

RECREATION

Introduction

The natural resources of Union and the region provide numerous recreational opportunities like hiking, hunting, horseback riding, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, fishing and boating. Open space includes shoreland areas, athletic fields, farms, forestlands, wetlands, lakes, ponds, and rivers, as described in these chapters of this plan: Agricultural and Forestry Resources, Natural Resources and Water Resources. The recommendations of this chapter seek to preserve and improve recreational opportunities. [NOTE: PURPLE TEXT IS FROM THE 2005 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND MAY BE WORTH RETAINING OR REVISING.]

State Goal

To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine citizens, including access to surface waters.

Analyses

(1) *Will existing recreational facilities and programs in the community and region accommodate projected growth or changes in age groups in your community?*

In general, Union and the region have the capacity to provide recreational facilities and programs for residents over the ten-year planning period. However, the Town should anticipate an increase or change in demand for recreation programs due to the growing elderly population.

(2) *Is there a need for certain types of services or facilities or to upgrade or enlarge present facilities to either add capacity or make them more usable?*

The Comprehensive Plan Survey conducted in 2016 regarding the question of locally available services, identified satisfaction levels with recreational facilities in Union as follows:

Service	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Recreation Facilities	2.86% (5)	45.71% (80)	21.71% (38)	26.86% (47)	2.86% (5)

Source: 2016 Union Survey

A majority supported creating a Recreational Trail that links the School, Village Common and Union Fairgrounds (64.46% 107 respondents). Some support for a recreational trail was conditioned on the trail not negatively affecting abutting private property owners, not requiring tax dollars to build or maintain, and not using eminent domain. It was suggested to apply for grants to fund the work and have school children participate. Several also supported sidewalks in the village area, and ATV trails in rural areas. Several suggested support for the Thompson Community Center financially and for recreational activities. Twelve suggested more recreational activities and improved recreational facilities in general and for youth and the

elderly. Related to this, eight wanted more hiking and walking trails, while seven recommended improvements to the Thompson Community Center, which is seen as dilapidated by some.

The Parks and Recreation Committee's programs, with its focus on youth, are appropriate and necessary within our limited resources. Some further development of organized programs for all citizens is advisable. Perhaps this could best be accomplished through a well-coordinated effort to integrate plans and programs with the Thompson Community Center.

The Center, while recently self-supporting in terms of normal operations and some extensive repairs, will probably need additional assistance to install an elevator to enable handicapped access to second floor rooms. The Town may be called on for financial assistance. Full use of this building by various groups, and use of the building and outdoor recreational facilities by the elementary and middle school students would not only allow broadening the programs available to serve more groups simultaneously but may enable the Center to receive more revenue from those activities. The Union Senior Citizens Club is an active group that receives some financial support from Town appropriations.

Existing recreational facilities are well-maintained overall and **successful** efforts to develop a Little League ball field **near** the Thompson Community Center **have resulted** in a popular facility.

The Union Fair grounds also offer certain recreational activities including annual antique festivals, horse and sheep shows, Scout jamborees, and special events.

Additional parks are recommended for the future enjoyment of the public and the preservation of premium open space and river access. One possibility would be Clarry Hill; a few acres at the crest, which would offer a picnic area in a sensational view setting before it is lost to high priced housing development. Public views from high points have been a part of Union's heritage for many generations, but these could be restricted by residential developments that generally discourage public access. If land is not available through donation, either to the Town or a land trust or other environmental organization, the Town should consider putting aside money from the Pullen Funds for purchase and development of such recreational lands and/or beginning a "land acquisition" fund for this or other specific land purchases. Purchase of land to retain the tradition of informal public access to other high points may be worth consideration. The Town may be able to get assistance from one of the land trusts in the Mid-Coast area or from State programs such as the Land for Maine's Future or various programs administered by the Maine Department of **Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry**, Bureau of Parks and Recreation. This type of park would be for low intensity, non-sport type activities.

Although addressed to some degree in the Transportation chapter of the Plan **topic of** sidewalks, there is a need for walking paths off the roads, both in the immediate village areas and out in the countryside. The cooperation of landowners and some volunteer efforts could result in a highly appreciated trail or two to be enjoyed by all who love nature and the outdoors. However, there appears to be **less** interest in creating trails open to ATV use.

The Town of Union has already followed policies that have resulted in both indoor and outdoor recreation for its citizens. Conversion of the old yellow school as the Thompson Community Center, **while still not fully utilized**, has been successful as far as it has gone. Union's outdoor recreational facilities were adequate for many years while the town's population was relatively stable. However, the population growth of the 1970s and 1980s along with a decline in largely outdoor occupations such as farming, have brought with them a need for more outdoor facilities. The water quality and physical characteristics of the St. George River within and near Union, including the ponds through which the river flows, offer recreational opportunities not found on the Kennebec, even though that river's water quality is improving, or on the Sheepscot and Medomak Rivers, much of which are limited to canoeists with some "white water" ability.

