

## ***The Height of Land Overlook and Region's Showstopper Reopens:***

***By Rebecca Kurtz in collaboration with Mark Latti, MaineDOT***



The Height of Land scenic overlook on Route 17 of the Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway re-opened over the Columbus Day weekend. It had been closed for almost 6 months while undergoing dramatic improvements that were facilitated by a public/private partnership between RLHT and the Maine Department of Transportation

“This project showcases how local citizens, state and federal agencies can work together to create something spectacular. The Height of Land and the Rangeley Lakes Scenic Byway is an attraction that draws people to the area and helps fuel the local economy,” said MaineDOT Commissioner David Bernhardt. Funding for this project came from federally-directed money specifically for the Height of Land project. The project included moving a segment of Route 17 east of the existing road, then using the old road to create the new, safer overlook.

“The success of the Height of Land overlook is due to a private and public partnership that benefits not only the region but the state as well,” said Rebecca Kurtz of the Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (RLHT) and the Scenic Byway Coordinator. RLHT, as the Byway’s fiscal and programmatic partner has collaborated with the Byway for nearly a decade to bring this exciting project to fruition.

The overlook, which used to be no more than a shoulder area where vehicles could pull over, now has an entrance and exit on each end. Natural stone from the area has been arranged to provide areas for seating. Colorful native vegetation adorns the site, and four interpretative panels beckon visitors to learn about land conservation, the Appalachian Trail, the watershed and the scenic vista.

Surrounding the overlook is over 500 acres of forest land that RLHT purchased to forever protect the view from development. The land protected is adjacent to the Appalachian Trail and stretches to Bemis Stream where it enters Mooselookmeguntic Lake. The Land for Maine’s Future program, with sponsorship by the Maine Department of Conservation, invested \$379,000 to support RLHT’s \$1 million dollar acquisition of the property. RLHT’s fundraising for this acquisition is ongoing.

The \$3.9 million project was a collaboration of a dedicated group that included local, state and federal people working together to promote safety and economic development by enhancing the byway and overlook. The overlook is designed to accommodate the many tour buses that travel through western Maine at this time of year providing revenue to local lodging, food and retail businesses. Pike Industries was the contractor for the project, and construction began in August of last year. Crews worked into winter before suspending the project due to snow, then resumed in the spring. Construction is now completed just as foliage has peaked in the Rangeley area.

The Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, the Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway committee, and the Maine DOT are now gearing up for Phase II of the project which will feature a *Conservation Walk at Height of Land* to be located directly adjacent to the new scenic overlook. This unique and easily accessible network of trails will feature bronze plaques on boulders and ledges with quotes from great American conservationists such as Muir, Roosevelt, Longfellow, and Thoreau. “This new monument to conservation will work in harmony with the spectacular vistas available at Height of Land to inspire visitors who come to enjoy the many recreational opportunities and rich outdoor history the Rangeley region provides” added Perlson. RLHT is working to pursue the possibility of incorporating a portion of the Appalachian Trail to provide a loop hiking trail from the new overlook.



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