

## Introduction

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**“Maine is careless . . . We let our open spaces get fenced off. . . . We let our scenic landscapes get cluttered. We let our best and most unique asset lose its special quality.”**

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How do you envision Bremen years from now? Will it be a town characterized by forests and scenic views as it is today? Will the ponds be clean and fit for swimming, fishing and boating? Will there still be a working waterfront? Or will the forests and fields have given way to house lots, wildlife habitat disappeared, and lobster boats replaced by yachts?

Undoubtedly most Bremen residents prefer the first scenario. Many people choose to live in Bremen for its scenic beauty and rural way of life. We often assume that beauty and way of life will exist forever. That is a false assumption. Population growth is accelerating along Mid-Coast Maine, accompanied by increased development and sprawl. We need to make sound choices now if we want to conserve lands and open space in Bremen for tomorrow. To help make those choices, the Bremen Conservation Commission has prepared a *Conservation Plan for Bremen*.

### Research

A great amount of discussion and research went into development of the Conservation Plan. The Commission invited all Bremen residents to a public forum to talk about their favorite places in Bremen and share ideas for what land should be conserved. Those in attendance had the opportunity to point to a map of Bremen and describe what places were special to them. One after another they spoke of a secret swimming spot, a skating area, hiking trails, the Johnston Hill area, the scenic views looking down Muscongus Bay from the shores of Medomak, and other favorites spots in Bremen that are precious to them. The information provided at the forum was invaluable to the Commission as it began work on the Conservation Plan.

The 2004 Bremen Comprehensive Plan played a major role in development of the Conservation Plan. It contains valuable information on Bremen’s natural resources and makes some excellent recommendations for conserving land and water resources. Unfortunately, few of the recommendations have been implemented. Rather than repeat the same research, the Conservation Plan uses and builds upon the natural resource information and recommendations provided in the Comprehensive Plan.

Additionally, the Commission consulted with numerous conservation organizations such as the Medomak Valley Land Trust (MVLТ), the Pemaquid Watershed Association (PWA), the Damariscotta River Association (DRA), the Maine Association of Conservation Commissions (MEACC), the Maine Audubon Society, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

(MDIFW), and several town committees.

The MVLТ suggested areas in Bremen such as the Western Branch and Johnston Hill that should have a high priority for conservation. The DRA described in detail how it is working with towns, other land trusts, and private landowners to establish a River~Link of undeveloped land between the Damariscotta and the Sheepscot Rivers. PWA provided information on water quality of ponds in the Pemaquid Watershed and shared the information it provides to educate landowners on how to maintain pond water quality.

Maine Audubon described its programs and suggested ways we might work together to increase recreational opportunities in Bremen. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) provided maps of high-value wildlife habitat areas in Bremen and suggested ways to preserve large blocks of habitat. The Bremen Harbor and Shellfish Committees provided information about the working waterfront and clamflat access points.

The Commission obtained suggestions for conservation of open space from organizations such as GrowSmart Maine, Friends of Midcoast Maine, the Small Woodland Owners Association (SWOAM) and the Maine Farmland Trust. We attended workshops and meetings to learn what other towns are doing to preserve open space.

All town-owned lands and rights-of-way, conservation easements, land in tree growth and open space, areas of high wildlife value, and wetlands were plotted for the first time on one property-line map. By incorporating all these elements on just one map, we were able to see what open space lands exist. We worked with the GIS Unit of the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association to prepare large-scale computerized versions of resource maps.

Using all this information, the Commission prepared a Draft Conservation Plan for Bremen. In November 2007, all residents were invited to a second public forum to comment on the draft plan, including possible strategies for conserving open space lands in Bremen. Attendees responded with opinions, comments, specific suggestions, and more information. All of this was critical in the development of the final plan.

## Quality of Place

While the Conservation Plan was being developed, the Brookings Institution issued a report called *Charting Maine's Future*. The report concluded that Maine's Quality of Place – a “brand” built on an image of livable communities, stunning scenery and great recreational opportunities – is an economic asset of increasing value for the State. Maine's unbroken forests, wild rivers, picturesque downtowns, village greens, historic homes, and grange halls, etc., are what makes it distinctive and sets it apart from other states. But the Brookings Report also concluded that “Maine is careless with this powerful economic asset today. We let our open spaces get fenced off. We let our downtowns and historic buildings deteriorate. We let our scenic landscapes get cluttered. We let our best and most unique asset lose its special quality.”

In response to the Brookings report, Governor Baldacci appointed the Council on Maine's

Quality of Place in March 2007. A report issued by the Council this year includes recommendations to conserve landscapes, revitalize communities and downtowns, and use an asset-based development strategy. “We cannot afford to wait and leave the future to chance. We need to act today to strengthen the Maine we love and, at the same time, assure an economic future for our children,” the Council stated.

## Conclusion

What is true for Maine as a whole is also true for Bremen. The good news is that it’s not too late. The town still has large blocks of undeveloped land that can provide wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, protect the quality of its water resources, and maintain its rural character and quality of life. The bad news is that if we sit back and do nothing, it soon will be too late to conserve any open space for the future. Almost without notice, large blocks of land are being sold and split up, often subdivided into smaller lots. Commercial farming has all but disappeared. Houses appear in the middle of open fields, obstructing views and reducing wildlife habitat. Or they encroach deeper and deeper into the woods, requiring longer driveways which in turn create more impermeable surface and barriers for some wildlife. Only the people who live along the shoreline of Bremen’s ponds have access to the ponds for recreational purposes, and except for the town landing, the situation isn’t much better for coastal waters. Slowly but surely, Bremen’s rural character is giving way to sprawl and suburbanization.

Sprawl is not inevitable. Through conservation planning, the town can maintain undeveloped blocks of land yet still provide plenty of sites for housing growth. Bremen can maintain its own **Quality of Place**.

What follows is a proposed **Conservation Plan for Bremen**. The narrative section is organized by the four goals in the Conservation Commission’s Mission Statement: Maintain Rural Character, Preserve Wildlife Habitat, Protect Water Resources, and Provide Recreational Opportunities. The narrative is followed by a section of **Strategies** which can be used to achieve those goals. The appendices contain reference material.

The Bremen Conservation Commission  
August 2008

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