

Recreation and Culture

Outdoor recreation and culture are an invaluable part of community life, particularly in Winthrop, which offers so many opportunities to explore. Winthrop has vast expanses of undeveloped open space, 11 lakes for water-based recreation, numerous locations to explore culture, as well as suitable recreational organizations and infrastructure.

Winthrop has an active and involved Recreation Committee (Rec Committee). The Rec Committee consists of five members who meet on an as-needed basis. They provide planning and oversight for programs and coordinate with other recreational groups and organizations.

Winthrop is fortunate to be the home of one of the few State YMCAs in Maine, the Winthrop Area YMCA. While the YMCA provides numerous programs to the region, the organization partners extensively with the Town in the summertime to provide the Winthrop Recreation Program. In fact, in 2013 the YMCA and the Recreation Program collaborated and launched the “We Play Outside” program. Since the YMCA’s humble beginnings in the 1980s, it has expanded its offerings beyond youth sports into numerous outdoor activities for kids and has recently ventured into an adult offering – pickleball.

TABLE 1: WINTHROP OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES

Area	Size in Acres	Ownership	Facilities
High School Fields		School Dept.	Athletic Fields: Baseball, softball, football, soccer, field hockey
High School		School Dept.	Roger Guerette Community Trail, a 1-mile walking/ski trail, with ¼-mile Bog Trail maintained.
Grade School Fields		School Dept.	Little league field, playground, athletic complex (as of mid-2023, currently under construction)
Middle School Fields/David's Field		School Dept.	Athletic Fields: multi-use, softball
Basketball/Tennis Courts at Town Hall Lane		Town	4 tennis courts, basketball court, pickleball courts. All lighted.
Norcross Point	1	Town	Gazebo, benches, BBQ grills, bathrooms, boat launch, parking
Maranacook Beach	1	Town	300 ft beach, benches, board walk,
East Winthrop Beach	1	Town	Unsupervised swim area
Fire House Field	1	Town	Softball diamond
Rambler Road property	6.2	Town	Undeveloped
Mt. Pisgah	94	Town	Trails, Fire tower
Route 133 Rest Area	1	State IFW	Carry-in boat access to Berry Pond
Upper Narrows Rest Area	1	State IFW	Carry-in boat access to Upper Narrows
Marshview		Private	Carry-in boat access to Little Cobbossee
Lower Narrows Rest Area		Private	Carry-in boat access to Lower Narrows
Snowmobile Trails		Private/multiple owners	Developed trails maintained by Hillandalers Club
State YMCA Camp of Maine	200	State YMCA	Resident camp; conference facilities (seasonal)
Camp Metchewana	300	Methodist Church of Maine	Resident camp; conference facilities (Seasonal)
Weston Woods Preserve		Kennebec Land Trust	More than 2 miles of trails, 1,315 feet of undeveloped shoreline on Little Cobbossee

Source: Winthrop Comprehensive Plan Committee, Winthrop Recreation Committee

Organized Recreation:

As illustrated in Table 1, Winthrop has a wide assortment of recreational opportunities and facilities, including programs and activities run by a variety of organizations. There are playing fields for baseball, softball, soccer, and other activities located in several parts of town. Tennis and pickleball courts are available below the grade school, and there's a Town Beach and a boat launch on Norcross Point.

Winthrop YMCA manages numerous recreational activities and programs, including swimming lessons, tennis lessons, summer camps in activities ranging from soccer to karate, and even out-of-town recreation trips. These programs are primarily for children.

The Town Beach, located on Maranacook Lake at the northern end of the downtown area, has supervised swimming during the summer months, also organized through the YMCA.

There are two residential camps, including the State YMCA Camp on a 200-acre site adjacent to Cobbossee Lake, and Camp Mechawana, which is a Methodist Church camp situated on 300 acres adjacent to Lower Narrows Pond and Annabessacook. Both camps operate on a reservation system and are open to all.

Organized Youth Sports:

In addition to youth sporting opportunities provided by the YMCA, Winthrop's public schools collaborate with several nearby communities to offer athletic programs, including:

- Football- RSU 2 (Monmouth Academy, Hall-Dale Middle and High School)
- Girls' soccer- Monmouth Academy
- Girls' hockey- Saint Dominic's Academy
- Nordic and Alpine Skiing- Maranacook Community High School
- Boys' hockey- Cony High School
- Lacrosse- Maranacook Community High School
- Winter track- Saint Dominic's Academy
- Competitive cheerleading- Monmouth Academy

Age Friendly Recreation:

As noted in the Community Profile chapter of this plan and in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, Winthrop's median age is increasing and there has not been a significant increase in the number of young people in town.

