

STAY THE COURSE

Maine Island Trail Association
Strategic Plan

2015-2020



Maine Island Trail Association
58 Fore Street, Bldg. 30-3
Portland, ME 04101
www.mita.org

Dear Friend,

On behalf of the Maine Island Trail Association Board of Trustees, I am thrilled to present you with this Strategic Plan to carry MITA forward through 2020. The good news is that, even after a thorough examination following more than a quarter of a century, the MITA mission remains as vibrant as ever. While we have exciting new opportunities and goals to fulfill, there is no cause for a major course correction. Of this, we can all be proud.

The planning process that underlies this document was led by a special committee of the Board and spanned over 12 months. It reflects considerable effort by the entire Board, the staff, and you - our members and stakeholders. Fully 750 people participated in this effort: 690 respondents to an online survey and 60 others in interviews and focus groups. We thank those people especially, and hope that you are as pleased and inspired by the results as we are.

With successful implementation of this plan, the Maine Island Trail will remain a vibrant, optimistic, and inspiring element of the Maine coast in 2020 and beyond. ONWARD!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Welch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Doug" being more prominent and the last name "Welch" following in a similar style.

Doug Welch, Executive Director

PS - To request a more detailed Findings Report alongside this document, please email Doug Welch at dwelch@mita.org.

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Maine Island Trail Association Strategic Plan

2015-2020



Compiled October 2014

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INTRODUCTION

After 26 years of successful growth, the Maine Island Trail Association has many opportunities to meet the needs of the next generation of Maine boaters and island stewards. This document outlines key recommendations from a robust data collection and strategic planning effort in 2013-14. To request a more detailed Findings Report in addition to this plan, please email Doug Welch at dwelch@mita.org.

MISSION STATEMENT

Since it was founded in 1988, the Mission of the Maine Island Trail Association has been *“to establish a model of thoughtful use and volunteer stewardship for the Maine islands that will assure their conservation in a natural state while providing an exceptional recreational asset that is maintained and cared for by the people who use it.”*

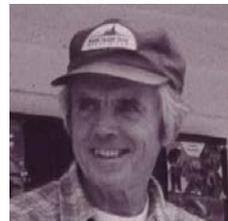
VISION

Devoted guardian of the wild islands of Maine, MITA will support coastal access and provide an inspiring recreational experience to boaters of all types through island-owner relationships, education, and citizen stewardship.

HISTORY

In 2014, the Maine Island Trail is a 375-mile recreational waterway that spans the entire coast of Maine. Considered America’s first recreational water trail, it connects over 200 island and coastal sites. Day visitors and overnight campers can traverse a variety of natural settings from sandy beaches and quiet bays to saltwater rivers and bold rocky shores.

The Trail was developed in 1988 in response to a 1987 column in *Small Boat Journal* by David Getchell, Sr. who proposed that an archipelago of remote coastal islands be linked like the Appalachian Trail to create “a waterway for small boats.” Asking for interested parties to write him a letter, Getchell was pleasantly surprised by an outpouring of responses. A request



DAVID GETCHELL, SR.

was successfully made to the State of Maine and L.L.Bean for some modest seed money. A logo was drafted and the Association was born.

The Maine Island Trail Association (generally known as “MITA”) began as a program of the Island Institute of Rockland, Maine under its larger mission



**FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
KAREN STIMSON OUTSIDE THE
ORIGINAL PORTLAND OFFICE.**

of work with the coastal islands and the island communities. In 1993, MITA became an independent organization. Soon it established an office in Portland and eventually closed the administrative office in Rockland. The two organizations pursued their respective missions and work in partnership, with the Island Institute actively represented on the MITA Trail Committee.

The concept of the Trail relied on a simple premise: conscientious users could be entrusted with the access to and stewardship of treasured Maine coastal islands. From an initial 30 state-owned islands, the Trail grew based on handshake agreements with other public agencies, individual private island owners, and land trusts. This handshake agreement, renewed annually with owners, states that their islands will be in better shape as part of the Trail than they would be if left on their own.

To uphold MITA’s end of the bargain, staff efforts were supplemented in 1990 by a team of volunteer Island Adopters: coastal residents recruited to care for neighboring islands. A more formal program of volunteer Monitor Skippers was assembled in 1993 to spearhead the islands’ physical stewardship. These hardy mariners continue to use MITA’s fleet of 18-foot red skiffs to visit the islands on a regular basis from May through October. Finally, MITA members themselves are instructed in Leave-No-Trace® recreational practices through an annual handbook. Today there are 30 Monitor Skippers, 70 Island Adopters, and over 3,800 annual memberships in the Maine Island Trail Association.



STRATEGIC PLAN

GOAL 1. STAY THE COURSE!

The most fundamental conclusion of this strategic planning effort is that support for MITA's mission is remarkably strong from all quarters. After 26 years, MITA's importance endures. In a world where our mission is increasingly valued, we will advance, broadcast, and celebrate it as an example of Maine ingenuity in service to the land. The Maine Island Trail creates significant economic value in Maine, generating more than \$2 million for local economies each year. While remaining neutral in state and local politics, MITA will endeavor to play a larger role in Maine's community economic development sphere.

GOAL 2. PROVIDE AN INSPIRATIONAL, BORDER-TO-BORDER RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR BOATERS OF ALL KINDS.

The overarching goal for the Trail is to provide extraordinarily rich and inspiring recreational experiences to island visitors of all kinds, from paddlers to sailors to motor boaters, and from border to border. To enable this, MITA will expand its program presence to better serve the entire coast.

