

AROOSTOOK COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN – 2016 Update

Famed for its potato growing, the County's premiere crop has declined steadily as has its population. Nevertheless, agriculture still dominates the County's economy and its culture. Aroostook County's major crops include potatoes, broccoli, hay, and small grain rotation crops.



Photos courtesy of Paul Cyr

Houlton is the Aroostook County seat, but the County also has offices in Caribou and Fort Kent. The County's 2010 population (71,870) represents 5.4% of the State's total population.

County Government

Aroostook County is structured the same as county governments in other parts of the state. There are three county commissioners who oversee the operations of county government including the courts, sheriff, corrections, registry of deeds and emergency management. The County also has responsibility for road maintenance and snow removal in the 108 unorganized townships, assessing County tax for municipalities, and preparing an unorganized townships budget to the State Legislature for its operations.

Local Units of Government

Aroostook County has several different types of government and authorities. The following summary is based in part the Maine Municipal Association's report "Local Government in Maine."

Cities. Caribou and Presque Isle are the only two cities in Aroostook County. All cities in Maine have local charters granted by the Maine Legislature that provide for a representative form of government - meaning they have a city council that serves as the legislative body. The city council is elected by and answerable to the citizens. The office of mayor varies considerably from city to city, with only a few acting as chief executive officer. Some mayors are elected by the vote of the people, while others are elected by a vote of their fellow councilors. In general, city councils have the authority to enact ordinances.

Towns. There are 53 towns in Aroostook County. Towns remain the cornerstone of local government. A Maine community becomes a town when it is incorporated by a special act of the legislature. At that time, it is given certain privileges and responsibilities. Under Home Rule, towns may take any action or change their form of government in any way not denied or precluded by state or federal law. The voters of the town constitute its legislative body. Day-to-day governance of towns has expanded from the original board of selectmen to include town managers, town councils, budget committees, municipal departments and various professional managers. In a small number of mostly larger towns, the council exerts legislative control without a town meeting. In others, a ballot vote is used to approve the budget rather than the open town meeting.

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Plantations. There are 11 plantations in Aroostook County. Plantations are a type of local government unique to Maine. They originated with the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and were at first intended to be a temporary government to help guide a community in changing from an unincorporated township to an incorporated town. In Maine, they have continued as a basic governmental unit in small rural areas. Plantations are typically rural, heavily forested, and sparsely populated. There is little demand in them for the full menu of public services provide in larger communities. Plantations are similar to towns in that voters at the annual meeting are the legislative body. During the meeting, assessors are elected to carry on the daily operation of government and function much as the selectmen in towns. Taxes are raised and appropriated and voters are registered. Plantations do not have the powers granted to municipalities under Home Rule, and do not have the authority to enact ordinances.

Townships/Unorganized territory. There are 109 unorganized townships in Aroostook County since July 1, 2015, when Bancroft lost its status as a town. They are part of Maine's Unorganized Territory. Maine is unique among eastern states in having half its land mass, more than 10 million acres, in the Unorganized Territory (UT) most of it in the northern and easternmost counties. There is no local government. For the people living in the unorganized townships within the UT, taxes are paid to the State. The State's Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) establishes basic rules, and services are provided by the state and counties and by contract with nearby towns and school districts.

Aroostook Band of Micmacs

The Aroostook Band of Micmacs is one of 28 bands of Micmacs in Eastern Canada and New England. The Aroostook Band is the only band in the United States. The federal government recognized the Micmacs as an Indian tribe in 1991. The Aroostook Band of Micmacs is governed by the Micmac Tribal Council consisting of a Tribal Chief, Vice-Chief and nine Council members. The Micmacs have no reservation, but they currently possess approximately 1,350 acres of land in northern Maine. There are approximately 1,000 members of the Tribe, most of whom live in Aroostook County, and 258 of whom lived on Trust Land in 2010.

Topography

Much of eastern Aroostook County is covered with farmland, while the central and western portions are heavily forested. Most of the County's timberland is within an area designated as the North Maine Woods (NMW), a 2.5 million acre tract of land that covers most of Aroostook and some of Somerset, Piscataquis and Penobscot Counties.

The terrain and topography of Aroostook differ from the rest of the State. The area is largely a flat expanse of sedimentary shale, left fairly undisturbed by the mountain building that folded, warped and changed the rest of Maine. Some variation in rock type and terrain occurs in the southeastern portion of the County, closer to the mountain-building forces that shaped other parts of Maine.

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Population

According to the 2010 census, Aroostook County had a population of 71,870 which represents a decline of 3% from the 2000 figure of 73,938. Aroostook County's 2010 population is less than it was in 1910 (74,664), but there have been considerable fluctuations between 1910 and 2010.

Table 1 displays that Aroostook's population increased every decade from 1900, when it stood at 60,744 to 1960 when it peaked at 106,064 people. The County has lost population every decade since 1960. Between 1960 and 2010, there was a loss of 34,194 people, or 32% of the 1960 population.