Winthrop partners with other towns to provide desired programs and activities to meet the needs of the older population. For example, Winthrop and Monmouth cooperate to offer adult education programs to residents of both towns.

To continue to adequately provide these services, Winthrop should proactively seek to offer opportunities for adult recreation and programs. Additionally, the town should evaluate which public facilities and town-owned buildings comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and which buildings need upgrades to meet these needs.

Community Partners:

The Town of Winthrop's efforts to preserve and conserve land as well as provide recreational opportunities are an effort that spans multiple entities. Interested parties include:

- Winthrop Conservation Commission
- Winthrop Recreation Committee
- Winthrop YMCA
- Winthrop Plays Outside
- Winthrop Public Schools
- Charles M. Bailey Library (free loans of fishing gear and snowshoes)
- Winthrop Lakes Region Chamber of Commerce (concert series)
- Winthrop Maine Historical Society (walking tours and cemetery tours)

Water-Based Recreation:

Winthrop has an abundance of lakes and ponds for water-based recreational activities. Waterbodies in Winthrop include (but are not limited to) Maranacook Lake, Cobbossee Lake, Upper and Lower Narrows ponds, Carlton Pond, Berry Pond, Dexter Pond, Apple Valley Lake, Little Cobbossee Lake, Nancy's Bog, Kezar Pond, and Annabessacook Lake. The numerous and vast waterbodies have shaped the history and character of Winthrop, much as they still do today.



Photo: A kayaker glides across the waters of Maranacook Lake at sunset.

Each of Winthrop's lakes provides a range of recreational opportunities, including fishing, boating, swimming, paddling, wildlife observation, ice fishing, and many more. The greatest opportunities for these activities lie with shoreline residents and landowners. Overall, the public has limited access to the numerous waterbodies throughout town. For example, aside from Norcross Point, the only beach access to Maranacook Lake is through the neighboring town of Readfield.

Beach Areas:

Winthrop has limited public swimming locations. Just north of the downtown area, the Town Beach and Norcross Point offer public access to Maranacook Lake. This facility includes a town park, picnic tables, a boat launch, and a beach with a swimming area. The Town Beach is a 300-foot sand beach, adjacent to Norcross Beach. Norcross Point has a gazebo, port-a-potty and free-standing restrooms in the summer, as well as other amenities. The YMCA provides a supervised swimming area, swimming programs, and other activities at the Town Beach and Norcross Point.

There is also a town beach in East Winthrop, which is accessible via East Winthrop Beach Lane. This town beach is unsupervised, with no lifeguard on duty.

Fishing:

Winthrop has many opportunities for fishing. Several lakes support cold-water fisheries and are managed and stocked by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. Public access is essential to utilization of fisheries as a recreational resource. More information on fish species in each waterbody can be found in the Natural Resources chapter of this plan.

Norcross Point:

Norcross Point is one of the town's most visible and valuable assets. Norcross Point, adjacent to the public beach, consists of a beach swimming area, boat launch, floating docks, picnic area, bathrooms, gazebo, park amenities, and veterans memorials.

The boat launch is owned by the town and consists of a 20-foot wide, paved ramp and launching platform with docks. Parking is available for eight vehicles with trailers, plus another 16 spaces for vehicles without boat trailers, shared with the adjoining town beach.

The town will be applying for a state grant in spring of 2024 to improve the current boat launch, which was last improved in 2001. If received, the town will be eligible to reapply for another grant in 2025 to refurbish and expand the parking area at Norcross Point to allow for more boat trailers. Winthrop has already applied for a 2023 grant, that if selected, will go toward replacing the boarding float adjacent to the boat ramp.

Norcross Point and the public beach serve a variety of community needs and interests, including a civic gathering space, swimming, boating, fishing, and much more. Both have a long tradition of providing family recreation for Winthrop residents. Norcross Point has the potential to host more community activities, ranging from festivals to music concerts. In fact, for the past 14 years, there has been a summer concert series on Sunday afternoons in July and August. Because of the location and site restraints, any improvements must be made with a lot of forethought and communication among users and neighbors.

Over the past several years, there has been limited, if any, improvements made to the infrastructure assets at Norcross Point. These assets at Norcross Point have been in place since the 1970s and need upgrades, repairs, replacement, or removal. Additionally, the waterfront and beach have seen significant degradation over the last 10 years.

