

Maine Sunday Telegram

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Progress can entail preserving best of our state's wild places Creating the proposed Maine Woods National Park will take, as folk singer Pete Seeger said, many, many small leaders.

By Thomas Mark Szelog

WHITEFIELD — Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award-winning folk singer Pete Seeger once stated, “Be wary of great leaders; hope that there are many, many small leaders.”

These words are guiding principles in the quest to create the 3.2 million-acre proposed Maine Woods National Park, an effort supported by Seeger, who said several years ago: “Hooray for the good people of Maine, who are pushing for a Maine Woods National Park, and will save these priceless lakes and streams from commercial exploitation.”

Although Seeger has passed on, his inspiration continues and epitomizes the American spirit, reinforcing the importance and urgency of protecting our country’s landscape and wildlife by rallying people to create the proposed Maine Woods National Park.

It will take many, many small leaders to make the proposed park a reality. Sadly, it is easier to build a casino, condominium or resort than it is to preserve our priceless and fragile natural beauty and ecosystems. Recent news states that the economic success realized from the casinos is fueling interest to build more casinos in Maine. Why do we turn a blind eye to the economic success that our national parks provide?

NATURAL BEAUTY AND TOURISM

Maine’s natural beauty contributes significantly to one of the state’s largest industries: tourism. Maine’s natural beauty has become its brand – a brand with a proven track record of economic success, and a brand with which other states cannot compete.

With America’s natural beauty becoming scarcer, Maine’s natural beauty is becoming more cherished and valuable; hence, the urgency regarding protecting it. The loss of our state’s abundant beauty would negatively affect the tourism industry. Subdivision, sprawl and real estate development will result in the loss of land access, and the spraying of toxic herbicides and pesticides will contribute to polluting water and air and threaten life.

We benefit from casinos, condos and resorts with economic growth and jobs.

We can benefit from the proposed Maine Woods National Park with economic growth and jobs, as well as the protection of a fragile and magnificent ecosystem that will contribute to the ongoing health of all species, human and wild, and provide us clean air, clean water and peace.

The creation of the proposed park will not terminate hunting, forestry, snowmobiling and other recreational activities. Maine has an abundance of land to support all these activities and the park as well.

Business leaders know the value of having a vision to ensure the long-term viability of companies. We, as a society, need to be the many, many leaders with a vision to ensure the long-term viability of our natural world.

Having a keen vision contributes to progress, but progress isn't always building the newest, most high-tech building or equipment. Sometimes progress is having the leadership to simply preserve those things that don't need to be improved, such as nature itself.

SOME COMPROMISE THEIR OBJECTIVES

Even some of Maine's most prominent so-called leaders of conservation groups whose missions are to protect wildlife, conserve habitat and preserve wild places compromise their objectives. They do not openly support the proposed park for fear of losing financial supporters who may oppose the park. Where is their vision, courage and commitment to save priceless lakes, streams, wildlife and habitat from commercial exploitation?

Where is our vision, our appreciation for our natural world and precious earth, our compassion for life, our dedication to put the preservation of life before greed?

Many, many leaders need to stay focused on keeping the "great" in Maine's Great North Woods by working together to create the Maine Woods National Park. We have an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate true leadership and contribute to saving our earth, its precious resources, and all species, human and wild.

Although there are many aspects of our federal government that need to be fixed, one of the greatest achievements of our federal government is the National Park System. Our national parks protect the greatest natural beauty, ecosystems and species within our country. Our national parks put the "beautiful" in "America the beautiful."

— *Special to the Telegram*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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