Table 2 contains a summary of demographics for Aroostook County, the State of Maine and the United States for the year 2010 (data on income is taken from the 2009-2013 American Community Survey). Table 2 demonstrates that household income in Aroostook is much less than in the other two jurisdictions; the poverty rate is high; and the percentage of people 65 years of age and old is much higher in Aroostook than in Maine and the U.S.

Table 1 Population of Aroostook County and Maine		
Year	Aroostook County	Maine
1900	60,744	694,466
1910	74,664	742,371
1920	81,728	768,014
1930	87,843	797,423
1940	94,436	847,226
1950	96,039	914,950
1960	106,064	970,689
1970	92,463	992,048
1980	91,331	1,124,660
1990	86,936	1,227,928
2000	73,938	1,274,923
2010	71,870	1,328,361
1970-80 change	-1%	13%
1980-90 change	-5%	9%
1990-00 change	-15%	4%
2000-10 change	-3%	4%
1960-10 change	-32%	37%

Source: U.S. Census

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Table 2 Profile			
Measure	Aroostook County	Maine	USA
Population - 2010			
Total Population	71,870	1,328,361	308,745,538
Households - 2010			
Total Households	30,961	557,219	116,716,292
Average Household Size	2.26	2.32	2.58
Income - 2013			
Median Household Income	\$37,855	\$48,453	\$53,046
Persons below Poverty	16.3%	13.6%	15.4%
Children below Poverty	9.5%	7.0%	9.6%
Sex and Age - 2010			
Female	50.8%	51.1%	50.8%
Under 5 Years	4.9%	5.2%	6.5%
18 and Over	80.0%	79.3%	76.0%
65 Years and Over	19.0%	15.9%	13.0%
Median Age	45.3	42.7	37.2
Population Density - 2010			
Persons Per Square Mile	10.8	43.1	87.4

Source: U.S. Census

Table 3, which is based on the 2010 Census, shows that Aroostook County is composed of 67 very small municipalities (66 after July, 2015) plus the Unorganized Territory. The largest community (Presque Isle) contains only 9,642 people. Aroostook County towns do not have departments or staff resources that may be commonplace in larger communities like Portland or Boston. Very few Aroostook County towns have municipal planning staff or community development personnel. Aroostook EMA is not aware of any community with fulltime GIS or hazard mitigation personnel.

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**Table 3
Population of Aroostook County Municipalities**

Town/City	Year Round Population 2010	Population Density/Square Mile - 2010	Occupied Houses 2010
Allagash	239	2	124
Amity	238	6	102
Aroostook Band of Micmacs Trust Land	258	-	74
Ashland	1,302	16	603
Bancroft*	68	2	34
Blaine	726	39	299
Bridgewater	610	16	263
Caribou	8,189	103	3,559
Cary Plantation	218	12	99
Castle Hill	425	12	181
Caswell	306	7	134
Chapman	468	12	194
Crystal	269	7	115
Cyr Plantation	103	3	42
Dyer Brook	213	6	92
Eagle Lake	864	23	378
Easton	1,287	33	536
Fort Fairfield	3,496	46	1,494
Fort Kent	4,097	76	1,747
Frenchville	1,087	38	459
Garfield Plantation	81	2	41
Glenwood Plantation	3	0.1	3
Grand Isle	467	14	215
Hamlin	219	9	96
Hammond	118	3	41
Haynesville	121	3	56
Hersey	83	2	32
Hodgdon	1,309	33	515
Houlton	6,123	167	2,556
Island Falls	837	23	357
Limestone	2,314	57	809
Linneus	984	22	382
Littleton	1,068	28	420
Ludlow	404	18	177
Macwahoc Plantation	79	3	38
Madawaska	4,035	73	1,983
Mapleton	1,948	57	816
Mars Hill	1,493	43	614
Masardis	249	6	107

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Town/City	Year Round Population 2010	Population Density/Square Mile - 2010	Occupied Houses 2010
Merrill	273	7	104
Monticello	790	21	343
Moro Plantation	38	1	22
Nashville Plantation	46	1	19
New Canada	321	9	115
New Limerick	510	28	241
New Sweden	602	17	255
Oakfield	737	21	323
Orient	147	4	63
Oxbow Plantation	66	2	30
Perham	386	11	151
Portage Lake	391	13	188
Presque Isle	9,692	128	4,201
Reed Plantation	161	3	75
Saint Agatha	747	25	357
Saint Francis	485	16	234
Saint John Plantation	267	5	123
Sherman	848	21	363
Smyrna	442	13	155
Stockholm	253	7	110
Van Buren	2,171	64	1,027
Wade	283	8	112
Wallagrass	546	14	244
Washburn	1,687	49	699
Westfield	549	14	216
Westmanland	62	2	31
Weston	228	7	369
Winterville Plantation	224	6	106
Woodland	1,213	34	508
Unorganized Territory	1,565	-	721
TOTAL	71,870	10.8	30,961

***Part of the Unorganized Territory as of July 1, 2015**

Source: U.S. Census

Population Note: Although Aroostook County is the size of Connecticut, the population of the entire county is 71,870. This lack of population is a great challenge to tax bases and resources.