Since so much time has lapsed since the creation of the *Norcross Point and Public Beach Redevelopment Plan*, drafted three years ago, the town has decided to go back to square one. The process of determining project needs and priorities will be started over again with public engagement to ensure that whatever improvements are pursued are in alignment with what the public wants, at the state's recommendation. The grant funds that were originally received three years ago are now insufficient to cover the cost of the improvements outlined in the original *Norcross Point and Public Beach Redevelopment Plan*.

The following is an incomplete list of known improvements needed at Norcross Point:

Norcross Point

Boating

- Floating docks
- Boat launch
- Boat inspection/wash station

Site Access, Parking and Pedestrian Circulation

- Access drive
- Parking lot
- Walkways
- New boardwalk at the beach

Shorefront Stabilization

- Stone toe armoring
- Vegetative buffers

Park Amenities

- Restrooms
- Gazebo
- Veterans Memorials
- Playground
- Signage, trash receptacles, bike racks
- Lighting, security cameras, public Wi-Fi
- Picnicking and seating
- Landscaping

Public Beach

Swimming

- Concrete swim pier removal
- Swim area delineation
- Lifeguard chair

Site Access, Parking and Pedestrian Circulation

- ADA access to beach
- Parking
- Sidewalks

Shorefront Stabilization

- Stone toe armoring
- Vegetative buffers

Site Amenities

- Signage, trash receptacles, bike racks
- Lighting, security cameras, public Wi-Fi
- Beach area space delineators
- Picnicking and seating
- Landscaping
- Temporary restrooms

Norcross Point Improvements Details:

Parking has been an issue at Norcross Point for many years. The 2010 Comprehensive Plan noted the parking limitations which are exacerbated when there are numerous boat trailers in the parking area. If the town is eligible to apply for the 2025 grant detailed above, those funds would be earmarked for this improvement.

Another important area for improvement is the restroom facilities. The town currently addresses this need using port-a-potties on site. Consideration should be given as to how the town will address this in the future.

Beach deterioration has been an issue for many years, also noted in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. The shoreline stabilization proposed by the *Norcross Point and Public Beach Redevelopment Plan* is an essential element in these improvements, as the erosion from the beach has potential to degrade water quality.

These and other improvements will undoubtedly increase the popularity of Norcross Point and Town Beach for public recreation and will undoubtedly contribute to the attractiveness of the downtown area.

Boat Access:

In addition to the boat launch at Norcross Point, a few other boat launches are scattered throughout Winthrop. There is a simple carry-in facility at the north end of Upper Narrows Pond. No road access or parking is available at this site except at the nearby rest area. Other, less formal carry-in facilities have been identified at Marshview (Little Cobbossee), Lakeside Motel (Cobbossee), and Lower Narrows Pond Rest Area (Lower Narrows Pond). In addition, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIF&W) maintains a boat launch off Turtle Run Road in East Winthrop for to access Cobbossee Lake. It is a more rustic facility, with a gravel entry road and no designated parking.

Additional facilities are available to access Winthrop's lakes from neighboring towns. They include:

- a carry-in launch facility at the north end of Berry Pond in Wayne,
- a boat ramp at the south end of Wilson Pond in Monmouth,
- a well-developed facility off Route 135 in Monmouth onto Cobbossee Lake,
- a boat ramp into Annabessacook Lake in Monmouth,
- a boat ramp into Maranacook Lake just south of Readfield Village.

The public has available access to Winthrop's many waterbodies in a variety of ways. All are accessible off town roads to those who wish to walk to them.

A common issue with allowing public boat access is the introduction of aquatic invasive species, particularly milfoil. Any improved access must be coordinated with intensive invasive species monitoring and courtesy boat inspections.

Land-Based Activities:

Land-based recreation consists of activities such as hunting, hiking, birdwatching, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, cycling, and many more. These activities take place throughout town, but many depend in large part upon public access to tracts of undeveloped land. This access can be in the form of publicly owned or managed tracts of land, such as Mt. Pisgah, but can also include easements or landowner agreements permitting public use of private land, such as with snowmobile trails. Continued access to these opportunities is contingent upon the continuing goodwill of landowners.

Development in rural areas and expanded posting of land could potentially limit future outdoor recreational opportunities in Winthrop unless steps are taken to preserve open space.

Trail System:

Winthrop has a plethora of trails for all pursuits. Included in the trail system are both publicly owned and privately owned land, maintained across multiple entities.

