

## **Appendix E**

### **Swan Island**

Swan Island is part of the 1,755 acre, state owned, Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area in the middle of the lower Kennebec River in the towns of Richmond and Dresden. During the years between 1940 -1950 the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) took ownership of the Island and currently operates it for visitors and as a natural science education facility.

Swan Island is known best for its abundant wildlife that features nesting bald eagles, white-tailed deer and wild turkey. The Island has a rich and storied history that includes use by Native American tribes, early explorers, and settlers. In 1995, Swan Island was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

More than 3,000 people visited Swan Island in 2007. Access to the island is provided through the Department by a ferry boat service from the boat landing in Richmond. Visitors must make a reservation and obtain a written permit before coming to the island. While there are complaints about this system, and it seems a bit cumbersome, a reservation line is open part-time during business hours and a potential visitor may leave a message and expect a return call in a reasonable amount of time. On Swan Island, there are miles of roads and walking trails to explore and environmental programs are offered to schoolchildren and the public by DIFW employees.

Swan Island is positioned very well to expand on what is already happening there. The Island itself offers an experience that many tourists who come to Maine and local visitors want. Abundant and very visible wildlife, great trails, and a chance for visitors to experience a piece of the Kennebec and its history makes for a very appealing activity package for visitors. The fact that Swan Island is located so close to major population centers makes the Island that much more accessible and appealing to visitors.

There are currently two DIFW documents that address the management of Swan Island. The first is a Wildlife Management Plan and the second is a Master Plan that essentially addresses the management issues outside of the Island's wildlife resources. The Master Plan was

completed in 1995 and should be re-examined and re-drafted if necessary. The Friends of Swan Island is a group that looks after and helps maintain the historical buildings that are located on the Island. Given limited resources, this is no small task.

***Recommendations: Gathered from stakeholders at the Reach Committee Meetings and Action Group Meetings***

The current wildlife management strategy restricts hunting/trapping of any type and the island is managed as a preserve. The down side of this strategy can lead to an unbalanced ecosystem and a loss of habitat from over grazing by a burgeoning population of deer. The deer situation on the island could be addressed with a limited hunt to control this population. One strategy would be to offer a lottery for the privilege to take part in a limited population control hunt. Successful permit winners would pay an additional fee once selected and the program could become a money maker for the DIFW and further assist with the costs involved with managing Swan Island. Given that the Island is closed to the public beginning in October, a hunt on the Island would not interfere with the public's use. The views of the towns of Richmond and Dresden need to be heard and looked at prior to any hunting on Swan Island.

Increasing the number of visitors on Swan Island would allow more people learn about and enjoy this area. If numbers were to increase significantly, the current ferry situation provided by DIFW, may not be able to keep up with the demand. There were recommendations made for Swan Island over that last year that range from building a bridge from Richmond to the island to making the island a State Park or Public Reserve Land using the Department of Conservation model.

The DIFW, at one time, produced an attractive poster promoting Swan Island and its many attractions. A reprinting of this informational poster for distribution to visitor's centers and other areas frequented by tourists throughout New England would be a first step to attracting more people to the island. While Swan Island information can be accessed via a link on the DIFW website, this information needs to be connected to other activities in the Kennebec Corridor for tourists to take advantage of. The idea of creating tour packages with various activities for visitors has come up often and Swan Island could fit into any one of these packages.

Participants in the KRI process believe that Swan Island has the potential to play a much larger role in the evolution of the Kennebec River as a strategic regional asset. This role needs to include expanding public access and offering people more opportunities to experience the island's natural, historic, wildlife, and scenic values. Increased appreciation for this resource will build further support for the multiple missions of DIFW and highlight the need to conserve and protect the river and the entire Lower Kennebec region.