

**Friends of Merrymeeting Bay**  
**P.O. Box 233**  
**Richmond, ME 04357**

03/19/08

Danny Martin  
Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife  
State House Station 33  
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Commissioner Martin,

Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) is a conservation group whose mission is to preserve, protect and enhance the ecosystems of Merrymeeting Bay. FOMB is a unique organization that works at both the state and local levels to preserve our precious environmental resources in Maine and around this Bay of international significance. Merrymeeting Bay drains nearly 40% of the State and is known for its extraordinary fish, bird, and plant populations, many of which are considered rare, threatened, or endangered.

One of the gems of Merrymeeting Bay is Swan Island, which MDIF&W has successfully managed to protect wildlife habitat as well as provide controlled access to the public. A day trip or overnight visit to Swan Island can almost guarantee sightings of deer, turkey, bald eagles and other Island residents and is an excellent way to experience the Kennebec and Merrymeeting Bay area. In addition, Swan Island's popularity with the public [4,000 visitors/season] reflects well on MDIF&W while also providing spin-off economic benefits to area businesses.

Unfortunately, difficult economic times have lead to a proposal that would eliminate seasonal ranger, conservation aide and reservations clerk positions. While we understand that limited day access may remain an option with the cooperation of Friends of Swan Island and FOMB volunteers, limited access and the elimination of overnight visits will significantly impact the public's enjoyment and educational use of Swan Island.

Equally important as reduced access, is the concern that a lack of overnight ranger or aide presence might lead to increased vandalism and poaching. As the word gets out that the Island is often untended, inappropriate visits might rise. As you well know, the historic significance of the remaining island buildings is unparalleled.

In the past, there have been suggestions that Island services could be privatized. We are concerned, however, that in the quest for profitability, the concessionaire would demand a larger camping area, additional facilities, and other changes that would negatively impact what should be, first and foremost, a wildlife reserve. The current system of limited access strikes a positive balance between public education and wildlife protection and is presumably in keeping with conditions attached to federal funds used in the Island's acquisition.

We trust that as you consider the proposed budget cuts you'll conclude that the amount saved is not worth the reduction in services, and that continued day and night visitation to Swan Island should continue. We also encourage the Department to partner with the Student Conservation Association [SCA]. SCA, a national non-profit, funds trained resource interns/assistants to seasonally assist federal and state resource agencies across the country.

Sincerely,

Ed Friedman, Chair

cc Representatives Berry, Treat, Watson, Hanley, Priest, Gerzofsky, Grose, Rines, Eberle, Jackson  
Senators Benoit, Treat, McCormick, Edmunds, Bryant, Martin  
Appropriations Committee [Rotundo Fischer Craven Webster]