Winthrop is crisscrossed by snowmobile trails and linked to an interstate network through the Interconnected Trail System (ITS) trail #87 running along the western edge of town. Snowmobile trails are maintained by the Hillandalers Snowmobile Club, using contributions from public and private sources.

In addition to snowmobile trails, there are many casual and developed hiking and walking trails in Winthrop, including at the high school-middle school complex. Probably, the best known and most extensive network of trails are in the Mt. Pisgah Conservation Area.

Mt. Pisgah is the highest point of land in Winthrop, a popular hiking destination, and the site of a former Forest Service fire tower. The Kennebec Land Trust (KLT) has holdings of over 900 acres surrounding the mountain. The fire tower itself, along with 94 acres, was deeded from the state to the Town of Winthrop in 2003. Since then, the town, along with KLT, has established a management plan, emphasizing low-impact recreation uses, such as hiking, picnicking, and nature education. Development for these uses is ongoing. Mt. Pisgah, with approximately 3 miles of trails, is by far the most outstanding land-based recreation asset in the region. On a clear day, the fire tower offers views of Mount Washington to the west and Camden Hills to the east.

Bicycling is becoming increasingly popular as a recreational activity as well as a form of transportation. Except for mountain biking, most cycling takes place on public roads. Few off-road or designated bike routes exist in Winthrop. This is a significant, untapped opportunity. A bicycle network linking the built-up areas, lakes, and other attractions would not only alleviate some transportation-related problems but could serve as a tourist attraction.

A Central Maine volunteer mountain bike program called Pedal Power uses the Roger Guerette Community Trail. Girls in grades 3-12 are encouraged to join Pedal Power. The program is aimed at developing confidence.

Most hiking trails in Winthrop are maintained by a diligent group of local volunteers. The trails are well-maintained and there are no noted use conflicts. The exception to this is the trails at Mt. Pisgah, which are maintained by the KLT and KLT volunteers, and the snowmobile trails, which are maintained by the snowmobile club.

Hunting:

There are no statistics available on the percentage of land in Winthrop that is open to hunting. There is a statewide trend toward more posting of private land, particularly in locations where large parcels have been subdivided. Winthrop is somewhat untouched by this trend. Inevitably, there are some postings and restrictions to private land, but there is no data available to confirm or measure the change.

Overall, traditional access is not being restricted in Winthrop to a detrimental degree and there are no obvious issues related to this. Further, the town does not restrict hunting on town-owned parcels.

Conserved Lands:

There are many public and private tracts of land in Winthrop, used for multiple purposes, including conservation. Many are open to public recreation, as well. Table 2 lists conserved land areas and ownership.

TABLE 2: CONSERVED LAND IN WINTHROP

Landowner	Acreage	Acres in Easements Held
Kennebec Land Trust	1,055	160
Town of Winthrop*	210	
Winthrop Utilities District	254	
Greater Augusta Utilities District	220	
Maine Woodlot Owners Assoc.	155	
Total	1,894 acres	

Source: Winthrop Conservation Commission

*Does not include ballfields and beaches.

The 1,894 preserved acres account for approximately 9.5 percent of the total land base in Winthrop. The amount of preserved acreage shown here only represents the undeveloped land in Winthrop and does not include properties enrolled in the Open Space, Farmland, Forest Farmland, or Tree Growth Tax Law Programs.

Currently, the open spaces commonly used for recreational purposes are a mixture of publicly owned and privately owned lands. The Hillandalers Snowmobile Club secured access over numerous privately owned parcels over the course of many years, though access is exclusive to snowmobiles. The town and Conservation Commission work collaboratively with the Kennebec Land Trust in securing permanent conservation status on numerous acres throughout Winthrop that are open to the public.

Winthrop does not currently have an open space fund for the acquisition of property, although they partner extensively with the Kennebec Land Trust to preserve open space and secure access to preserved/conserved properties.

Winthrop's Culture:

Opportunities for cultural exploration abound in Winthrop and are available in multiple locations throughout the year. These cultural opportunities are open to both visitors and residents alike.

Venues:

Venues for gatherings and events offering a cultural experience include the Performing Arts Center (PAC) in Winthrop's High School, and the King Event Room, downstairs at the Bailey Public Library. Norcross Point, close to the village area, is an active outdoor venue for entertainment.

