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Grants available to Franklin and Somerset county nonprofits

ELLSWORTH — Nonprofit and public organizations seeking funding for projects that draw on the strengths of the community and foster collaboration are encouraged to apply to the Western Mountains Fund, part of the Maine Community Foundation's Community-Building Grants Program.

Jan. 15, 2009, is the next deadline for applying for grants. Applicants will be notified in late March. Application, guidelines and a list of recent grants can be found at www.mainecef.org. Grants are made from a permanent fund, restricted to nonprofits with 501(c)(3) tax status and public organizations serving Franklin and Somerset Counties.

The Western Mountains Committee, which oversees the fund, prefers proposals for new initiatives and projects as opposed to requests for ongoing support. Applicants are encouraged to build partnerships between and among community groups to plan, advance and evaluate a proposed project, including involving people they hope to serve in its design and implementation.

A statewide organization with offices in Ellsworth, Augusta and Portland, the Maine Community Foundation has been partnering with donors and nonprofits to strengthen Maine communities for 25 years.

For more information, visit www.mainecef.org or call 1-877-700-6800.

PEAKS

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Rangeley and Phillips. The region might be best known for the 30 miles of Appalachian Trail that forms its spine, but the foothills and valleys are as interesting and important as the spectacular ridge that defines the skyline. These valleys and foothills are crisscrossed with hiking, snowmobile, ATV and cross-country ski trails. They also enclose large chunks of undivided timberlands lands that are still a key part of the regions forestry livelihood.

The High Peaks Initiative is a land preservation effort aimed at keeping these lands and our use and enjoyment of them as intact as possible. When my wife and I hiked a section of the Appalachian Trail last summer we were struck by how many had traveled long distances just to hike a section or two of the trail in and around the Hundred Mile Wilderness. These people were not end-to-enders, they hiked a few days here and there interspersed with refueling and relaxation stops in nearby Millinocket, where a local lodge could shuttle them to and from the trail and wine and dine them when they were done. On the heels of a paper industry collapse, Millinocket is effectively recasting itself as an Appalachian Trail town. Hikers, boaters and anglers in the summer; skiers and snowmobilers in the winter. At this end of the trail we have Rangeley and Stratton that play similar roles for outdoor tourists.

In our High Peaks Initiative we are seeking willing sellers who are interested in either selling land outright or through conservation easement. Our goal is to maintain and even expand the public rights of use while maintaining a sound, sustainable forestry base. The good news is that this region is still dominated by a few large landowners, some of whom have expressed an interest in our own proposal. The Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust and the Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust have part-



nered in a Forest Legacy Program proposal to fund most of what we need to complete these transactions.

The effort is huge —holdings totaling 20,000 acres is our first goal— and the costs are great —phase 1 is about \$10 million— but the pieces are slowly falling into place.

This is win-win for all of us. Traditional recreation and forestry will be protected while we also make a down payment on expanding the tourism possibility of our region. Today tourists increasingly seek areas of big scenery and abundant recreation possibilities. There is no reason Maine's High Peaks region cannot stand tall among other possible choices such as the Smokies, The Adirondacks and even Yosemite. There is no reason that the towns that border this region cannot be trail towns that share in the wealth that four-season recreation can bring.

Steve Bien, a Jay resident and Farmington physician, is a member of Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, the organization that formed the High Peaks Alliance initiative.

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