

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of the Acadia National Park *General Management Plan* is to define the basic management philosophy that will guide park management decisions over the next 10 to 15 years; establish a role for the park within its regional context; and provide strategies for resolving issues and achieving the stated management goals. Management issues addressed by the plan are detailed in the *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment*. All other plans developed for the park, some of which are called for in this *General Management Plan*, shall be consistent with the direction established in this lead planning document.

Planning for the Isle au Haut portion of the park has been undertaken separately; therefore, this plan does not deal with parklands in the town of Isle au Haut.

The document is divided into three parts: part one provides background information, part two describes the park, and part three contains the plan.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE PARK

Acadia National Park officially began with the establishment of Sieur de Monts National Monument by Presidential Proclamation 1339 in 1916. The name was changed in 1919 to Lafayette National Park (40 Stat. 1173) and in 1929 to Acadia National Park. The 1929 legislation (45 Stat. 1083) established the authority to expand the park through donations of property within Hancock County and certain islands in Knox County. However, the legislation created a park with no permanent boundary and no authority to purchase land.

As property was donated, a fragmented patchwork of parklands developed. Lands were scattered, making management, protection, and visitor orientation difficult. Local towns were frustrated by the constant threat of unexpected donations eroding their tax bases. For many years the National Park Service, the towns, the Hancock County Planning Commission, and numerous conservation groups attempted to resolve these issues through arduous negotiations.

In 1982 separate boundary legislation (PL 97-335) was approved for parkland in the town of Isle au Haut and, subsequently, a development concept plan was approved for the parkland. On September 25, 1986, boundary legislation (PL 99-420) was enacted for the rest of Acadia National Park. The law defined a permanent boundary and gave the National Park Service authority to acquire lands, but only within the designated boundary of Acadia National Park; it identified approximately 175 tracts for acquisition and 24 for deletion. (This authority does not apply to the town of Isle au Haut; acquisition of land within the boundaries of this town continues to be covered by the authority outlined in PL 97-335). The legislation outlined conditions for acquiring conservation easements outside the boundary and established an advisory commission (see appendix A).

The stated intent of those who have donated tens of thousands of acres for the creation of the park over the past 75 years and the intent of the secretary of the interior and the Congress

in accepting those donations has been to preserve the area's outstanding scenic, natural, scientific, and historic values. In his letter to the secretary of the interior in 1916, in which he offered lands on Mount Desert Island as a gift to the United States, George Dorr described the area as follows:

[It is] rich in historic association, in scientific interest, and in landscape beauty...It contains within itself the only heights that immediately front the open sea with mountainous character upon our eastern shore. It contains also, owing to past glacial action and its own variously resistant rocky structure, an extraordinary variety of topographic features which unite with the climate caused by the surrounding sea to fit it beyond any other single locality in the east for the shelter, growth, and permanent preservation of a wide range of life, both plant and animal. It forms a striking and instructive geologic record. And it constitutes the dominant and characteristic portion of the first land, Mount Desert Island, to be visited, described, and named by Champlain...in exploration of the New England coast. (Dorr 1942, p. 2)

In the original enabling proclamation President Woodrow Wilson cited the island's distinction as Champlain's landing place and the great scientific interest of its topography, geology, and fauna and flora. He indicated that the purpose of the monument was to protect these significant resource values, warning all unauthorized persons "not to appropriate, injure, destroy or remove any of the features or objects included within the boundaries." (Winsor 1955, p. 11)