Events:

The following is a list of events held throughout the year in Winthrop (not an exhaustive list):

- ✓ Summer Concerts, Norcross Point
- ✓ Summer Art Festival, Downtown, Town of Winthrop
- ✓ Speakers Series, Winthrop Maine Historical Society
- ✓ Lakes Region Forum Speakers Series, Bailey Public Library
- ✓ Storytime with Miss Jenn, Bailey Public Library
- ✓ Bailey Ukelele, Bailey Public Library
- ✓ Bailey Title Waves Book Club, Adult, Bailey Public Library
- ✓ The Summer Community Read, Bailey Library
- ✓ Young Writers Workshop, Bailey Public Library
- ✓ Tweens and Teens Book Club, Bailey Public Library
- ✓ Poetry Series, Bailey Public Library

Baily Public Library:

Winthrop is a library-centric community, and the town is immensely proud of its library's wide offerings both culturally and recreationally.

Library buildings are rich in symbolism and meaning, and Baily Public Library is the epitome of this. Libraries have long been known to provide cultural assets to communities, such as non-mainstream points of view, a voice for local artists and authors, and opportunities for free classes. Regardless of how grand a library is or is not, the physical space of the library communicates to the public the community's underlying, core values that libraries, information, and shared community space matter, all of which Baily Public Library personifies.

The new adult wing in the Baily Public Library is a stunning addition to the historic portion of the library that houses the children's wing. There is an amazing playroom for the

youngest readers, computers for school-aged children, and a wonderful, quiet space for study, research and reading.

Love of Winthrop's History:

Winthrop is proud of its history and the revitalization of the Winthrop Maine Historical Society (WMHS) is evidence of this. The Society opened the new Winthrop Maine Historical Society Center in 2021 and offers many events, series, and even a small gift shop from its new location. The volunteers of WMHS are passionate, knowledgeable, and involved in the community.

Winthrop's Vital Town Center:

Winthrop could be considered a shopping and retail hub for surrounding rural communities. Several local businesses in town currently host weekend-long events on a monthly basis that draw hundreds of customers to the Commerce Center. This boosts sales throughout the town on those weekends. In addition, there are many other retailers, both established as well as new in town, that continue to grow the town's economy and culture.

Recreation is Part of Our Culture:

Year-round outdoor recreation is a considerable part of Winthrop's culture. From winter to summer, Winthrop "plays outside." Ice fishing, ice hockey, ice skating, skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and winter hiking are some of the more popular wintertime activities enjoyed in Winthrop. Summer boasts fishing, boating, swimming, kayaking, canoeing, water skiing, and spotting and photographing wildlife -- both flora and fauna. Hunting is another type of recreation that is a popular all-season pursuit in Winthrop.

Analysis and Key Issues:

Much of Winthrop residents' recreational activity needs are met through current offerings by existing entities in the town. The Recreation Committee and the YMCA have grown and expanded to meet the changing needs of residents and continue to offer a wide range of options.

The town's trail system is well-maintained and there is an abundance of organized recreational opportunities and programs, though mostly for youth. Winthrop's current offering of youth programs should be maintained and evaluated for areas of improvement and levels of demand in the future.

Although there is a variety of offerings for youth activities, a need has been identified for more diverse recreational opportunities for all generations, specifically infants/toddlers, new parents, middle and high school-aged kids, as well as adults and seniors. An emphasis on young teens or middle school-aged kids, outside of school-sponsored offerings, should be considered. Opportunities for non-athletic enrichment programs, such as dance and gymnastics, would improve and complement Winthrop's current recreational offerings. Future considerations regarding the benefits and potential offerings of a

Community Center should be considered now, as construction is unlikely to take place during this planning period.

An increased demand for adult recreation programs and opportunities is anticipated. The current “Baby Boomer” generation is indicating a desire to stay physically and mentally active. They want to go to concerts, take classes, participate in the community, ride bikes, kayak, and engage in interesting pursuits in their retirement. If Winthrop wants to attract or keep its aging Baby Boomer population, a variety of recreational opportunities and programs that this demographic find appealing is necessary.

Winthrop has excellent prospects for a variety of recreational activities with existing facilities, numerous waterbodies, open space, and working relationships with the YMCA, the Cobbossee Watershed District, and Kennebec Land Trust. In these areas, continued planning for future demand and financing the necessary facilities are all that is necessary.

The town is taking steps to maintain and improve the treasured Norcross Point, by determining areas that need to be addressed, applying for grants, and garnering public input and support.

Another town project is the effort to build a turf field behind the grade school and Town Office building. This would serve to maintain the current level of use for youth recreation.

Future consideration should be given to handicapped accessibility in locations with known noncompliance. The middle school and high school already meet ADA standards, while the library, Water District, and most significantly, elementary school do not. There is a need for additional ADA compliance within and around the existing brick and mortar town facilities.