

Grand Falls Hut, ATV trail near The Forks get Somerset County TIF dollars

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Maine Huts and Trails is one of two organizations that has secured funds from Somerset County commissioners aimed at improving outdoor recreation infrastructure in remote parts of the county. The organization received \$17,500 to make upgrades at its Grand Falls Hut. (Photo courtesy of Maine Huts and Trails)

SKOWHEGAN — Funding to fix up a remote hut near Grand Falls and a key ATV and snowmobile trail in The Forks got the green light from Somerset County commissioners Wednesday.

The board of commissioners at its meeting approved \$17,500 for Maine Huts and Trails to make upgrades at its shuttered Grand Falls Hut and \$40,800 for the Lake Moxie ATV Club to improve a trail that brings traffic from elsewhere to businesses in The Forks.

Both efforts are aimed at improving [outdoor recreation infrastructure](#), which has come to play a key role in the rural county's economy and commissioners have come to regularly support.



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The funds come from the Bingham Wind tax increment financing district, which covers the portion of the large wind farm that sits in the county's unorganized territories, outside Bingham. A tax incentive for the developer, the TIF diverts taxation on the increase of assessed value of the district since its inception to a separate fund. That revenue has designated uses.

Maine Huts and Trails, a nonprofit that runs a system of 80 miles of trails and four huts between the Carrabassett Valley and The Forks areas, requested the funds to bring one of its four huts back online. Most of the grant will go to buying a new battery system and other minor work necessary to reopen the Grand Falls Hut.

The hut was closed in 2019 when its off-grid battery system failed, Executive Director Wolfe Tone said. Around the same time, [the nonprofit faced other infrastructure failures](#), rising debt and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then, the organization has improved its financial position and reimagined itself from a hospitality brand to a mission-focused nonprofit, Tone said.

Reactivating the Grand Falls Hut is among the first steps of a yearslong plan to rehabilitate a portion of the trail system along the Dead River, he said. Putting the batteries in place will allow the organization to have a crew live there this summer, preparing the hut for future use and beginning work on nearby trails.

The nonprofit received [\\$250,000](#) from the Maine Trails Bond, which will be used toward restoring canoe access on the Dead River from Big Eddy to Grand Falls and fixing trails from the hut to the falls. Future related projects are estimated to total \$1 million and take five to seven years, a presentation Tone prepared showed.

The Lake Moxie ATV Club, meanwhile, plans to use its funds to address damage to a 5.2-mile trail that brings both ATV and snowmobile traffic from the south, north and east to businesses in The Forks and West Forks. [The trail runs](#) from Troutdale Road to U.S. Route 201 on land mostly owned by Wagner Forest Management.

"The trail is in extreme disrepair," club president Ben Towle said. "We still haven't recovered from the storm damage from 2023 on our system."

The condition of the trail prompted the club to request the commissioners open the county-owned section of the Lake Moxie Road to ATV traffic. [The board denied the application in a 2-3 vote, mostly citing safety concerns](#). Some commissioners recommended the club instead seek funding to repair the existing trail, or build a new one altogether.

Plans for the trail, Towle said, include \$140,000 worth of resurfacing, ditching, culvert replacement and erosion control, as well as a new bicycle trail parallel to the 16-foot-wide motorized trail. The county funds match a state municipal ATV grant, he said.

