

# Wal-Mart program preserves land as it builds business

BY ANDY OSTMEYER  
THE JOPLIN GLOBE

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. — already one of the nation’s leading conservation supporters through its partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation — is doubling down on that investment.

In 2005, the retailer started a program called Acres for America. The goal was to spend \$35 million throughout the next decade to help purchase or preserve one acre of land for every acre that had been developed by the company. That was a big order. Wal-Mart owns enough land to be its own small country (with more revenue than many countries’ GDPs).

In the 10 years since, the Acres for America money, paired with matching grants and other funds has protected more than a million acres — an area comparable in size to Montana’s Glacier National Park.

“As of today, the Acres for America program has conserved more than 10 acres of vital habitat for every acre of land Wal-Mart has developed since its founding in 1962,” the company announced last week, when it said it was renewing the program for another 10 years with another \$35 million.

The money has been used for conservation easements and outright land acquisitions in key areas near protected lands such as national parks and wildlife refuges. Through its competitive grant process, the program has leveraged Wal-Mart’s initial \$35 million investment to generate more than

\$352 million in matching contributions for a total conservation impact of approximately \$387 million.

“We began this journey in 2005, and we are astounded by what it has become over the past 10 years,” John Clarke, vice president of store planning for Wal-Mart, said in a statement making the announcement.

In eastern Maine, the Acres for America initiative acquired a conservation easement that prevented forest fragmentation across 312,000 acres of wildlife habitat. This easement was the second-largest of its kind in U.S. history at that time, according to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and guaranteed “perpetual public access” for hunting, hiking, fishing, birding and boating.

At Yellow River Ravines in Florida, the money was used to buy 11,313 acres that connects existing conservation lands to form a protected landscape of more than 834,000 acres of longleaf pine and bottomland hardwood forests.

The money has protected, among other places, tidal bay shoreline in Texas, redwoods in California, flyway habitat critical for migrating birds along the Platte River and protected headwaters timberland in Oregon.

The Acres for America money has also been used for three Ozark projects identified as high priority conservation areas by the Arkansas chapter the Nature Conservancy.

In 2013, a \$550,000 grant to the Nature Conservancy from the National Fish and



BDN FILE  
A maple tree branch juts out over Second Pond, near Dedham and Lucerne, in 2007. Wal-Mart started Acres for America in 2005, a nationwide program to help purchase or preserve similar land for conservation and recreation.

Wildlife Foundation was paired with \$750,000 in matching funds to acquire 608 acres along the Kings River in Northwest Arkansas, adding two miles of river and riparian corridor to the Nature Conservancy’s 4,585-acre Kings River Preserve. The Kings River is a top Ozark smallmouth stream before it empties into Table Rock Lake.

A year earlier, a \$790,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to the Nature Conservancy was

paired with more than \$3.1 million in matching money, including state money, to buy 1,954 acres of forest along Beaver Lake, preserving habitat and creating additional public access, as well as reducing sediment entering the lake. It is known as the Devil’s Eyebrow Natural Area, which has “one of the highest concentrations of rare plant species in Arkansas, with several species typically found far to the north and others that are restricted in

distribution and considered globally rare,” according to the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission.

Another 408 acres were recently acquired by the Nature Conservancy adjacent to the natural area. That area is known as Rob and Melani Walton Preserve, although that was not done through the Acres for America funding.

One of the first grants, for \$400,000 in 2005, helped acquire a conservation easement on 1,226 acres of Smith

Creek along Arkansas’ upper Buffalo River to protect the largest Indiana bat hibernation area in the state, and it also connected several large forest conservation areas. Without the acquisition, the Nature Conservancy said the land probably would have been developed, which would have negatively affected the federally endangered Indiana bats, as well as water quality in the cave and in Smith Creek, which would have impacted water quality in the Buffalo National River.

## Maine legislator pushes stricter recycling, waste disposal rules

BY MAL LEARY  
MPBN

AUGUSTA — Studies indicate that every person in Maine generates at least 4 pounds of trash per day. That adds up to millions of pounds that need to be disposed of, somehow, every year.

Lawmakers are gearing up to take a second look at how the state can do a better job at managing its waste and increasing its recycling rate.

Maine has not looked at its solid waste laws for 15 years. Sen. Tom Saviello, a Republican from Wilton said that “it’s time.”

“We set some recycling goals in those, we aren’t coming close to meeting those goals, so as a result we have to look at why and what can we do to help them,” he said.

Saviello serves as co-chairman of the Legislature’s Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which earlier this year enlisted the help of the Mitchell Center at the University of Maine to look at how other states and municipalities have improved their recycling rates. Maine’s goal of reaching 50 percent by last year fell short and is now estimated to be at 35 percent.

The Mitchell Center’s Travis Blackmer said some com-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
Many took part in collecting more than 50,000 pounds of electronic equipment from Aroostook County residents on Earth Day this spring.

munities are adopting increased disposal fees and the banning of certain packaging.

“We have things like the polystyrene foam ban in Portland, polyethylene bags in Westport, Connecticut, York recently,” said Blackmer. “California as well. And then things like single-serve bottles being banned in Concord, Massachusetts.”

The panel also is looking at updating laws governing trash-to-energy generation, in which wood, paper and other combustibles are taken from the waste stream and burned to generate electricity. Saviello expects the final package to be controversial.

“This bill is the kitchen sink, it’s got everything it,” he said. “Some things people

are not going to like; for example, we already know the [agricultural] people don’t like the fact we are going to add apple cider and blueberry juice into this thing.”

Specifically, Saviello believes they won’t like the idea of adding the containers for those products to the list of returnables and assessing a deposit. But committee members say the clock is ticking, and the state could run out of licensed landfill space in 15 years. That’s why they’re planning to take up the proposal in the next session that starts in January.

This article appears through a media partnership with Maine Public Broadcasting Network.

## Bill Gates to start clean tech initiative

REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates will launch a multi-billion-dollar clean energy research and development initiative on Monday, the opening day of the U.N. climate change

summit in Paris, GreenWire reported Friday.

Gates and a group of developing and developed countries will agree to double their research and development budgets to boost clean energy deployment and work collaboratively, according to GreenWire, an energy and climate trade publication, citing government and business officials

familiar with the agreement.

Gates will join Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Barack Obama and French President Francois Hollande to announce Initiative Cleantech at a side event on the opening day of the two-week climate summit, according to a summit agenda released by the French government Friday.

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The ConnectME Authority has prepared a draft of its first triennial strategic plan. An electronic version of the plan is can be found using the following link:

**[www.maine.gov/connectme/documents/ConnectMEDrafttriennialplan111215.pdf](http://www.maine.gov/connectme/documents/ConnectMEDrafttriennialplan111215.pdf)**

This draft is made available for public review and comment through December 11, 2015. If you are unable to access the document electronically and would like to receive a paper copy, call the ConnectME Authority at 207-624-9793.

A public hearing on the draft will be held on Friday, December 4, 2015, at the ConnectME Authority Board meeting. The public hearing will be conducted during the regular business meeting which begins at 1:00PM. The meeting location is:

**The Maine Public Utilities Commission  
101 Second Street  
Hallowell, ME 04347**

Comments on the draft triennial strategic plan may be submitted via E-MAIL to [david.w.maxwell@maine.gov](mailto:david.w.maxwell@maine.gov). Please include “strategic plan comments” in the subject line of your message. Comments can be sent by conventional mail to:

**ConnectME Authority  
78 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333**

To be part of the public record in preparation of the final triennial strategic plan considered on February 12, 2016, comments must be received by close of business on Friday, December 11, 2015.