**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.



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.

[](http://www.crownofmaine.com/paulcyr/daily/index.php?page=164)[](http://www.crownofmaine.com/paulcyr/daily/index.php?page=163)[](http://www.crownofmaine.com/paulcyr/daily/index.php?page=164)

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

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 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.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **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.

| **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 |
| 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.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **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.

