

**BLETHEN MAINE NEWSPAPERS**

12.23.08

FRANK A. BLETHEN Chairman of the Board

CHARLES C. COCHRANE President and Chief Executive Officer

A MEMBER OF THE SEATTLE TIMES FAMILY OF NEWSPAPERS

OUR OPINION

Grant reception shows how well synergy works

Communities, local economy to benefit from cooperative effort

The state's residents, visitors and a number of municipal tax bases should all benefit as a result of grants totaling almost \$5 million that were made last week.

Those 14 grants were the fruit of a bond measure passed in 2007 by Maine voters. After decades of pollution and industrial blight had degraded Maine's rivers and shorelines, the idea behind the bond was that the state's now cleaned-up riverfronts could drive economic activity and renewal.

It was a concept that had produced good results in other states, where the redevelopment of rundown riverfronts led to thriving new homes and businesses, as well as recreational and cultural opportunities such as hiking trails, parks and annual festivals.

The bond was called the Riverfront Community Development Bond and its intent was to stimulate development for the many Maine riverside cities and towns with projects bigger than city pocketbooks.

Grant proposals were submitted and Thursday Gov. John Baldacci announced who had won. The awards went to cities stretched along the coast from Biddeford to East Machias. They were sprinkled inland to communities along the Penobscot, Kennebec and St. John rivers. They were small — \$45,000 to Augusta — and large — \$675,000 each to projects in Sanford and Bangor. They include a number of trail-building and park construction projects, the redevelopment of old industrial buildings and habitat improvement for degraded rivers.

Of particular note are the winning projects along the Kennebec River and its tributary, the Sebasticook. These two rivers — technically, one watershed — and the five cities in them that won the \$1.16 million in grants represent almost 24 percent of the \$4.9 million granted. That's some record, and the residents of Pittsfield, Skowhegan, Richmond, Gardiner and Augusta should give a pat on the back to their civic officials who worked on the grant proposals and the citizens who worked

READ ALL ABOUT IT

To read the specifics of the local bond recipients, go to <http://cen.traimaine.maineleday.com/pdf/riverbond.pdf>

with them, as well.

They also should thank the good people who work at the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments for their help in sowing the seeds of those grants. The council has acted as midwife for what's called the Kennebec River Initiative, a sprawling plan devised to guide the ecologically and economically appropriate development of the river corridor from its northern Maine headwaters all the way to the ocean.

The plan's thrust is entirely in line with the principles guiding the bond awards: That a combination of conserved recreational and agricultural land along our rivers as well as ecologically sensitive commercial and residential development will help stimulate economic activity as well as create communities that people want to live in. The council held briefings for member cities considering filing grant applications and staffers helped individual cities with their applications.

And finally, we're impressed with the level of cooperation in the grant process shown by two cities that often consider themselves rivals, Augusta and Gardiner. Instead of competing, the two cities applied jointly for a grant to fund riverfront historical signs and other amenities in Augusta and riverfront park construction in Gardiner.

"Augusta's Mayor (Roger) Katz and I both enthusiastically embrace regional efforts to capitalize on the remarkable natural asset that is the Kennebec River," said Gardiner Mayor Andrew MacLean.

In a sense, the entire set of grants to the Kennebec watershed's communities make that point: That our river is one remarkable natural asset on which to pin at least a substantial part of our economic future.

OUR OPINION represents the opinion of the Editorial Board of this newspaper. Publisher John Christie, Executive Editor Eric Conrad and Opinion Page Editor Naomi Schalit.