

\$5M distributed for riverfronts

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OF THE NEWS STAFF

AUGUSTA — Roughly \$5 million in voter-approved bonds are being divvied up among communities from Fort Kent to Biddeford for riverfront development projects.

In November 2007, Maine voters endorsed a package of bonds that included money for a new program to promote development and economic revitalization along Maine's rivers. On Thursday, Gov. John Baldacci unveiled the list of 14 projects that will share the \$4.9 million.

"Our rivers are the lifeblood of Maine," Baldacci said at a State House news conference.

"They have always been vital to the state's economic development and remain so today."

More than half of the communities — including Orono, Pittsfield and Skowhegan — plan to use the money to help build trails and improve public access to the river. The Piscataquis County town of Milo, meanwhile, plans to use its \$197,300 earmark to rebuild a downtown devastated by fire last October.

"The community is very excited about moving forward and putting the past behind us," Milo town manager Jeff Gahagan said at the news conference.

The package of Riverfront Community Development Bonds includes:

- \$675,000 to Bangor for the next phase of the city's effort to develop a 12-acre park along the downtown waterfront from the intersection of Railroad and Front streets.

- \$215,500 to East Machias to redevelop an old mill and hatchery.

- \$652,000 to five Aroostook County communities to create trails, provide public access and complete other riverfront projects. Towns participating in the \$2.5 million project are Grand Isle, Fort Kent, Madawaska, Frenchville and Van Buren.

- \$110,000 to Skowhegan for a riverside park featuring trails and water access.

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To be eligible for the program, communities must raise \$2 in local or outside funding for every \$1 in bond money. Baldacci's office said that in actuality the \$4.9 million would leverage more than \$41 million in matching dollars.

The city of Bangor, for instance, also received \$580,000 in grants from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for its downtown waterfront redevelopment project. Engineering for the \$2.3 million project is 90 percent complete, with work expected to begin by summer 2010.

The park project is expected to include pedestrian and bicycle paths, play areas for children, a skating rink, amenities including picnic tables and benches, and space for an outdoor theater to be developed later.

"The city has pursued this project for over 20 years by following a consistent vision," Bangor Mayor Gerry Palmer said in a statement. "Tremendous progress has been made in turning this previously industrial area into an outstanding economic and recreational asset. We are pleased that the state has recognized the potential of this project and has supported it through this grant."

Speaker after speaker at Thursday's event said the bonds reflect the growing appreciation

Pittsfield gets park expansion funds

BY SHARON KILEY MACK
OF THE NEWS STAFF

PITTSFIELD — The announcement that Pittsfield was awarded \$32,200 in state riverfront funds Thursday to upgrade the Pinnacle Park for public recreation was met with celebration by a dedicated group of people who have been revitalizing the area.

"The Pinnacle has always been a wonderful resource for skiers, but now it can become a multipurpose area and attract a lot more people," Councilor Donna Chale said.

She added that as families look closer to home for recre-

ational opportunities, the Pinnacle will become more and more important.

"Wow! Isn't that great?" Deputy Mayor Wayne Fother said. "This is just terrific news. Pittsfield sure has a lot to offer, don't we?"

Fother said that with municipalities having tough budgets, the money would go far toward realizing the Pinnacle's potential.

The award was part of \$5 million in Riverfront Community Development Bonds announced by Gov. John Baldacci on Thursday afternoon. In Pittsfield, the grant funds will be used to begin more than

\$96,600 worth of improvements to the Pinnacle, which now consists of ski slopes and a small ski lodge. The grant funds will be used to create an ice-skating and skateboarding area, a boat launch and to further develop some primitive trails along the Sebasticook River.

In addition, there are plans for scenic platforms for bird-watching and fishing.

Pittsfield was one of 14 communities receiving grant funds, which were part of a package that Maine voters approved in November 2007.

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for the role that Maine's rivers should play as the state seeks to capitalize economically on its "quality of place."

Most of Maine's cities and towns sprouted around factories and mills that relied on the river. But over the decades, many of those rivers became so polluted and degraded that they were often regarded as eyesores or even liabilities to neighboring communities.

State and federal environmental regulations, including the Clean Water Act spearheaded by Maine Sen. Edmund Muskie, have led to dramatic improvements in water quality. And interest in fishing, canoe-

ing, kayaking and other types of outdoor recreation means rivers are also major tourist draws for the state.

"Where we once turned our backs on them, we now see them as a resource and an asset," said Gardiner Mayor Andrew MacLean, whose town will share a \$495,000 grant with Augusta for trails, public access and habitat improvements along the Kennebec River.

Other communities getting Riverfront Community Development Bonds are:

- Biddeford — \$500,000 for a river walk, dam and mill redevelopment.

- Houlton — \$22,600 for trails, public access and habitat

- Orono — \$96,400 for a river park, trails and public access.

- Pittsfield — \$32,200 for trails, public access and habitat improvement.

- Richmond — \$333,000 for a riverfront park and public access.

- Saco — \$675,000 to redevelop a mill, a riverfront park and public access.

- Sanford — \$675,000 to redevelop a mill, a riverfront park and public access.

- Thomaston — \$221,000 to redevelop Maine state prison, a river park and trails.