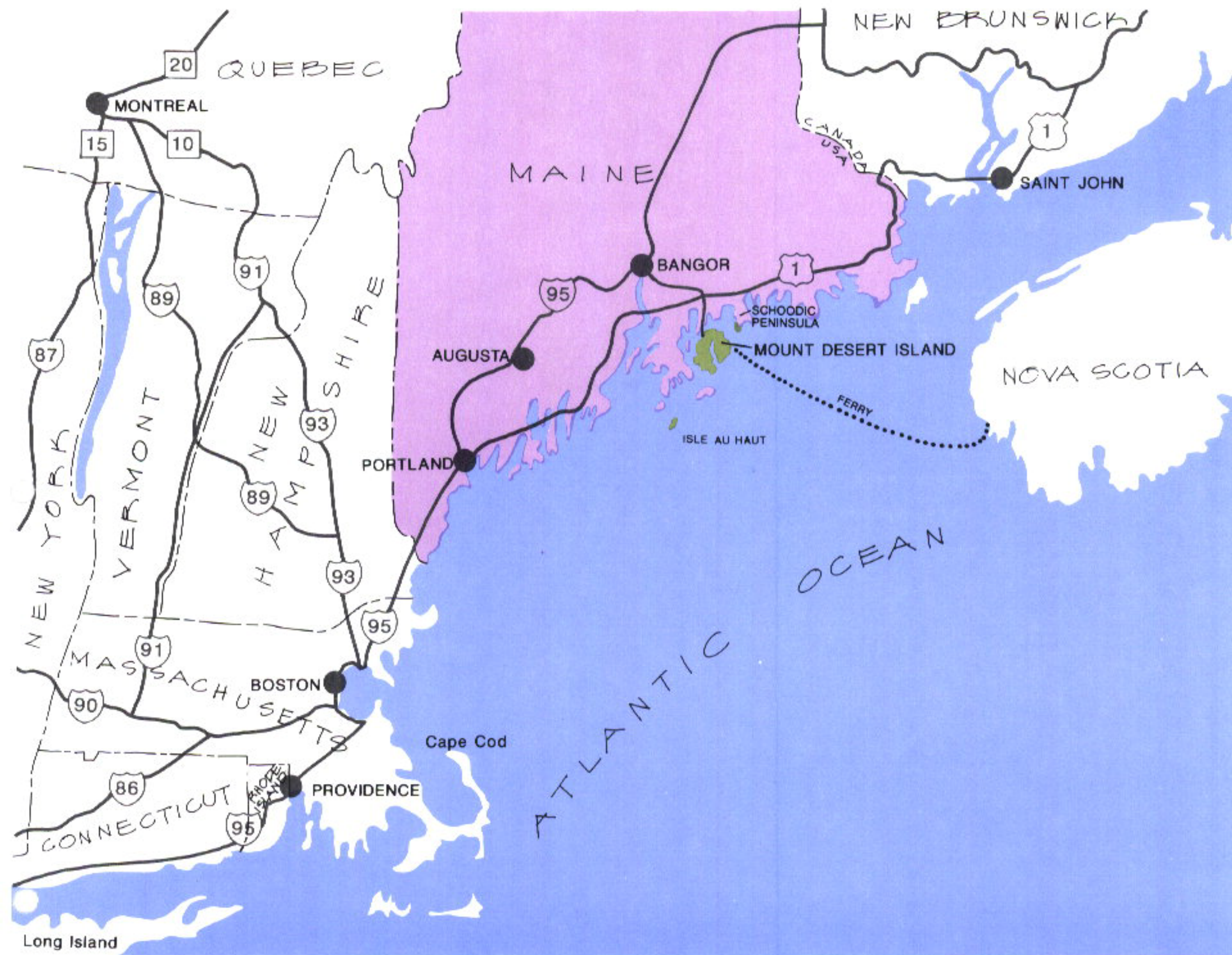
Prominent public officials and conservationists of the day described the purposes for establishing Acadia National Park. Dorr's letter, excerpted above, was supported by the chief geologist of the U.S. Geological Society, the chairman of Harvard University Botany Department, and the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society. Speaking before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Public Lands in April 1918, Theodore Roosevelt stated:

I have watched with interest the work that has led to the creation of this park. It is our one eastern national park and gives for the first time to the crowded eastern portion of the country an opportunity to share directly and immediately in the benefits of our national park system. Its striking ocean frontage makes it unlike every other park....Under right development it will give a healthy playground to multitudes of hard-working men and women who need such a playground. Moreover, it constitutes a wildlife sanctuary under national guardianship at a spot where such a sanctuary is greatly needed. (Winsor 1955, p. II-4, appendix 2, p. 4)

On May 15, 1918, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane gave the following reasons for establishing a national park on Mount Desert Island in a letter to Congressman Scott Ferris, chairman of the Committee on Public Lands:

First: Mount Desert has important historic value....

Second: Scenically its impressive headlands give Mount Desert Island the distinction of combining sea and mountain. These headlands are by far the loftiest of our Atlantic coast. Their high rounded summits often craggy...form a



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background for a rugged shoreline and an island-dotted harbor....Back of the shore is a mountain and lake wilderness which is typical in remarkable degree of the range of Appalachian scenery.

Third: From the point of view of conservation, the value of the proposed park can hardly be overestimated. The forests are largely primeval. Oaks, beeches, birches, maples, ashes, poplars, and many other deciduous trees of our eastern range...mingle with...pine and hemlock. The typical shrubs...are in equal abundance. Wildflowers abound. There are few spots, if any, which can combine the variety and luxuriance of the eastern forests in such small compass. The rocks have their distinction...worn by the ice sheets of the glacial period, eroded by the frosts and rains of the ages, their bases carved by the sea, their surfaces painted by the mosses and lichens of today, they are exhibits of scientific interest as well as beauty. Still another distinction is Mount Desert's wealth of bird life. All the conditions for a bird sanctuary in the East seem to be here fulfilled....

Fourth: From a recreational standpoint the...park would be capable of giving pleasure...to hundreds of thousands of people living east of the Mississippi River. (Winsor 1955, II-1, appendix 2, p. 1)

When Secretary Lane wrote his letter over 60 years ago, little could he have realized the "pleasure" of *millions*, not thousands, of visitors who would come to Acadia annually.

