



Making Headway in the Katahdin Region

Community Celebration

August 20, 2017

Summary Report



Making Headway in Your Community is a program of GrowSmart Maine and the Maine Downtown Center. Making Headway in the Katahdin Region was led by GrowSmart Maine in close partnership with Our Katahdin and Katahdin Revitalization and funded by the Elmina B Sewall Foundation through a grant to The Nature Conservancy in Maine.

The Katahdin Region is seeing much change, as residents actively seek out new opportunities for dormant paper mill properties and the Katahdin Woods & Waters National Monument completes its first year within the National Park Service. GrowSmart Maine engaged community members from Medway, Millinocket and East Millinocket on a short-term program “Making Headway in the Katahdin Region” to begin to envision what’s next for the region, and create tangible projects that set the stage for the work ahead. The Community Celebration is a completion of this program.

Purpose

On Sunday August 20th residents of the Katahdin region joined friends and neighbors to celebrate six community projects generated through the Making Headway in the Katahdin Region this spring and summer. This celebration marked the conclusion of the second annual Penobscot River Festival in Medway and included appearances by project leaders reporting on progress, shared successes, and offering thanks to those who helped them along the way. Each of these projects, in their own way, is moving the Katahdin region forward and bringing communities and community members closer together and preparing them to address the opportunities ahead.



Event Summary



At 2pm attendees were invited to enjoy ice cream and asked to think about ‘What’s next for the Katahdin Region?’ A flip chart was provided where people could add their thoughts and ideas or show support for the ideas of others. Community members brought homemade treats and volunteers scooped ice cream for all ages on the hot day. Tyler Kidder, Community Outreach Director of GrowSmart Maine, welcomed the gathered crowd and invited project leaders to the stage for exciting progress updates and ways for community members to stay engaged.

People gathered under a nearby tent while listening to the informal presentations by project leaders. The Festival was held on the banks of the Penobscot River in a town park.

Organizers of the Penobscot River Fest, one of the projects supported through the program, thanked everyone for attending their second annual weekend-long family-friendly festival. Despite cloudy days and a few rain storms, attendance was higher than last year with fun events running from Friday morning through Sunday afternoon. Diverse food vendors provided sustenance to the festival-goers, a costumed fairy led fairy trail tours through the adjacent woods, pets competed for best dressed and best trick, and local crafters sold their wares.

Wende Sairio, director of the Katahdin Regional Chamber of Commerce, presented a large format version of her soon-to-be-printed regional map which will be available for visitors. Sairio identified a need for a comprehensive map that included seasonal attractions, outdoor activities, businesses and services, as well as trails, state parks, and the national monument. As an added bonus, the map includes detail maps of the region's towns and cities to provide additional information and encourage visitors to visit the historic downtowns.



An update on a school backpack project was provided by project leader Jada Kimball, a junior at Schenck High School in East Millinocket. Fundraising for the project was done by Jada and through crowd funding on Our Katahdin's web platform for community projects. Backpacks are available to local students who may be without a backpack, school supplies, or personal care items. 35 families registered in advance for backpacks with 65 more ready to be given out to students. Penquis Community Action Program, Toys R Us, and the Calvary Temple Church all donated supplies to the program, with community members contributing funds and supplies as well. Jada is hoping to scale the program up to serve more students and expand its geographic reach to Millinocket and Lincoln. Jada, and her community, recognize how it important it is for students to have what they need to be successful in school.

Jada's program has received positive press. Check out this TV coverage from over the summer: <http://www.wlbz2.com/news/local/teens-backpack-program-will-send-100-kids-to-school-with-what-they-need/465112656>. You can stay in touch with the program via email: jadasbackpackprogram@gmail.com.

Another project has continued full steam ahead: 'Youth Entrepreneurship: Owning Your Future'. The project team has created and piloted a program aimed at nurturing youth entrepreneurs in high school at Stearns, Schenck and Katahdin High Schools and has the stated long-term goal of encouraging

young adults in the Katahdin Region to consider starting businesses that are connected to the natural and cultural assets of the region. A group of community leaders had been thinking about this idea before the Making Headway program after attending a conference in rural Pennsylvania. The experiential program is designed to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen at an early age, and connect local communities through learning, inspiration and innovation. It includes a paid teacher coordinator role, a 40 minute classroom presentation, piloted in Schenck this past spring, and is ready to be rolled out in area high schools this fall. The Katahdin Region, like many in Maine, is looking for creative ways to engage students and encourage them to stay in the region after graduation. This project has the added benefit of featuring local businesses in classroom and experiential situations bringing the generations in closer contact with each other.

