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## In Maine, a Public Park in Search of Public Support

By [FELICITY BARRINGER](#)

MILLINOCKET, Me., Nov. 1 — Roxanne Quimby could be forgiven if she thought she was emulating the likes of Henry David Thoreau, Percival P. Baxter, John D. Rockefeller Jr. and other lovers of [Maine](#)'s landscape when she started to buy bits of the vast northern woodlands near here to be the core of a new national park.

Who knew that when she began using some of the fortune she had earned from her organic personal-care business, Burt's Bees, to buy up woods to preserve, she would be greeted with "Ban Roxanne" T-shirts? Or, that her efforts at preservation — banning snowmobiling, hunting and all-terrain vehicles on 50,000 of her acres — would be taken as an attack on the old-time values of the timberland?

Who knew that even some conservation-minded groups would be reluctant to support the decade-old vision of a national park that had inspired Ms. Quimby?

Still, one might have guessed, looking at the streets of this town of 4,700 people, where hunter's blaze orange is the fall fashion statement of choice during this month's deer hunting season.

Millinocket residents fear that turning timberland into parkland will further cut timber jobs, strip them of their accustomed hunting grounds and prevent the development of resorts and snowmobile parks they see as one way out of the downward economic spiral.

"What Roxanne and the others want to do, they want to create a park up here the size of Connecticut and take it out of the heartland of the Maine forest," Eugene Conlogue, the town's manager, said in an interview. "That's a nonstarter for us."

Other environmental groups, while sympathetic to the idea of a national park, see it as an unwelcome distraction from their fight to block a proposed 420,000-acre resort development that the Plum Creek Timber Company has unveiled for Moosehead Lake, just west of here.

As Brownie Carson, executive director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine, said, "You

can't pour energy into protection of a single area, even though it's large and hugely important, without risking losses, big losses, in other really important areas of Maine's North Woods forest."

Thirty years ago, Ms. Quimby was living a subsistence counterculture life in the North Woods. After building her financial empire, she was taken with an idea conceived a decade ago by Jym St. Pierre and other local conservationists for a Maine Woods National Park that would envelop Baxter State Park, in the conservation equivalent of Russian nesting dolls. The new park would be the size of Yellowstone and Yosemite combined.

"I find it pretty ironic, or humorous, that people make a national park out to be such a radical idea," said Ken Spalding, the project coordinator for the moving force behind the park, Restore, a group with offices in Hallowell and in Concord, Mass. "American people love their national parks."

Ms. Quimby, 56, hopes Mr. Spalding and Restore's director, Mr. St. Pierre, are right. The idea of a park, she said, "floats my boat."

She prefers that her 75,000 acres become a base on which Restore's 3.2-million acre park could be built.

But in the past few weeks, she has started to explore conservation alternatives and has met with her opponents to see if her goals to bring the northlands back to their pre-logging state can be reconciled with their goals of finding economic value and personal freedom in the same woods.

In the last six years, more than six million acres of timber company land have changed hands. Timber companies have come and gone like truckers at a roadside stop.

"What has happened over the years," Ms. Quimby said, "is that there were very few landowners and they had a very permissive policy toward land use as long as you stayed out of the way of the logging operation. So people had this unrestricted access."

"So now that the ownership is changing," she said, "it's becoming quite clear that this is private property. And as a private property owner I don't have to let anybody on it."

That, she added, "is becoming the alternative to public land."

When Ms. Quimby banned snowmobiling and hunting and all-terrain vehicles from the first two tracts she bought, which totaled more than 50,000 acres, the "ban Roxanne" cries were

heard everywhere here. When she bought her third tract, 23,000 acres, earlier this fall, adjacent to the critical parcel in a state-brokered deal to expand Baxter park, opponents erupted again.

This time, Ms. Quimby sat down and met with them and made a deal. For at least a year, snowmobiles and hunters could continue to use the new purchase, called Sandy Stream. In the meantime, the competing visions of the North Woods' future could be debated with less pressure.

"Mainers are more individualistic," she said. "They're used to having more space about them. They are very self-sufficient, including in the way they think about things."

It is not clear whether Ms. Quimby's efforts at appeasement will beget a more conciliatory attitude to other conservation deals, particularly the not-yet-completed purchase of land around Katahdin Lake. This is a place whose haunting views of Maine's largest mountain, have been a magnet for American landscape painters, from Frederic Church on.

Patrick McGowan, the commissioner of Maine's Department of Conservation, has spent months trying to put all the pieces in place to add 6,000 acres to the eastern side of the 204,800-acre Baxter State Park, ensuring that Katahdin Lake, the artists' beaches and the surrounding woodlands would be preserved. The deal was buffeted on its way through the Maine Legislature, but survived, with two provisos.

Mr. McGowan, aided by the nonprofit conservation group, The Trust for Public Lands, had to get \$14 million in private donations to complete the purchase. Facing a Dec. 15 deadline, he is more than \$3 million shy of the goal. The Trust is organizing fund-raising events, and artists like Evelyn Dunphy are donating canvases of Katahdin.

The second proviso was that one-third of the new parkland— though not the area around lake — had to be open to "traditional" uses like hunting and snowmobiling.

That deal was barely done when Ms. Quimby announced the purchase of her latest, 23,000 acre, tract from a local logging operator.

Hunters saw the Quimby announcement as a double blow. They were losing access to 23,000 acres, and those acres were the main way in to the 2,000 acres of proposed parkland set aside for them.

"Everybody perceived this as a threat," said Bob Cram, a local hunter and a director of the

statewide hunters' group, the Sportsmen's Alliance of Maine. "I did, too."

How Ms. Quimby's talks with the hunters' groups will change the landscape is unknown. Acadia and Baxter parks faced opposition before their creation. It took decades to assemble the land and gain legislative approval. Mr. Spalding, of Restore, said: "The opposition is very much a minority. It is clear that the Maine public, statewide, overwhelmingly supports the acquisition of more public land for conservation."

For the moment, the conservation will likely continue to be ad hoc, with individuals like Ms. Quimby, groups like the Appalachian Mountain Trail Club and state-private partnerships raising the money for individual tracts. These might be combined in a national park, a national forest or a state preserve. They might also remain private, part of a checkerboard of conservation areas and resort development.

A national park, Ms. Quimby said, is not the only solution. "I think a national forest is a possibility, like the White Mountain National Forest," she said. "It has much broader usage."

"Everyone has to give up something in a compromise," she said. "But you get your most important things if it's a good compromise."

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