HISTORY OF PLANNING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Until now Acadia National Park has not had an approved general management plan. In the 1940s several attempts were made to develop a master plan under the direction of the park's first superintendent, George B. Dorr. These proposed plans set the groundwork for much of the road system, the campgrounds, and the visitor center as they exist today. Many proposals, such as elaborate downhill ski and winter sports facilities, were never implemented.

A combined *Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* was prepared in 1978 that dealt primarily with proposed solutions to the unresolved boundary issues. The plan was not given final approval but was used as the basis of a mediated agreement in 1979 between local towns and the park. The agreement operated as a de facto plan until the passage of the 1986 boundary legislation. Many of the basic assumptions of the 1978 master plan, especially the gross underestimation of visitation levels, are no longer valid.

With the establishment of a permanent boundary for the park in 1986, the National Park Service moved forward with the management planning process. In order to improve safety, parking, and access for bicyclists, hikers, and motorists, the Park Service proposed to convert segments of the Park Loop Road from two-way to one-way traffic with parking in the right lane. An environmental assessment was prepared to examine alternative solutions and their impacts. The environmental assessment was reviewed by the public and by the park's advisory commission, and subsequently a recombination of the alternatives was selected for implementation. On February 24, 1988, an administrative determination was signed, detailing the process, alternatives, and reasoning for the selection. The decision left open the

option to change the decision if, in developing a general management plan, it was determined that a different solution was preferable for long-range visitor use management.

In anticipation of preparing the current *General Management Plan*, a number of actions and studies were initiated to gather planning data. Permanent traffic counters were installed at two locations on the Park Loop Road in October 1986. Elevation, hydrology, transportation, and boundary data were obtained from the U.S. Geological Survey for Mount Desert Island, then reformatted and loaded onto a computer to be used in an islandwide geographic information system (GIS). Vegetation maps were prepared and digitized into the same system by the Park Service. The Soil Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, revised the soil surveys of Hancock County.

A visitor use study was conducted (Manning 1987), and a visual-quality preference study was initiated (Steinitz et al. 1988). A study of the historic carriage road system and bridges was conducted (Rieley and Brouse 1989) and amended to include recommendations for their use and maintenance (Rieley and Associates 1989). Other studies included a documentation of island resources with high conservation value (Jacobson and Dominie 1988), an evaluation of the park's conservation easement program (Maine Coast Heritage Trust 1988), and an economic analysis of Mount Desert Island (Stellflug and Deller 1989).

At the Park Service's invitation, a landscape architecture class at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design spent a semester identifying issues, projecting trends, and developing three alternative recommendations for the future management of Acadia and Mount Desert Island. Their work was summarized in *Alternative Futures for Mount Desert Island* (Steinitz et al. 1986) and distributed to the public. The students also presented their findings at public meetings in both Boston and Bar Harbor.

Public scoping meetings and workshops were held in August 1987 at three locations on Mount Desert Island. Participants were invited to review the Park Service's proposal for the scope of the plan, offer additions or deletions, and voice opinions regarding issues, problems, and opportunities for park management. A similar process was followed with the park's permanent and seasonal staff. The preliminary issues addressed by the planning team were modified in response to some of the concerns expressed during this review process.

In August 1987 the first issue of *Planning Update* newsletter was distributed to invite public involvement in the planning process. More than 700 individuals, universities, and local, state, and national agencies were eventually included on the newsletter mailing list. A second *Planning Update* was mailed in May 1988 and a special issue of the newsletter was distributed that summer at Acadia's campgrounds, visitor center, and interpretive programs. More than 230 written responses to the newsletter were received and considered by planners.

As the *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment* was being formulated and reviewed, it became clear that several areas were potentially controversial and that implementation of the preferred alternative would require substantial cooperation between the Park Service, the surrounding communities, state agencies, and several other interest groups. For that reason an *Alternatives Document* was published and distributed in the summer of 1989 to describe the alternatives, solicit comments, and gauge the degree of controversy. In addition to eight public meetings held on Mount Desert Island and in Ellsworth and Bangor, meetings were held with the boards of selectmen of each Mount Desert

Island town, the park's advisory commission, representatives of various state agencies, and other interested groups. Approximately 145 people participated in the meetings and more than 260 written responses were received and analyzed.

The *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment* was finalized and placed on public review in August 1991. In the document four alternatives were presented for addressing issues of concern to park management; the potential impacts of those alternatives were analyzed and compared as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (42 USC 4321). Compliance issues regarding natural and cultural resources were also addressed in the *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment*. Copies of the draft were placed in libraries throughout the Northeast and a *Planning Update* offered copies to people on the mailing list. Six hundred copies of the draft plan/assessment were distributed to interested parties. The public comment period was extended from August 15 until November 15, 1991. During this period two public workshops were held, and the park superintendent and planner attended numerous formal and informal meetings where they made presentations and listened to comments. Members of the public were encouraged to offer written comments; approximately 300 such comments were received. A summary of written responses to the *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment* is available at Acadia National Park.