivers and waterfalls enabled powering mills, tanneries, and more to process raw materials into usable goods. Tides in Downeast Maine are so significant that they have been tested for their potential to generate electrical power, reflecting how the region's natural resources continue to inspire innovation.

The natural resources that built Downeast Maine and the American nation remain vital to the current

local economy – fisheries, forest products, wild blueberries, and outdoor recreation and tourism being the most predominant. Traditional outdoor activities are still deeply ingrained in local culture including hunting, fishing, guiding, paddling, and seasonal harvests of wild plants. Strong resource management ethics support these industries today and enable our Downeast communities to continue their valued quality of life.

The region has a long-standing culture of sustainable resource management due to the economic and survival dependence on intact resources. The large scale of resource management in Downeast Maine can, and in some cases already does, serve as a model for other similarly resource dependent areas and offer leadership nationally.

Resource management initiatives include wildlife habitat and ecosystem

preservation; commercial fisheries management and access; open space, farming, and forestry management on private lands; access to land and water for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation; heritage tourism; and heritage education.

These efforts are increasingly carried out within the uncertainty of a warming climate. The Gulf of Maine, upon which commercial fisheries, habitat, and tourism are dependent, is warming faster than any other ocean on the planet. Insects, warming temperatures, drought, and other climate-related changes are affecting important forest and agricultural industries, and cultural resources. Identifying solutions to climate and landscape changes will allow people and nature to continue to thrive together for generations to come.

# *Exploration and Settlement of the Northeastern United States*



Downeast Acadia is the origin of French settlement in the nation. In 1604 Pierre Dugas (also known as Sieur de Monts) established the first settlement at the mouth of the St. Croix River. After that first hard winter, settlers developed relationships with the Wabanahki, who shared knowledge and resources which helped them survive. Inland and coastal waterways, long-standing transportation routes of the Wabanahki, enabled further settlement by Europeans.

Downeast communities played critical roles in settling the nation and then defending the emerging nation's independence from the British. Battles fought on the coast of Downeast Maine were key to defining

the eastern edge of the United States and international boundary with Canada. Alliances between the French and Wabanahki in defending their territory significantly affected the geography of Maine, which had been a District of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Downeast Maine is of significant importance as a basepoint for early navigation, mapping, and surveying. Water routes provided the method to explore and map inland through Maine and Canada, and along the eastern seaboard. The easternmost and only remaining Geodetic Survey Baseline Road continues to be used as a primary travel route through the wild blueberry barrens. The Calais Observatory enabled the first successful transatlantic telegraphic longitude determination and helped establish worldwide longitude values, affecting all nations. A string of lighthouses marked the way for safe maritime navigation along the rocky, often fog-bound coast. Twenty-six lighthouses remain, roughly 1/3 of all lighthouses in Maine; some are accessible to the public.

**Battle of the Rim (above) -** Battles fought on the coast of Downeast Maine were key to defining the eastern edge of the United States and international boundary with Canada. Alliances between the French and Wabanahki in defending their territory significantly affected the geography of Maine, which had been a District of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. After the Battle of the Margareta, Great Britain attempted to destroy Machias in revenge for the capture of HMS Margareta. Patriots, with the aid of Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Penobscot warriors, harassed and attacked the British, forcing their retreat. A living history group in the Machias area re-enacts the Battle of the Rim, including several ancestors of actual battle participants. Photo by RJ Heller.

# *A Culture Inspired by Nature*

Downeast Maine is known across the world as a place of rugged beauty and unspoiled wildlands, a place where people feel revitalized and inspired by nature. Arts, tools, dance, food, stories, language, ceremonies, customs, and architecture are intricately tied to the natural resources, geology, geography, and scenic beauty around them.

Skilled craftsmen use wood, stone, clay, and plants to create beautiful and utilitarian products. Artists, writers, and storytellers have memorialized the Downeast landscape in works of art and literature and continue to be inspired by the land, people, and customs of the region.

Traditional outdoor activities are still deeply ingrained in local culture which includes hunting, fishing, guiding, paddling, and seasonally harvesting forest products. Habitat conservation and resource management have been embraced by the communities. They acknowledge conservation is vital to preserving ecosystems that support their forest, farm and ocean-based economy, as well as nature-based tourism, and their highly prized rural quality of life.



*Keezer Fruit Baskets* - The family of Clara Neptune Keezer was known for basketmaking for more than 200 years prior to her birth. Clara Neptune learned to make baskets from her grandmother and mother, weaving her first basket at the age of eight. She worked with the preferred materials of Maine basket weavers, split brown ash and sweetgrass, to fashion both utility and fancy baskets. Basket weaving was experiencing a decline in Maine in the 1950s, and Keezer was instrumental in revitalizing the basket weaving tradition. She created original designs that earned her recognition by the National Endowment for the Arts; she was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship Award in Washington, D.C., in 2002. Photo courtesy of the Abbe Museum.

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Important community festivals (birding, wild blueberry, lobster, night sky) and special events (smelt fry, maple syrup, farming, lighthouses, lobster boats) celebrate important elements of natural resources.

Boat-building is a Downeast skill as old as the cultures on these lands and waters. Boat styles are influenced by the specific physical environments in which they are used and can dramatically differ from harbor to harbor.

The cold rough landscape and long winters have shaped the characteristics of “Downeasters,” who are known for their understated, sarcastic, witty humor and their talent for spinning

stories. The geographic remoteness of the region and obstacles this can cause have created a culture known for their ingenuity, innovation, entrepreneurship, resilience, and community service.

These are all requirements for surviving in a landscape where elements beyond human control dictate choices made in daily life, and people are often challenged to overcome hardships and assist their neighbors to do so as well.



**Friars Bay - Boat-building is a Downeast skill as old as the cultures on these lands and waters. Boat styles are influenced by the specific physical environments in which they are used and can dramatically differ from harbor to harbor. Illustration from Schoodic National Scenic Byway Interpretive Panel.**

## Conclusion

The significant and consistent public input and information gathered over the years underscores that the Downeast Maine study area has a unique and nationally important story beloved by many, as well as the potential and desire to better support interpretation of that story and expand on opportunities.

*The significance statement and interpretive themes represent how the people, groups, and events associated with Downeast Maine have contributed to the broader national heritage and continue to contribute today. The significance statement and interpretive themes presented in this study convey the presence of a nationally distinctive landscape and provide a solid thematic framework to support a national heritage area in Downeast Maine.*