



Economic Development Services Report

1ST QUARTER 2026: JANUARY 1, 2026 TO MARCH 31, 2026



Prepared on May 4, 2026 for Washington County Government

Submitted by Sunrise County Economic Council

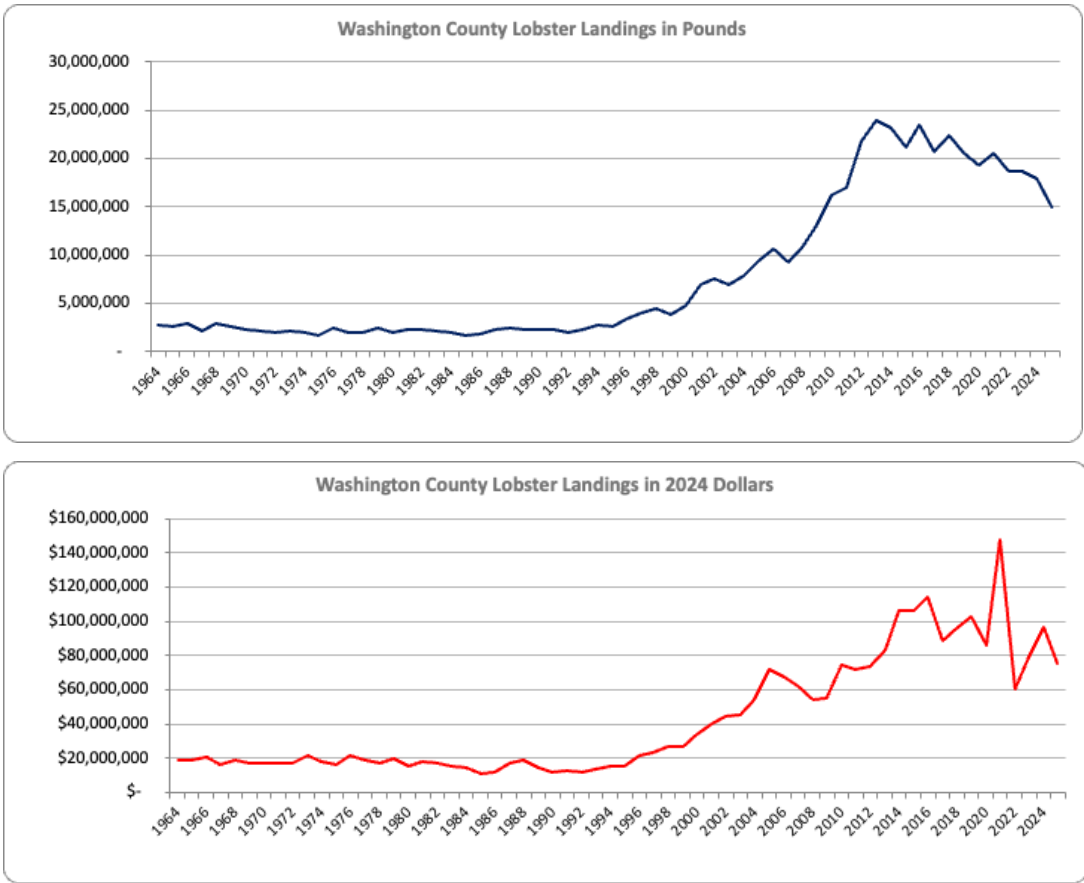
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INTRODUCTION

Lobster fishing is one of the most important industries in Washington County, supporting roughly 2,000 direct jobs and hundreds more in the businesses that support the industry. Per the Maine Department of Marine Resources, 2025 lobster landings in the county were just under 15 million pounds, about 3 million pounds less than in 2024 and almost 9 million pounds less than the recent peak in 2013. The graph below depicts lobster landings in pounds over the past 60 years. There was a historic boom in the industry from the late 1990s to the mid 2010s. The landings in the past decade have varied from year to year, but the overall trend has been lower.

At this point, it is difficult to point to a single cause, the prevalence of lobster is a factor, but the cost of fuel and bait are important as well as changes in dock price. It is uncertain what part of the decline is due to a decrease in effort over the industry as a whole and what part is due to the abundance of lobsters available to be caught.

