ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY

By Matthew LaRoche

A magnificent 92-mile-long ribbon of interconnected lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams flowing through the heart of Maine’s vast northern forest, the Allagash Wilderness Waterway (AWW) features unbroken shoreline on the headwater lakes and free-flowing river along the lower waterway. The AWW’s rich culture includes use by Indigenous people for millennia and a colorful logging history. In 1966, the Maine Legislature established the AWW to preserve, protect, and enhance this unique area’s wilderness character. Four years later, the AWW garnered designation as a wild river in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSR). This year marks 50 years of federal protection under the NWSR Act.

VISITOR USE SURVEY

During the late spring, summer, and fall of 2019, the AWW partnered with the University of Maine’s School of Forest Resources to conduct a survey of visitors to the waterway. The visitors were asked questions on their method of travel, length of stay, and camping conditions encountered. The study provides baseline data and the ability to monitor stewardship efforts in protecting visitor experiences on the AWW, to recognize successful management efforts, and to identify areas that may need attention to improve the quality of experiences.

The full report will be available on the AWW conditions and alerts page at maine.gov/allagash and eventually to Bangor. Chamberlain Dam was later modified to include a lock system so that logs cut near Eagle Lake could be floated to the Bangor lumber market.

The AWW provides visitors with a true wilderness experience, with limited vehicle access and restrictions on motorized watercraft. Some 100 primitive campsites dot the shorelines, and anglers from all over New England come to the waterway in the spring and fall to fish for native brook trout, whitefish, and loon (lake trout), and to ice fish in the winter.

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway Foundation recently published Allagash Explorer, a pocket guide that explains and highlights the cultural history and natural resources of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway from its earliest times to the present. See AWWF.org for more information and a list of locations where Allagash Explorer can be purchased.

The northward natural flow of Allagash waters from Telos Lake to the St. John River presented a challenge to Bangor lumbermen and investors who wanted to float logs from land around Chamberlain and Telos lakes southwest to mills along the Penobscot River. So, they reversed the flow by building two dams in 1941. CANAL DAM raised the water level and Telos Dam controlled the water release and logs down Webster Stream and eventually to Bangor. Chamberlain Dam was later modified to include a lock system so that logs cut near Eagle Lake could be floated to the Bangor lumber market.

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