(3) *Are important tracts of open space commonly used for recreation publicly-owned or otherwise permanently conserved?*

Yes, important open spaces are publically owned like the Union Common, Founders Park, Ayer Park, and ---. Conservation easements protect other areas as well. See the response to 4 below.

(4) *Does the community have a mechanism, such as an open space fund or partnership with a land trust, to acquire important open spaces and access sites, either outright or through conservation easements?*

Though the Town itself does --- not currently have any agreements, partnerships in place to acquire additional open spaces, reserve funds include ---. Individual landowners have conservation easements in place utilizing two area land trusts: the Georges River Land Trust and the Medomak Valley Land Trust.

Preserves owned and managed by the Georges River Land Trust include Pool Preserve (three acres along the St. George River), Stickney Preserve (no public access), and 100-Acre Island on Crawford Pond (access only available through private lands). The Georges River Land Trust also holds conservation easements for other private lands the do not allow public access, approximately 283 acres.

Medomak Valley Land Trust is active in Union as well. They manage 65 acres on Clarry Hill in Union and more land in Waldoboro. The Carroll Farm Trail is located on a 70-acre parcel known as Sweetgrass Farm Winery and Distillery. The farm is under private ownership, and is open to the public year-round for low-impact recreation, while the Medomak Valley Land Trust maintains the trail.

(5) *Does the public have access to each of the community’s significant water bodies?*

Public access to significant water bodies is indicated in the next table.

Public Access to significant water bodies in Union		
Name (shared with)	Public Access	Location(s)
Crawford Pond (Warren)		
Crawford Stream	Yes	Founders Park
Lermond Pond (Hope)		
Medomak River (multiple)	Yes	Carroll Farm Trail
Mud Pond		
Round Pond		
Sennebec Pond (Appleton)		
Seven Tree Pond	Yes	Ayer Park
St. George River (multiple)	Yes	Union Fairgrounds

(6) *Are recreational trails in the community adequately maintained? Are there use conflicts on these trails?*

Recreational trails are primarily --- on private property including snowmobile trails. In general they are --- maintained. Conflicts have ---.

(7) *Is traditional access to private lands being restricted?*

Traditionally, year-round residents have viewed unimproved land as a shared resource, e.g. for walking, hunting, etc. and though privately owned, the land is used by residents because everyone knows each other. This has changed, especially along coastal properties, due in part to the influx of new residents, both year-round and seasonal. As more people restrict the use of their land, informal public access to private land becomes increasingly problematic.

Condition and Trends

Minimum data required to address Analyses:

(1) *The community’s Comprehensive Planning Recreation Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Department of Conservation, and the Office, or their designees.*

See the map titled Public Facilities.

(2) *A description of important public and private active recreation programs, land and water recreation areas (including hunting and fishing areas), and facilities in the community and region, including regional recreational opportunities as appropriate, and identification of unmet needs.*

Recreation Facilities and Programs

Union has two small parks and one recreation area, aside from the Common, school grounds (SAD 40), and the Union Fairgrounds (Knox Agricultural Society). A Little League baseball field is located on land behind the municipal building.

The Union Common is a scenic park and recreational asset of the town, though not under the purview of the Parks and Recreation Committee. Consisting of three Town owned parcels with a combined area of about 0.83 acre at the very center of the village commercial and social activity, it offers a few park benches, lots of trees, two war memorials and a gazebo/bandstand. The Common accommodates summer festival activities, craft and bake sales, and band concerts on special occasions. In December, it is traditionally decorated with about thirty-four Christmas trees, which are illuminated nightly.

The Thompson Community Center, a non-profit corporation, offers facilities made up of the “old yellow school” and the Thompson Memorial Building. The Center has significant space and specialized facilities (gymnasium, stage and cafeteria with kitchen) which have considerable potential for contributing to town and community recreation programs as well as accommodations suitable to revenue producing ventures. However, the facilities are in need of considerable investment for maintenance and restoration.

The land on which the Thompson Community Center is located totals approximately 20 acres, owned by the Town. The recreation area directly south of the Center contains a small park for young children, Prior Park. This playground offers a few swings, a “go-round” and two picnic tables. Immediately adjacent are an outdoor basketball court and two tennis courts, paved, well fenced, illuminated and well maintained.