In addition to the Making Headway seed money, the youth entrepreneurship project had local success with fundraising and received financial contributions from ten businesses from around the region. In addition, the team has connected with the area school superintendents and received their support to integrate this exciting work into the curriculum. The Making Headway process provided an avenue for this project group to jump start their fundraising while gaining broad public support for their initiative, demonstrating that Making Headway can boost existing, as well as sparking new, ideas for a community or region.



Matt Delaney, Library Director at the Millinocket Memorial Library, presented on the [Katahdin Story Booth Project](#) which is a community initiative to record and share the personal stories of the people that have lived, worked, and shaped the Katahdin Region we know today. Delaney played a newly edited compilation of recordings from local people which were touching and thoughtful – many in the audience recognized voices of neighbors, former co-workers, and friends. More recordings will be available soon and will live on the library’s website as the project grows:

<http://millinocketmemoriallibrary.org/storybooth/>

Delaney says, ‘Through sound recordings, we invite people to tell their stories to each other, helping preserve our past as we prepare for the future. It is both the ordinary and the extraordinary stories that connect people and strengthen communities through the simple process of storytelling.’

The Katahdin Story Booth Project is a mobile listening and recording experience that provides an opportunity to identify common themes crossing generations, political boundaries, and town borders to strengthen the regional community. In addition, collected stories identify people’s relationship to the

land around them. These goals fit well with Making Headway’s overall theme of honoring the past while preparing for the future.

‘The Katahdin Story Booth Project has worked with over 25 storytellers so far, and we look forward to bringing in many more. We plan to expand the reach of our project by lending out “Story Kits” so people can conduct their own Living History projects with their friends and family. We also look forward to partnering with students and other organizations to help us edit our material to make the project even more accessible for listeners.’ says Delaney.

In addition to the seed money from Making Headway, the Katahdin Story Booth Project was made possible through the generous support of numerous community partners including Maine Folklife Center, National Park Service, designlab, and East Millinocket Public Library.

The sixth project presented at the Community Conversation: Pitch Night in the spring was the Katahdin Art Festival. Organizers and advisors have decided to hold this even in downtown Millinocket in August 2018, giving them time to recruit artists and organize for the festival.

Deb Rountree and State Representative Steve Stanley, both active members of Katahdin Revitalization, closed out the celebration by announcing the next speaker series which will be held in the Katahdin Region Education Center, thanking all of the project teams, and sharing inspirational words that describe a challenged but motivated region who is truly Making Headway.