The value of the lobster catch in Washington County has followed the general trends in the amount landed, but with much greater changes from year to year as the price of lobster has responded to the shocks of increased global trade, trade disruptions, and the pandemic’s impacts on domestic demand. After reaching an inflation-adjusted value of over \$148 million in 2021, the last few years have been erratic with the value of Washington County lobster landings ranging between \$60 million and \$96 million when adjusted for inflation. The value of lobster landings in the county in 2025 was just under \$78 million in nominal dollars. Despite the recent hardships in the industry, it remains a vital part of the Washington County economy and an irreplaceable source of living-wage jobs and business opportunities for the county’s residents.



WORKFORCE

Working Communities Challenge

This quarter, the Working Community Challenge convened in person in March in Calais. The group met with the new CAP agency, Washington Hancock and Aroostook Community Action Program, to explore opportunities for mutual benefit between the two initiatives. The program has been navigating a period of transition as it works to sustain operations without the financial support of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

The Partnership Director has been engaged with the StartUp Downeast redesign team as it advances its programming, contributing fatherhood and Passamaquoddy perspectives to the process.

Family Futures Downeast (FFD)

This quarter, 127 Washington County individuals received whole-family services through the FFD program. Fifty-two parents attended college at WCCC and UMM and worked on career development and self-employment plans with coaches in order to improve the economic futures for their children.

Through the 2Gen programming of FFD, children have been connected to primary care providers, helped access dental care, and received support to improve reading skills. FFD youth who would not have had opportunities to engage in some activities have received support to complete driver's training, attend educational and arts programs, and to help defer the financial impact of youth sports opportunities. By partnering with a number of community organizations and local churches, FFD coaches ensured children were supported during the holidays — many families forgoing “big gifts” and requesting things like diapers, winter coats, and ski pants. FFD distributed 37 pairs of winter boots to children throughout Washington County as part of the holiday effort.

FFD parents also participate in a variety of leadership activities as part of their work in FFD, including attending the John T. Gorman Foundation 2Gen Summit, serving as panelists at the SCEC Economic Summit, and working with state and national partners on initiatives like the Ending Hunger By 2030 committee and serving as a parent representative for Ascend at the Aspen Institute's national work on university and community college student data.

Start Up Downeast

Work has continued this quarter to improve the economic outcomes for fathers and non-custodial parents and their children through a redesign of Start Up Downeast. This quarter, key staff from SCEC, the Community Caring Collaborative, and WCCC participated with parent leaders at the 2Gen Summit to work on the types of career and training programs that would best support fathers who want to contribute to their children's well-being. A final redesign is planned for the spring.

During this time, the current participants continue to work with SUDE coaches to complete college and career programming, and develop small business plans with work at the MaineStreet Business Building. Of 10 participants this quarter, three have active businesses in Washington County, and one parent completed her bachelor's degree at UMM in December.

Scholarships

This quarter there was one Sunrise Scholarship application to support enrollment in a 300-hour Yoga Teacher Training program (online, rolling admission). The total program cost is \$626, with a scholarship request of \$500. The applicant is transitioning from prior full-time employment into self-employment in the wellness field and is currently facilitating workshops, with plans to expand offerings. This advanced certification builds on prior yoga training and will enhance skills in yoga instruction, meditation, holistic wellness, and trauma-informed practices. The training is intended to support sustainable employment while increasing access to wellness services in Washington County.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MaineStreet Business Building (MSBB)

This quarter, the MSBB business advising team served 34 active clients across Washington County, delivering 105 hours of comprehensive business support. In addition, the team provided targeted technical assistance to 15 clients focused on business technology and website development.

Our clients reflect the diverse economic fabric of the region, including marine industries such as aquaculture and commercial fishing; hospitality and food service operations (both fixed and mobile); skilled trades including construction, HVAC, mechanical services, and excavation; outdoor recreation and ecotourism ventures; retail businesses spanning clothing, wine, and floral; and early-stage product prototyping and launch initiatives.