Union’s combined Elementary and D. R. Gaul Middle School occupies a site of just under 49 acres, owned by SAD 40, off Route 17 just east of the Common village. Its athletic facilities are in excellent condition and include a combined soccer and baseball field, a playground and a softball field, the latter two close to Route 17. **At present, no** use is made by the school of the Thompson Community Center’s facilities, either indoor or outdoor. Non-school use of the SAD 40 facilities is extensive, and includes Babe Ruth, farm team and Little League activities in summer and during parts of the school year. Union residents also use the equipment at the playground and skateboard on the parking lot and driveways.

Ayer Park, located at the St. George River inlet to Seven Tree Pond, occupies a site of 0.8 acre owned by the Town since 1973. It was developed using State and local funds in 1973-74. It offers a public boat-launching ramp, limited parking area, swimming beach, a picnic area (ten tables, ten fireplaces), and two Porta-Potties, one of which is handicapped-accessible. Generally well maintained, the facilities were refurbished in 1990 as a public service project organized by Aaron Lincoln, an Eagle Scout. Another major renovation was carried out in 2003, including replacement of the tables and fireplaces. The park is open from April 1st to November 1st each year, with the boat ramp open year-round.

The park is heavily used and overcrowded in hot weather, unsupervised, and subject to a degree of vandalism - to the extent that many town families do not choose to use this park. A significant flaw in planning this park was the co-location of the boat ramp and bathing beach. The boat access at times draws excessive traffic and poses hazards to the unsupervised swimmers. A few vehicles with boat trailers can overwhelm the limited parking space, discouraging prospective bathers and picnickers.

The Parks and Recreation Committee's programs are focused primarily on youth activities. Programs offered in 1990 were: 1) a coed, three week team sports program for children in grades 3 through 6, 2) canoeing instruction and hiking experiences, 3) coed youth tennis instruction, 4) adult tennis lessons, 5) youth baseball, 6) Pee Wee basketball, and 7) swimming instruction at PenBay YMCA in Rockport. The programs are supported in part by the Joseph Pullen Fund, an endowment invested specifically to fund recreation activities and facilities for town citizens, and the William Pullen Fund, available for general governmental purposes, and by appropriation of taxes at Town Meeting.

Open space in our rural environment contributes heavily to the town's recreational opportunities. The river and ponds offer swimming, skating, winter and summer fishing, boating and other water sports. The surrounding hills, lanes and back roads provide access to hiking, biking and nature appreciation walks. Winter landscapes provide sledding and tobogganing opportunities as well as cross country skiing, snow shoeing and snowmobiling. Snowmobile registration receipts have been refunded by vote at Town Meeting to snowmobile clubs in adjacent towns. These clubs mark and maintain trails in the Interconnected Trail System (ITC) with the cooperation and permission of landowners. Hunting is, of course, a popular fall and winter activity; although fewer lands remain open to hunters as more properties are posted every year. Future hunting pressure may ultimately exceed the capacity of the remaining unposted lands for reasonable activity levels, but this is not expected to happen during the ten-year planning period.

A small private golf course is located on Barrett Hill Road. Owned and managed as the Union Country Club, it is a nine-hole "Par 3" course open to members and their guests from approximately April to mid-October. Presently limited to 135 members, some of whom are residents of towns other than Union, there is a waiting list for new memberships.

Recreation Areas within the Region:

- Beech Hill Preserve (Rockport)
- Camden Hills State Park (Camden/Lincolntonville)
- Jack Baker Woods (Thomaston)
- Penobscot Bay YMCA (Rockport and Rockland)
- Pleasant Point Nature Preserve (Cushing)
- Rockland Harbor, including Rockland Breakwater (Rockland)
- Thomaston Village Trail - Georges Highland Path

Recreation needs of Union residents include adequate ongoing maintenance of the Town's limited recreational facilities, including ---, and trails through open spaces, as well as the consideration of the hosting of recreational programs within Union.

(3) *An inventory of any fresh or salt water bodies in the community determined locally to have inadequate public access.*

The public has boating access, for a fee, to Crawford Pond via a ramp at the Mic Mac Cove Campground and Cabins. Canoes can be launched from a site on the Union Fairgrounds on the St. George River above Round Pond. Seven Tree Pond should be studied, perhaps in cooperation with the Town of Warren, to determine if any other sites are suitable and potentially available for launching sites, either “full service” or limited to car-topped craft. The east shore of the pond, reachable from Route 131 south, may present opportunities, especially near South Union. A privately owned site on the St. George River, immediately downstream of the Middle Road Bridge in Warren, has been used for occasional canoe launching and retrieval with the owner’s permission. Other sites on the pond or the adjacent river may be found.

Water bodies within inadequate public access in Union are shown in the next table.

Name	Improvements Needed
ADD AS APPROPRIATE	

--- does not have adequate public access, lacking ---. Parking is limited at ---.