Economic Highlights

The following is a summary of Aroostook County's economy taken from the 2003 Aroostook County Economic Cluster Report prepared for the Northern Maine Development Commission.

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Forest products. The forest products industry employs 3,500 workers in Aroostook County in timber harvesting, lumber and paper mills, biomass plants, trucking and railroad transport, and equipment and chemical supplies. These workers are part of a larger New England – Canadian forest industry cluster, the largest in the region. For a variety of reasons, the industry is at a down point in its economic cycle and the longer the down cycle lasts, the more business shrink and in some cases close. The causes of the paper industry's troubles are weak overall demand and international competition. The lumber industry is in the midst of a housing boom, but low cost competition, largely from Canada, is squeezing local mills.

Agriculture. Agricultural employs 3,000 Aroostook residents on farms, in equipment and chemical supplies, in wholesaling and transportation, in food processing and the like. About three quarters of the production is potatoes. The rest is vegetables and grains such as broccoli and oats, and livestock such as beef and poultry.

Tourism. Tourism includes thousands of people who: 1) create or enhance attractions (such as snowmobile clubs and festival organizers); 2) provide lodging; 3) provide food (restaurants); and 4) provide stores and services supporting tourists. There are about a half million pleasure trips taken to Aroostook County each year. Over half come for outdoor activities, including snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter, and bicycling, fishing and hunting in the summer and fall.

Information technology. Information technology (IT) consists of businesses that are involved with computer software and web design, database management, internet services, and related services. These businesses typically pay twice the average salary in the region, and have the potential to be the County's number one growth industry in the next decade. CCH in Caribou (producing tax software), Burrell's in Presque Isle (information services) and the Maine Mutual Group (IT base for regional insurance operation) are three leaders in the local industry. Aroostook County has excellent access to high speed internet services, redundant broadband pathways for internet-dependent businesses, and three institutions of higher education, all of which are essential infrastructure for IT.

Large Employers. Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) in Limestone was activated January 1995 as part of a consolidation of service financial and accounting operation and employees over 500 people. DFAS Limestone provides premier base-level finance and accounting services to its customers and is located at the site of the former Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, Maine. These services include appropriated funds accounting and reporting, vendor pay, working capital funds accounting and reporting, travel accounting, and accounts receivable. DFAS Limestone services all the operational Air Force. It covers an area stretching from Afghanistan in the east to Hawaii in the west and includes 14 time zones.

Maine Military Authority (MMA) was established in 1997 to operate the Maine Readiness Sustainment Maintenance Center (MERSMS) which maintains, rebuilds, repairs and stores military vehicles and equipment for the U.S. Department of Defense, National Guard Bureau and for foreign governments in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Defense Foreign Military Sales Program. It is located at the site of the former Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, Maine. Since its inception in 1997, MMA has produced over 6,100 pieces of equipment for the National Guard and US Army unit shortages.

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Precision manufacturing of metal products is a small but important activity in Aroostook County. Acme-Monaco in Presque Isle, First Technology in Caribou, and Smith and Wesson in Houlton are key companies, as are other local metals fabricators serving the agriculture and wood products industries. There are also a number of large metals firms just across the border in New Brunswick that increase the market for developing needed industry supports.

Sitel, a call center now located on Sweden Street in Caribou, has a large number of employees.

New Brunswick is a resource for Aroostook County's growth. New Brunswick is a source of investment in forestry (Irving, Nexfor-Fraser); investment in agriculture (McCain's); potential tourists; and of infrastructure for metals and IT.

Transportation

Highways. Aroostook County is served in part by Interstate I-95 which extends from the southern part of the State to Houlton. Route 1 is the County's major north/south route, extending from Danforth in the southeast to Fort Kent in the north. Other major highways include Route 11 from Sherman to Fort Kent, and routes 161, 2 and 2A.

Other. There are 19 small airports in the County and one major railroad, the Maine-Montreal Railroad.

County Services

Sheriff. The Sheriff's Office is made up of a Sheriff and Chief Deputy, one captain, one Lieutenant, four Sergeants, 10 full time deputies and 16 reserves.

Jail. The Jail consists of an administrator/captain, program officer, four sergeants, 24 full time corrections officers and 9 reserve corrections officers.

Sheriff's Office Dispatch. The Aroostook County Sheriff's Office Dispatch has 4 full time and 5 part-time communications specialists.

Registry of Deeds. The Aroostook County Registry of Deeds has two locations. The Registry of Deeds (Northern District) is located in Fort Kent and the Registry of Deeds (Southern District) is located in Houlton.

Probate. The Aroostook County Probate Court is quasi-judiciary; administratively, there is an elected full time Register of Probate and an elected part time Judge of Probate, a Deputy Register, and Probate Clerk.

Emergency Management. The Aroostook County Emergency Management Agency has a 3-person staff.

