



## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

*If you could spend a full week anywhere this winter, where would you like to be?*

By David Hart



**Ken Shaw, of Kingfield:** "Kingfield, Maine."



**Linda Saulter, of Waterville:** "Right here at Sugarloaf. This place is heaven. As a family we've been coming here for 45 years."



**Jason Parrett, of Stratton:** "St. Petersburg, where I'm heading to now."



**Nate Veilleux, of Belgrade:** "Vail, Colo., but don't tell Sugarloaf."



**Courtney Steeves, of Carrabassett Valley:** "Outer space."

## COMMENTARY

### The High Peaks Initiative

By Steve Bien

A major land conservation effort is taking place right in our back yard, one that is win-win for all of us, the High Peaks Initiative.

The High Peaks region of Maine is where we live: the area bounded by Kingfield, Carrabassett Valley, Stratton, Rangeley and Phillips. This spectacular 200,000-acre expanse includes eight of Maine's 12 4,000-foot peaks. But it is not just the ridgeline that makes this area unique. Its streams are home to brook trout and some waters may be seeing the rebirth of Atlantic salmon populations. The larger mammals of the region are well known—bear, moose, deer, lynx and bobcats—and how many of us catch the songs and colors of spring bird migrations?

And the High Peaks region's slopes and valleys are also home to a vital working forest that supports both our forestry and tourist economies. Because it benefits so many, the High Peaks Initiative has attracted the support of numerous local organizations—hikers, snowmobilers, ATVers, ski-areas and economic development groups—which seek to protect traditional recreation and forestry in our region.

Land conservation has always been a touchy issue in Maine. In a state that prides itself on individual rights and responsibilities, public meddling in issues of private land has never been popular. However, as we shall see, the old ways of land management are rapidly changing and this calls for new thinking, if we are going to keep what we cherish.

When I came to the state in 1982, roughly 60 percent of all land parcels larger than 5,000 acres were held by pulp and paper companies. By 2005 that percentage had dropped to 15 percent. Given the high profile of companies like International Paper, Boise and others in those days, who would believe they would virtually disappear as landowners in Maine by the turn of the century? As the returns from real estate outstripped those from timberland management the paper companies one by one sold their holdings to real estate brokers, land managers and investment trusts which now collectively own 33 percent of Maine's forestlands. Plum Creek, a Real Estate Investment Trust, leads the pack with 900,000 acres. The major

paper company still holding land is Irving Paper, a Canadian company.

This enormous change in land ownership has changed the very ground we walk on. As we have seen, especially in western Maine, second-home acquisition and development have exploded as the real estate brokers turn around and subdivide the holdings they have bought. More and more roads that were once open to the public are now gated, and this is just the beginning of the trend of shutting these quasi-public lands.

Equally important, these lands are being taken out of effective forestry management through their fragmentation as parcels. It takes large scale acreage to make effective timber management practices such as thinning and replanting efficient and effective. The acreages where these are practiced have declined by 60 percent in the last 15 years. Although we are now in a downturn, when the economy returns so will the demand for pulp. And without question there will be an increasing demand for fuel wood in our energy future. These are two markets we cannot afford to lose, but we might.

Finally there is tourism. Except for the coast, Maine's tourism growth has been relatively flat in recent years. A case in point is our ski industry. Ski industry growth in the past decade has been sluggish, especially in the Northeast where the weather can be uncooperative while ski industry costs for snowmaking and insurance continue to climb steeply. For the consumer, a plane ticket out west can guarantee powder for a price comparable to a less predictable week of skiing closer to home. Add to that the likely effects of global warming and you have a reason to be nervous.

But skiing is just the start of what is here. We have world class hiking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. Our ITS trail system is the envy of many states whose residents flock here for their snowmobiling. And our ATV network, while in its early stages, shows similar promise. And Franklin County has the landscape to do it in, 200,000 acres of it.

We have eight of Maine's 14 4,000-foot mountains right in our backyard, roughly in the rectangle formed by the towns of Kingfield, Stratton,

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### Legislative Report Alternative energy rebates

By Rep. Tom Saviello  
District 90

In the last few months many of you have called and asked about potential rebates for changing to alternative energy sources. Maine residents and businesses interested in renewable energy sources can get some help from the Public Utilities Commission's Efficiency Maine program for both solar thermal systems and wind energy systems.

Efficiency Maine has reinstated the rebate program for solar thermal systems. Applications for solar system rebates must be postmarked Jan. 2 and no later than Jan. 16. If after the first quarter requests exceed the funding available, successful applications will be drawn at random.

Maine's Solar Energy Rebate Program Governor Baldacci's Solar Initiative was signed into law on June 29, 2005. The Solar Energy Rebate Program applies to solar electric and thermal energy systems purchased after July 1, 2005. The Maine Public Utilities Commission Rule Chapter 930 governs implementation of the Act.

For Solar Thermal Systems  
\* Solar thermal systems designed to heat water and air qualifies for a basic rebate of 25 percent of the cost of the system or \$1,000 whichever is less. Solar incentives for ENERGY STAR and Maine Home Performance Homes are 25 percent of the

cost of the system or \$1,500 whichever is less. The commercial incentives are now 25 percent of the system costs or \$1,000 whichever is less;

\* Solar hot water systems must be installed by licensed plumbers who have been qualified to install such systems by the Maine Public Utilities Commission, or by licensed plumbers working with someone who has been qualified to install such systems by the Maine Public Utilities Commission;

\* List of Certified Solar Thermal Installers; and,  
\* To become a certified solar thermal installer, an individual must take the two-day workshop offered by the Maine Public Utilities Commission and pass the take-home exam. To see if a workshop is coming up, please visit the MSEP's calendar of events.

For Solar Electric Systems  
\* Solar PV systems qualify for rebates of \$2/watt for the first 1,000 watts, capped at \$2,000;  
\* Effective on Jan. 1, 2008 all PV applications must include a copy of a home energy audit signed by the auditor;

\* Up to 25 percent of the designated solar fund can be spent on solar electric system rebates;

\* Solar electric systems must be installed on

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