

AROOSTOOK COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN – 2021 Update

SECTION 1 – OVERVIEW

Aroostook County is Maine’s northernmost county, and is the state’s largest. It is bordered on the east, west and north by Canada. It is known as “The County” to its residents. It was established on May 1, 1839, in the midst of the dispute known as the “Aroostook War,” and 187 years after the creation of York County, the first in Maine. Aroostook County was originally part of Aroostook and Penobscot Counties and is named for an Indian word meaning “beautiful river.” Aroostook County contains two cities, 53 towns, 9 plantations, and 112 unorganized townships. The overall density is 10.0 persons per square mile. There are a total of 6,672 square miles in the County (21.6% of Maine’s land area). Approximately 89% of the County is forested, 1% consists of lakes, ponds and rivers, and 10% consists of cultivated farmland.



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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

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.

County Government

Houlton is the Aroostook County seat, but the County also has offices in Caribou and Fort Kent. The County's **estimated 2019** population (**67,055**) represents **5.0%** of the State's total population (**1,344,212**).

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 following departments as stated on the County's website:**

- Deeds
- District Attorney
- Emergency Management Agency
- Facilities and Infrastructure
- Technology
- Human Resources
- Probate
- Unorganized Territory
- Public Access Officer
- Sheriff
- Administration
- Treasurer/Finance

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The County also has responsibility for road maintenance and snow removal in the 112 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 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 (these towns include Ashland, Fort Fairfield, Fort Kent, Houlton, Mars Hill, Van Buren and Washburn). In others, a ballot vote is used to approve the budget rather than the open town meeting.

Plantations. There are 9 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 provided 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 112 unorganized townships in Aroostook County. 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

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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.

In 2015, the Town of Bancroft lost its status as a town and became part of the Unorganized Territory, and is now known as Bancroft Township. Two plantations also became part of the Unorganized Territory (Oxbow Plantation in 2017, now known as Oxbow North Township, and Cary Plantation in 2019, now known as Cary Plantation).

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.

The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians is a federally recognized tribe of Maliseet, whose land is along the Meduxnekeag River. They are headquartered in Houlton. This tribe is related to the larger Maliseet First Nations of New Brunswick, Canada. The government structure of the Tribe consists of a six-member Council, plus one elected Tribal Chief. The leaders are chosen by the membership through an election process. The Tribal Chief serves a four-year term, while the Tribal Council members serve four-year, staggered terms.

Population

According to 2019 census estimates, Aroostook County had a 2019 population of 67,055 which represents a decline of 7% from the 2010 figure of 71,870. Aroostook County's estimated 2019 population is less than it was in 1910 (74,664), but there have been considerable fluctuations between 1910 and 2019.

Table 1 shows 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 2019, there was a loss of 39,009 people, or 37% of the 1960 population.

Table 2 contains a summary of demographics for Aroostook County, the State of Maine and the United States based on Census estimates for 2019 and American Community Survey five-year estimates for the period 2014-2018. 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 older is much higher in Aroostook than in Maine and the U.S.

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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
2019	67,055	1,344,212
1970-80 change	-1%	13%
1980-90 change	-5%	9%
1990-00 change	-15%	4%
2000-10 change	-3%	4%
2010-19 change	-7%	1%

Source: U.S. Census

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Table 2 Demographic Profile			
Measure	Aroostook County	Maine	USA
Population -2019			
Total Population	67,055	1,344,212	328,239,523
Households 2014-2018			
Total Households	29,645	556,955	119,730,128
Average Household Size	2.23	2.33	2.63
Income – 2014-2018			
Median Household Income	\$39,824	\$55,425	\$60,293
Persons below Poverty	15.3%	10.9%	10.5%
Sex and Age – 2014-2018			
Female	50.6%	51.0%	50.8%
Under 5 Years	4.8%	4.7%	6.0%
18 and Over	81.7%	81.5%	77.7%
65 Years and Over	24.9%	21.2%	16.5%
Population Density - 2019			
Persons Per Square Mile	10.1	43.6	93.0

Source: U.S. Census **Estimates 2019**; American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates 2014-2018

