

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This Prospective Zoning Plan is the Land Use Regulation Commission's first land use plan developed for a subregion of the jurisdiction. Together with rule changes and new zoning maps developed specifically for the Rangeley Region, it incorporates a:

Long-term vision of what people want the region to be like generations from now; and

Strategy for guiding the desired types of future development to designated areas in the subregion over the next twenty years in a manner that reinforces the vision.

The planning area encompasses five plantations including Dallas, Sandy River, Rangeley, Lincoln, and Magalloway; and five outlying townships including Adamstown, Richardsontown, C, D, and E. The Commission prospectively zoned this region first in the jurisdiction because of the high development rate and extraordinary natural features found there.

The Commission held an unprecedented 30+ meetings with communities, landowners, and organizations in the region. Agreement was generally strong about the location and kind of development that should occur over the next twenty years, with the exception of the appropriate development intensity for Lower Richardson and Azischohos Lakes, an issue that the Commission agreed to monitor.

The Commission believes that this Plan will go a long way toward reinforcing the region's traditional settlement pattern and protecting its special character - even as the development permitting process becomes more predictable, easier, and accommodating for those who live and make a living there.

The Region

The rate and kind of development activity, rather than excessive population growth, is the reason for this Plan. Year-round population in the ten townships -- as well as the Town of Rangeley -- actually declined slightly between 1990 and 1997. This decline was not evenly distributed, however, because Dallas and Rangeley Plantations, along with the Town of Rangeley, gained a quarter more residents over the period. Even so, for each year-round resident that was added the last decade in Rangeley, Dallas, and Sandy River Plantations, 23 new homes or camps were permitted. Three quarters of the permits were for new homes or camps of a construction type that will accommodate year-round use.

This amount and type of development -- particularly the trend away from rustic camps -- departs from historical trends and is likely to change the face of the region. It is very likely to increase demand for public services, too.

Most of the land is still owned in large tracts managed for commercial timber and accommodating public use for outdoor recreation. And a sizeable amount, compared with the state average, has been conserved through easements or public or non-profit ownership. But unplanned growth has the potential of changing the region's unique character forever.

The Vision

Local people agree that the region's outdoor heritage and character are too important to squander through sprawl and inappropriate development. Generations from now, they still want the region to:

- ✓ Be a four-season recreational gateway to the working woods for recreation and forestry;
- ✓ Rely upon the Town of Rangeley as the economic center;
- ✓ Focus most year-round development primarily in three adjacent plantations including Dallas, Rangeley, and Sandy River;
- ✓ Retain the working woods in all but discrete locations in outlying townships; and
- ✓ Maintain a diversity of lake experiential qualities in the region from remote to rural and developed settings.

New Zones and Maps

The Commission has adopted six new zoning subdistricts to shape future development patterns consistent with this vision. All are variations of existing zones, but provide greater specificity about the kind of development that can be accommodated. These new zones are being applied only in the Rangeley Region at this time. They include:

For Adjacent Plantations

Community Center Development
Extended Settlement Development
Community Residential Development
Recreational Residential Development

For Outlying Areas

Rural Settlement Development
Semi-Remote Lake Protection

Four of the zones allow more latitude for people to make a living in settlement areas. Two, Residential Recreation and Semi-Remote Lake ensure that new development fits with outstanding resource values on lakes and other places. Applying the zones, the Commission adopted new zoning maps for each of the ten plantations and townships. The size of new development areas was determined through discussion with local people and landowners, but generally provides about as much room for development as has occurred over the past twenty years. The maps are available from the Commission upon request.

New Standards

Repeatedly, people told the Commission that they are willing to accept more mixed-use development in the region providing that it is concentrated in discrete areas and respectful of neighboring properties and the region's special character, such as its dark night sky. Local people requested, and the Commission developed, standards for new development that relate to:

- ✓ Building height, setbacks, and road frontage,
- ✓ Outdoor lighting,
- ✓ Buffering,
- ✓ Building layout,
- ✓ Parking and circulation, and
- ✓ Home occupations.

New Zoning Criteria

Planning can be a waste of time and resources unless it translates into decisions on the ground. For this reason, the Commission has adopted three criteria, in addition to two jurisdiction-wide criteria, to use in determining whether to approve rezoning requests, including:

JURISDICTION-WIDE

- ✓ Consistency with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- ✓ Community Need and No Adverse Impact

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR PROSPECTIVELY ZONED AREAS

- ✓ Unforeseen Circumstances
- ✓ Contiguous Development Districts
- ✓ More Effective Approach

Plan Implementation

The Commission will monitor how well the Plan works so that it may make refinements as necessary and consider whether to apply the new approach and zones elsewhere in the jurisdiction. Staff will track development trends and issues, report to the Commission annually on progress, and propose a plan update, if needed, at five-year intervals. In response to public comments, the Commission will also pay particular attention to (1) permits for home occupations in the General Management Subdistrict and (2) new development on Lower Richardson Lake.

The Commission has identified some priority areas for conservation attention based upon public comments. The Commission will work with landowners, Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, and Land For Maine's Future Board, and others to determine whether opportunities exist for private or public conservation on Lower Richardson Lake, Aziscohos Lake, and the remaining undeveloped shore of Beaver Mountain Lake. Finally, the Commission will consider three more regulatory changes to implement the plan in response to public comments. These include:

- ✓ Elimination of the 40-acre subdivision exemption,
- ✓ Refinements to the Planned Development districting process, and
- ✓ Addition of a provision enabling "mother in law" apartments in the Residential Recreation subdistrict.