Beyond direct client services, our team remained actively engaged with regional partners and collaborative networks working to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem. We continued our involvement with the Maine Sea Grant Program Advisory Committee and advanced our signature Partners in Entrepreneurial Pathways program.

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) joined the MSBB building as a new tenant this quarter, with expanded opportunities for collaboration ahead. The building maintained steady occupancy across office and coworking memberships, with a notable increase in drop-in coworking usage.

The team also led Seascale Demo Day — “Keep Haulin’, Start Growing” — an informal aquaculture outreach event showcasing innovative scallop gear designed for lobstermen. This event created meaningful engagement with the marine community around alternative revenue opportunities, while also providing valuable, direct feedback to key partners including the Maine Aquaculture Association, GMRI, and the Downeast Institute.

Several team members attended the Northeast Aquaculture Conference & Exposition (NACE), which convenes producers, researchers, and industry leaders from across the region to address emerging challenges and share applied research.

In addition, team members participated in the Maine Fishermen’s Forum, a key convening of fishermen, aquaculture producers, scientists, regulators, and industry stakeholders. SCEC’s Coastal Opportunities Advisor was a featured panelist, contributing to a discussion on community resilience, workforce pathways, and economic opportunity in Maine’s fishing communities.

Finally, the MSBB team continued its partnership with Machias Savings Bank and Jobs for Maine’s Graduates (JMG) to support an incubator-style business competition for high school students across Washington County. This initiative includes monthly mentorship sessions and will culminate in a regional pitch competition in Spring 2026.

Partners in Entrepreneurial Pathways

Partners in Entrepreneurial Pathways 2.0 – Beyond the Business Plan kicked off in February and saw a record number of registrations with more than 90 participants, with 34% of participants from Washington County and 98% from Maine. The 11-week, virtual startup accelerator covers the practical application of business strategy and development including market, customer, succession, and ecosystem insights, leading to refreshed business plans and development portfolios.

With 28 individual partners across 21 regional and statewide organizations – including business mentors and advisors, community lenders, economic development professionals, health and wellness collaboratives, entrepreneurs, attorneys, and business educators – the program delivered 22 workshops, panel discussions, and individual business coaching sessions during the course. New partners were added this session, including Cobscook Institute in Trescott and Community Clicks in Cutler, with new topics including “Social Media Marketing for Small Businesses.” The course is accredited at both Washington County Community College and the University of Maine at Machias.

APEX Accelerator

The APEX program at SCEC offers many services to the people of Washington County. The APEX Counselor at SCEC works with businesses in Washington County to sell their goods and services to the government in the form of contracts. Contracts can be with the local, state, or federal government. Government contracting can seem daunting, and the APEX Counselor helps navigate the government purchasing process. Assistance is available for municipalities with registering on SAM.gov or receiving a Unique Entity Identifier.

The APEX Counselor and the rest of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship team have been involved in various outreach events throughout Washington County. These events are designed to meet businesses where they are physically located. Businesses may receive assistance with local contracting opportunities, marketing, and solicitations, as well as one-on-one counseling, assistance with certifications and registrations, bid match services, bid/proposal assistance, and much more. The APEX Counselor recently attended the Sea-Air-Space 2026 Conference in National Harbor, Maryland, where several prime contractors, military personnel, and White House representatives were in attendance.

DownEast Acadia Regional Tourism (DART)

This quarter, the DART team focused on completing the 2026 Region Guidebook, planning the Destination DownEast Tourism Conference, growing social media engagement, launching a new digital map discovery tool, and finalizing a digital advertising campaign with the Miles Partnership.

2026 Region Guidebook. The 2026 Region Guide received a 60,000-copy print run, distributed from Pennsylvania to Houlton, Maine, with extensive placement throughout Washington and Hancock Counties. Designed and developed in-house by the DART Grant Manager and SCEC Director of Business Programs and Communications, this year’s edition features updated written and visual content, trail maps for Acadia National Park and Roosevelt Campobello International Park, and advertising from Visit Bar Harbor, the CAT, Woodlawn Museum, Fort Knox and Penobscot Narrows Observatory, UMaine Machias, and Visit Castine. Additional partnerships with the Downeast National Heritage Area, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and Downeast Conservation Network resulted in an MDI history feature and a land preserve section. The detailed maps continue to add tremendous value for visitor center staff statewide.