(4) *A description of local and regional trail systems, trail management organizations, and conservation organizations that provide trails for all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiling, skiing, mountain biking, or hiking*

Trails include --- along --- and snowmobile trails traversing over privately owned land located mostly between --- and maintained by --- Snowmobile Club. Cross-country ski trails on property owned by the ---, accessed via ---.

(5) *A map or list of important publicly-used open spaces and their associated facilities, such as parking and toilet facilities.*

See the map titled Public Facilities.

Public Open Spaces in Union: Associated Facilities	
Name	Associated Facilities
Ayer Park	Parking, Toilets, Landing, Picnic tables
Founders Park	
Thompson Community Center / Prior Park/Town Office Land	Parking, Toilets, Ballfield, Playground, Tennis Courts
Union Common	Benches
ADD AS APPROPRIATE	

Policies

- (1) To maintain/upgrade existing recreational facilities as necessary to meet current and future needs.
- (2) To preserve open space for recreational use as appropriate.
- (3) To seek to achieve or continue to maintain at least one major point of public access to major water bodies for boating, fishing, and swimming, and work with nearby property owners to address concerns.

Strategies

Recreation: Strategies	Responsible Parties	Timeframe
<p>(1) Create a list of recreation needs or develop a recreation plan to meet current and future needs. Assign a committee or community official to explore ways of addressing the identified needs and/or implementing the policies and strategies outlined in the plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a plan for a multi-use complex of recreational and other municipal and quasi-municipal facilities along the South Union Road below the Thompson Community Center. 	<p>Selectmen and Recreation Committee</p>	<p>Immediate and Ongoing</p>
<p>(2) Work with public and private partners to extend and maintain a network of trails for motorized and non-motorized uses (walking and hiking). Connect with regional trail systems where possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a pedestrian/bicycle pathway along portions of the St. George River between the village and Union Fairgrounds, and from the village toward the D.R. Gaul School. • Work with local snowmobile clubs, landowners, and the Union Conservation Commission to create additional trails, which might be used for walking in warm weather, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter. There would be little public cost involved if volunteer labor was used. 	<p>Selectmen and Recreation Committee, Conservation Commission, Snowmobile Clubs, Landowners</p>	<p>Midterm</p>
<p>(3) Work with an existing local land trust or other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquire through donation to the Town or purchase, land at the summit of Clarry Hill for a small park and picnic area. 	<p>Selectmen and Recreation Committee</p>	<p>Long Term</p>
<p>(4) Provide educational materials regarding the benefits and protections for landowners allowing public recreational access on their property. At a minimum this will include information on Maine’s landowner liability law regarding recreational or harvesting use, Title 14, M.R.S.A. §159-A.</p>	<p>Selectmen and Recreation Committee</p>	<p>Immediate and Ongoing</p>

Note: Strategies proposed in this Comprehensive Plan are assigned responsible parties and a timeframe in which to be addressed. Immediate is assigned for strategies to be addressed within two years after the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, Midterm for strategies to be addressed within five years, and Long Term for strategies to be addressed within ten years. In addition, Ongoing is used for regularly recurring activities.

THE TEXT BELOW IS FROM THE 2005 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. RELEVANT PORTIONS COULD BE RETAINED OR REVISED AND INCLUDED IN THE UPDATED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. NOTE: AS SUGGESTIONS, SOME HAVE ALREADY BEEN ADDED ABOVE.

Recommendations/Implementation Strategies

1. The Town should begin planning for a pedestrian/bicycle pathway along portions of the St. George River between the village and Union Fair. This pathway could also extend easterly from the village toward the D.R. Gaul School. (Parks and Recreation or special committee, Selectmen) Long Term
2. Acquire, through donation to the Town or through purchase by a semi-private organization similar to the land trusts, improved public access to the lakes and other waterways in the Town. (Private initiative) Long Term
3. Acquire through donation to the Town or purchase, land at the summit of Clarry Hill for a small park and picnic area. The Town may be able to get assistance from one of the land trusts in the Mid-coast area or from State programs such as the Land for Maine's Future or various programs administered by the Maine Department of Conservation, Bureau of Parks and Recreation. (Conservation Commission, Parks and Recreation Committee, Selectmen, Budget Committee, Town Meeting) Long Term
4. The Town should consider working with local snowmobile clubs, landowners, and perhaps the Union Conservation Commission to create additional trails, which, depending on how they are laid out, might be used for walking in warm weather, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter. There would be little public cost involved if volunteer labor can create much of the trails and needed improvements such as footbridges over streams. (Parks and Recreation Committee, Selectmen, Budget Committee, Town Meeting) Ongoing
5. Establish a special committee to develop a plan for a multi-use complex of recreational and other municipal and quasi-municipal facilities along the South Union Road below TCC. (Selectmen) Long Term