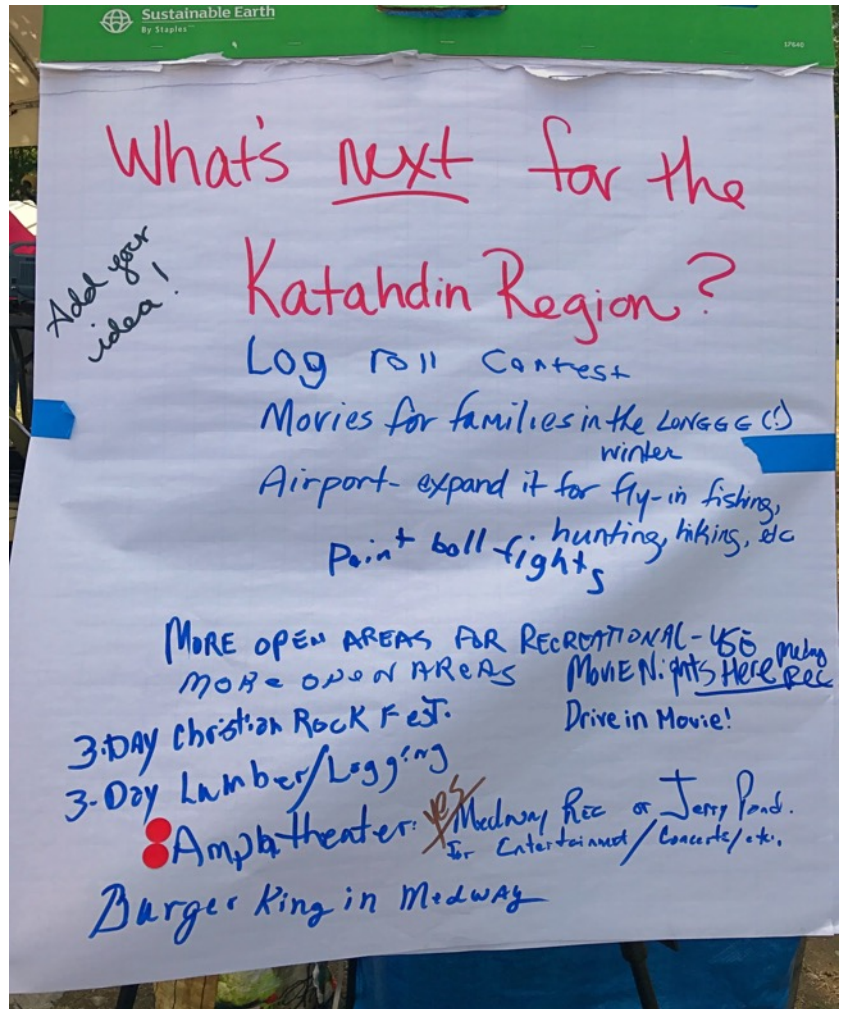
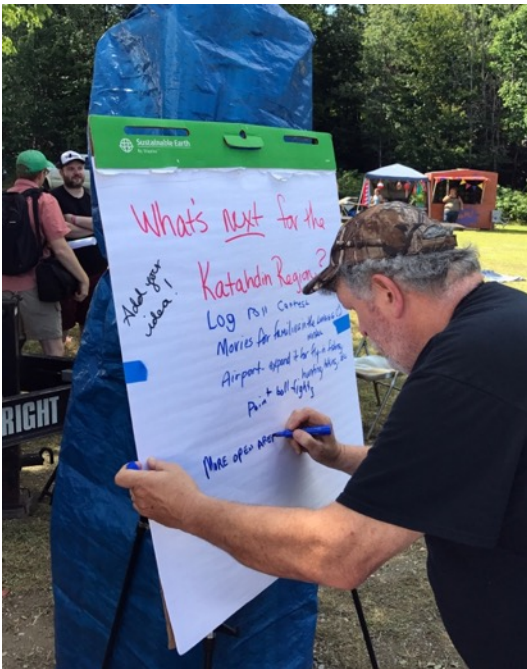


One key person was not at the celebration, and for good reason! Our Katahdin Community Development Manager, Lucy Van Hook, had recently given birth to a healthy baby girl. Lucy was the lead local contact and Making Headway liaison for project teams for the duration of the program. She assisted with and lead on logistics, fund raising, coordination in and between projects, press, promotion, and providing insight and inspiration. When Lucy returns to work, she will be able to continue supporting these new and existing community leaders and their projects through her work with Our Katahdin.

Community Celebration Outcomes

All six projects met their fundraising goals with creative combinations of Making Headway program seed money, individual & business contributions, and partnerships with other organizations and institutions.

This outreach builds and cements social and financial networks for future community work and the project teams should be commended for their hard work securing the necessary resources.



What's Next for the Katahdin Region?

- Log Roll Contest
- Movies for families in the LONGGGG (!) winter
- Airport – expand it for fly-in fishing, hunting, hiking, etc
- Paint Ball Fights
- More open areas for recreational use
- Movie Nights here (@ Medway Rec Area)
- Drive in Movie!
- 3-Day Christian Rock Fest
- 3-Day Lumber/Logging [Fest]
- Amphitheater @ Medway Rec or Jerry Pond: Entertainment & concerts
- Burger King in Medway

Making Headway strives to engage and empower community members to get involved at the local level, where they can really make a difference in their hometown. In the Katahdin Region there is no shortage of spirit and passion and there is a renewed sense of momentum and promise – local folks, and people moving to and visiting the area, have what it takes to revitalize their region. The ideas submitted above

show excitement, humor, and creativity for the future – for families and young people as well as the older population.

Making Headway came to the Katahdin Region at a moment when the region was struggling with tough decisions and changes while receiving a lot of attention statewide and nationally in response to the designation of the Katahdin Woods & Waters National Monument. As they continue making headway, the community can point to these six projects as evidence of their ability, success, and strengthened connections among themselves, and with outside partners, that will sustain into the future. People have identified shared values through this process, knitting the region together. In this way, Making Headway Katahdin Region was a part of a larger movement toward community building across town lines, sharing resources, and working together as the area faces, and responds to, new challenges and opportunities.

Report compiled and written by Tyler Kidder, Community Outreach Director, GrowSmart Maine