



**FOREST
SOCIETY
of MAINE**

Nicatous Lake Project

Land Worth Protecting

In interior downeast Maine, Nicatous (pronounced "nick-a-TAO-us") Lake has long been prized for its scenic qualities, remote character, abundance of wildlife, and recreational opportunities. The vast, unbroken forests surrounding the lake are also valued as prime

forestland, particularly for growing white pine. In 1997, Jim and Jenness Robbins, the visionary owners of more than 20,000 acres around Nicatous and West Lakes, initiated a landmark conservation venture that was completed in April 2000. A productive partnership that included Robbins Lumber Company, the

Conservation Easement

A legally binding agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently protects valuable attributes of the property for the public while the lands remain privately owned. An easement can prohibit development, protect key ecological values, guarantee public access, and ensure sustainable forest management. Once in place, the easement is permanent and remains in effect with all future landowners.

Forest Society of Maine (FSM), the Maine Department of Conservation, the Trust for Public Land, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and International Paper Company resulted in several noteworthy outcomes:

- a conservation easement on 20,068 acres of Robbins Lumber Company land that guarantees a balanced array of ecological, economic, and recreational benefits;
- state ownership of 76 Nicatous islands and a 300-acre parcel connecting an existing state ownership with Nicatous Lake;
- prohibition of development

along 34 miles of spectacular shoreline;

- continuation of the property's availability for long-term forest management;
- protection of the Nicatous shoreline for nesting bald eagles; and
- permanent public recreational access to nearly 50,000 connected acres of state and private conservation land.



Nicatous Lake is dotted with nearly 100 small islands.

FSM file photo

Conservation Values

Maine's conservation community has identified the "Downeast Lakes Region" of Maine as a high priority for protection due to its significant ecological, recreational, and forestland values and growing development threats. The conservation easement at Nicatous Lake is an important step toward protecting this region. It prohibits development on the entire property, including most of the highly desirable shorelines of 1,363-acre West Lake and 5,574-acre Nicatous Lake, protects valuable plant and

animal habitats and water quality, and keeps the land available for forest management.

Wildlife

Towering white pines on the shoreline and islands of Nicatous Lake provide nesting habitat for bald eagles, and the lake is a breeding area for one of the largest loon populations in Maine. West Lake boasts a significant landlocked salmon fishery. The extensive forestland around Nicatous contains unusual glacial features and a diverse

array of forest types, wetlands, ponds, and streams. These habitats are protected under the easement with special management provisions. For example, 12 percent of the forestland must remain in a "mature forest type" suitable for deer wintering habitat, and a percentage of the forestland must also be managed for hardwoods that pro-



Jenness and Jim Robbins, owners of the easement land and initiators of the project, show off healthy white pine regeneration.

Photo by Bill Silliker, Jr.

continued on back >



The wetland complex surrounding Guagus Stream is one of several unique wetland features protected by the Nicatus easement. *FSM file photo*

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duce nuts and other food for wildlife. The conservation value of the property is bolstered by its adjacency to the state's 25,000-acre Duck Lake Public Reserved Lands Unit, creating almost 50,000 acres of contiguous wildlife habitat.

Water quality

The lakes, ponds, streams, and other wetlands on the property are surrounded by protective buffers under the easement. Forest managers must also follow best management guidelines for harvesting in these riparian areas.

Recreation and scenery

In a state with more than 6,000 lakes, Nicatus stands out for its size and for its scores of small rocky islands, craggy peninsulas, and tucked-away sandy beaches. These unusual features have long attracted Mainers and visitors alike to the region, and the easement ensures that traditional uses such as canoeing, camping, hiking, and fishing will always be permitted. The easement also sets standards whereby scenic areas such as the Nicatus and West Lake shorelines and certain hillsides are managed to preserve their visual qualities for public enjoyment.

Sustainable forestry

The Nicatus easement serves as a

working example of how forestland can be managed successfully for ecological health, public enjoyment, and economic good through forestry. The easement was carefully constructed to protect conservation and recreational values, while simultaneously allowing for sustained timber harvesting. It includes restrictions on cutting in areas that are ecologically sensitive or that are valued for recreation, as well as provisions for forest practices that protect and perpetuate the ability of the land to produce valuable forest products.

forest products.

Making It All Happen

The commitment and cooperation of many organizations, individuals, public officials, and the landowners made possible the remarkable outcomes at Nicatus. The project partners worked hard to craft a pioneering easement and obtain the funding necessary to acquire the easement and new state lands. Maine's congressional delegation secured \$3 million from the Forest Legacy Program, a U.S. Forest

Service program that partners with states to encourage the protection of privately owned forestlands, and the Land for Maine's Future Program contributed \$750,000.

Today the property remains under private ownership by Robbins Lumber Company, and International Paper Company (IP) manages the forestry operations. The conservation easement is held by the Maine Department of Conservation, and the department's Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) maintains the property's campsites and manages recreational use. The Forest Society of Maine monitors the easement, ensuring that all terms are met. All of the parties involved (Robbins Lumber, BPL, FSM, and IP) work together to honor the intent of the easement, and to find appropriate solutions when problems are encountered. This partnership serves as a model for future working forestland conservation projects in Maine.

National Recognition

In 2001, the Nicatus Lake project became the first Forest Legacy project to receive the Taking Wing Award, a prestigious national award presented by the U.S. Forest Service in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. This award is given in recognition of significant efforts to conserve wetland ecosystems for waterfowl and other wildlife. The Nicatus project was chosen as the national winner in the "Habitat" category because it protects large areas of critical undeveloped shoreland and wetland.