Table 3, which is based on the 2010 Census **and 2019 Census estimates**, shows that Aroostook County is composed of **62** very small municipalities plus the Unorganized Territory. The largest community (Presque Isle) contains **9007** people. Aroostook County **cities, towns and plantations** do not have departments or staff resources that may be commonplace in larger communities like Portland or Boston. Very few Aroostook County **communities** 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	Year Round Population 2019	Change 2010-2019
Allagash	239	217	-22
Amity	238	217	-21
Ashland	1,302	1,217	-85
Bancroft	68	Unorganized	n.a.
Blaine	726	671	-55
Bridgewater	610	562	-48
Caribou	8,189	7,593	-596
Cary Plantation	218	Unorganized	n.a.
Castle Hill	425	393	-32
Caswell	306	282	-24
Chapman	468	445	-23
Crystal	269	248	-21
Cyr Plantation	103	94	-9
Dyer Brook	213	194	-19
Eagle Lake	864	803	-61
Easton	1,287	1,181	-106
Fort Fairfield	3,496	3,285	-211
Fort Kent	4,097	3,856	-241
Frenchville	1,087	1,037	-50
Garfield Plantation	81	74	-7
Glenwood Plantation	3	3	0
Grand Isle	467	430	-37
Hamlin	219	203	-16
Hammond	118	110	-8
Haynesville	121	112	-9
Hersey	83	75	-8
Hodgdon	1,309	1,267	-42
Houlton	6,123	5,752	-371
Island Falls	837	778	-59
Limestone	2,314	2,173	-141
Linneus	984	910	-74
Littleton	1,068	989	-79
Ludlow	404	368	-36
Macwahoc Plantation	79	74	-5
Madawaska	4,035	3,735	-300
Mapleton	1,948	1,834	-114
Mars Hill	1,493	1,469	-24
Masardis	249	227	-22
Merrill	273	250	-23
Monticello	790	741	-49
Moro Plantation	38	35	-3

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Table 3 Population of Aroostook County Municipalities			
Town/City	Year Round Population 2010	Year Round Population 2019	Change 2010-2019
Nashville Plantation	46	42	-4
New Canada	321	302	-19
New Limerick	510	475	-35
New Sweden	602	569	-33
Oakfield	737	678	-59
Orient	147	140	-7
Oxbow Plantation	66	Unorganized	n.a.
Perham	386	365	-21
Portage Lake	391	372	-19
Presque Isle	9,692	9,007	-685
Reed Plantation	161	144	-17
Saint Agatha	747	713	-34
Saint Francis	485	442	-43
Saint John Plantation	267	249	-18
Sherman	848	778	-70
Smyrna	442	418	-24
Stockholm	253	232	-21
Van Buren	2,171	1,999	-172
Wade	283	263	-20
Wallagrass	546	525	-21
Washburn	1,687	1,541	-146
Westfield	549	509	-40
Westmanland	62	57	-5
Weston	228	210	-18
Winterville Plantation	224	207	-17
Woodland	1,213	1,143	-70
Unorganized Territory	1,565	1,771	+206
TOTAL	71,870	67,055	-4,815

Source: U.S. Census

Major Employers

Based on information obtained from the Maine Department of Labor, the top 25 employers in Aroostook County are shown in the table below.

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Top 25 Employers Aroostook County	
Employer	Business Description
Aroostook County Action Program	Other individual and family services
Aroostook Home Health Services	Home health care ser
Aroostook Medical Center	General medical and surgical hospitals
Aroostook Mental Health Services	Outpatient mental health centers
Career Systems Development Corp.	Other technical and trade schools
Caribou Nursing Home Inc.	Nursing care facilities, skilled nursing
Columbia Forest Products Inc.	Hardwood veneer and plywood manufacturing
Community Living Association	Residential developmental disability homes
Daigle Oil Company	Fuel dealers
Hannaford Bros Co	Supermarkets and other grocery stores
Huber Engineered Woods LLC	Reconstituted wood products manufacturing
Houlton Regional Hospital	General medical and surgical hospitals
Katahdin Trust Co	Commercial banking
Louisiana Pacific Corporation	Engineered wood member manufacturing
Maine Mutual Fire Insurance Co	Direct property and casualty insurers
Maple Grove Nursing Home Inc.	Nursing care facilities, skilled nursing
McCain Foods USA Inc.	Frozen fruit and vegetable manufacturing
Northern Maine General	Nursing care facilities, skilled nursing
Northern Maine Medical Center	General medical and surgical hospitals
Paradis Shop 'N Save	Supermarkets and other grocery stores
Pineland Farms and Potato Co	Perishable prepared food manufacturing
Pines Health Services Inc.	Offices of physicians, except mental health
Smiths Farm Inc.	Other vegetable and melon farming
Twin Rivers Paper Company LLC	Newsprint mills
Walmart/Sam's	Warehouse clubs and supercenters

Source: Maine Department of Labor

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.

Railroads. For many decades, the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad served Aroostook County, but in 2010, 233 miles of its track from Millinocket to the Canadian border were sold to the State of Maine. The current operator is Irving's Maine Northern Railway.

Airports. Aroostook County's four major airports are Northern Aroostook Regional Airport in Frenchville, Presque Isle International Airport, Caribou Municipal Airport, and Houlton International Airport.