GOAL 3. FOSTER STEWARDSHIP IN PACE WITH TRAIL DEVELOPMENT TO BENEFIT BOTH THE ISLANDS AND THEIR STEWARDS.

The ability to effectively care for the islands remains key to MITA's mission. The Trail has grown nearly seven-fold since its inception. Over the past 26 years, management challenges including invasive plants and downed timber are increasingly common. To keep the islands in great



physical shape, stewardship must keep pace with the growth of the Trail and the increasing management challenges along its entire length. While stewardship is about the islands, it is also about the human experience of caring for them. With over 200 sites on the

Trail, and increased technological capacity to reach out to volunteers, MITA will provide more opportunities for people to volunteer. In order to meet the physical needs of the islands, and the human needs of MITA members, MITA requires a second Stewardship Manager.

GOAL 4. SUSTAIN THE SKIPPER PROGRAM.



A crowning success of MITA is the Monitor Skipper crew, who ultimately are the backbone of our stewardship work. These 30 individuals—with collective experience of over 300 years on the Trail—are a truly remarkable volunteer force. Some have volunteered for decades, and several have recently retired from active service. MITA must focus on Skipper recruitment efforts and seek partner organizations that might be a source of leads or training support.

GOAL 5. BROADEN MITA MEMBERSHIP AND DEEPEN MEMBER ENGAGEMENT.

MITA welcomes all comers. The organization must develop fresh tactics to attract and retain younger members in order to prosper as MITA’s founders step away. This might involve revising the fee structure to attract more new members, providing more social and volunteer events where members can meet staff and likeminded peers, and utilizing social media to connect and share experiences.

GOAL 6. GROW MITA’S FINANCIAL BASE.

From MITA’s beginnings as a grassroots organization, it has grown in its fundraising capacity. A modest organization with a current annual budget of approximately \$600,000, MITA’s revenues must keep pace with the growth of the Trail and the membership.



Like many non-profits, MITA is susceptible to minor fluctuations in the economy and philanthropic environment, and must provide compelling reasons for donors to support it. In addition to generating annual operating funds, MITA needs to grow the endowment from the current \$800,000 to \$2 million to support its core stewardship program indefinitely.

GOAL 7. ENGAGE AND SERVE ISLAND OWNERS.



ISLAND LOG BOOKS SERVE AS A LINK BETWEEN LAND OWNERS AND VISITORS.

Partnerships are in MITA’s “DNA,” from the three founding partners to a wide array of island owners and business partners today. Much has been learned in the process. Handshake agreements have succeeded in attracting and maintaining interest in the Trail. Strategic decisions not to compete with land trusts, guides, and other organizations have proven wise. As ownership of the coast of Maine changes, MITA’s approaches must continue to evolve, as many of its goals will continue to be easier to achieve through partnerships, particularly with the island owners:

- **PUBLIC AGENCIES:** The State of Maine is the largest landowner on the Maine Island Trail. Renewal of the state island management plan is critically important to the Trail’s future.
- **PRIVATE FAMILIES:** Island-owning families’ needs are evolving as time and generations pass. Sales and transfers of privately held islands hold both threats and opportunities for MITA.
- **PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS:** Increasingly important are MITA’s partnerships with land trusts. Smaller land trusts represent the largest share of Trail growth in recent years, and land trusts large and small are moving toward increased public use of conserved lands.

Successful partnerships and open-mindedness with island owners and others remain key to MITA’s continued success and that of the Trail as a whole.

GOAL 8. USE THE MAINE ISLAND TRAIL AS A RESOURCE FOR PARTNER-BASED YOUTH EDUCATION.

MITA often summarizes its mission as “SEA”: stewardship, education, and access. MITA does much to educate adults through the guidebook and signage, and often works with school groups on an ad hoc basis, yet it does little formal educational programming for young people. This presents an opportunity, given that young people will be the next generation of island stewards, and they have less access to boats and the islands today. In partnership with other organizations whose primary mission is education, MITA needs to get young people outdoors and engaged. It is important for MITA’s long-term viability to educate and motivate tomorrow’s stewards.



GOAL 9. ENGAGE MORE BUSINESSES.

Business partnerships have proven advantageous for both MITA and the businesses involved. In many cases, the benefits MITA brings are marketing-related, such as the MITA member benefit program, Maine Island Trail Ale, and the MITA app. MITA should continue seeking mutually beneficial business opportunities to directly benefit members and make clear that the Maine Island Trail is good for the Maine economy.

GOAL 10. PURSUE MISSION-SUPPORTIVE DIGITAL MEDIA WHILE MAINTAINING TRADITIONAL MEDIA.



MITA has an ever-expanding set of exciting new communications tools such as the MITA app. MITA must continue to strike a balance where developments in social media and technology complement the much-loved annual Guidebook and semi-annual paper newsletter. MITA must also balance the need to have some information “open source” (such as information about public islands), while making other information available only to those who pledge to respect the privilege of access to private land.

Social media will likely become an ever-more-useful tool for MITA members to connect with the organization and each other. MITA will continue to explore creative uses of social media to convey information, tell stories, solicit content from members, and create community among people near and far who love the Maine islands.

SUMMARY OF CORE OBJECTIVES

- Celebrate the mission and the organization more broadly.
- Make the Trail serve all boaters in all regions.
- Hire a second Stewardship Manager.
- Recruit more Monitor Skippers.
- Provide more opportunities for people to volunteer and connect with each other and the islands.
- Strengthen and expand financial support.
- Investigate and develop partnership-based educational programming.
- Engage and serve island owners as their needs evolve.
- Continue developing business partnerships.
- Supplement traditional paper products with social and digital media.



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