Destination DownEast Tourism Conference. The first annual Destination DownEast Tourism Conference, June 12 at UMaine Machias, is now open for registration at downeastacadia.com.

Digital Trip Planning Tool. A new digital trip planning tool is live at visit.downeastacadia.com. Outdoor-recreation forward, the platform is built for use across interests, markets, and platforms.

Digital Marketing Campaign. A digital marketing co-op campaign with Visit Maine and the Miles Partnership is underway, leaning into our 2026 slogan, “That’s the way we like it,” across four creative executions highlighting the region’s natural beauty and Downeast charm.

Downeast Maine National Heritage Area

During the first quarter of 2026, the primary work of the National Heritage Area planning committee has been to strengthen the collaborations required to advance and sustain the program for the long term. The Management Plan must include specific elements before it will be approved for implementation, including a five-year action plan for program implementation. Four subcommittees have each met monthly with our National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance team to strategically plan for the first five years of the program.

Public engagement is a critical component of the management plan. SCEC staff continued individual and small-group outreach with local partners and our regional National Park Service partners and has begun to develop outreach tools for the planning team to use as they connect with the public and engage them in program development. SCEC staff developed an independent website for the Downeast Maine NHA to keep community members and partners informed and to provide opportunities to engage with the planning process.

The March 2026 NHA planning team meeting featured a conversation with the NHA program director from the Maritime Washington National Heritage Area. They shared tips and lessons learned from their own recently completed management planning process and described their program rollout and leadership structure.

INFRASTRUCTURE

This quarter, the Upper Machias Bay Master Plan was finalized. After 14 months of diligent work, the project Leadership Committee developed more than 30 draft recommendations and held a public meeting in March to share the recommendations and receive feedback. Recommendations cover public engagement, downtown flooding and stormwater, the capped Machias landfill, wastewater, emergency management and planning, and the Machias Dike replacement. The final report draft has been completed and will be presented at an event for public officials and the press on May 4. The final recommendations are posted on the project website, and the final report will be posted shortly (<https://sunrisecounty.org/machiasbay/>).

Sustainable Prosperity staff have been collaborating over the past year with several partners led by Green and White Hope, a new nonprofit organization aimed at promoting safety in the fishing industry, to develop a Community Orchestration Guide to help communities plan to respond effectively to commercial fishing emergencies such as a missing vessel, a person overboard, or a capsized boat. This work is part of a larger collaborative initiative to reduce marine casualties spurred by a spate of recent deaths in the fishery. The guide is now complete and is available on the Green and White Hope website at <https://www.greenwhitehope.org/services-7>. The guide was presented in a well-attended session at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum and in a presentation by the Shellfish Advisory Council for Shellfish Focus Day, and audiences were eager and receptive.

ETIPP — Energy Technology Innovation Partnership Project

SCEC staff continue to address the community and economic impact of power outages in Washington County through the ETIPP program with support from the Island Institute and the National Laboratory of the Rockies (NLR), in partnership with Versant Power. NLR staff completed a draft of the Strategic Energy Plan (SEP) that emphasizes empowering residents and town leadership to understand and participate in mitigating outages and increasing public safety and disaster preparedness.

During the first quarter of 2026, SCEC partnered with the College of the Atlantic (COA) “communicating science” students to create educational fact sheets for public and municipal use. SCEC worked with the students to design fact sheets that communicated the different safety and preparedness concepts to three different audiences - youth, adult community members, and municipal leaders. These students created four fact sheets, which SCEC will print and distribute at municipal offices and any other appropriate public spaces.

Loans & Grants

In the first quarter, the loan program generated steady early-stage activity, receiving six new loan applications and successfully closing one \$10,000 loan to support a local lobster fisherman. While overall deal volume remains modest, the pipeline reflects continued demand for flexible, community-based financing solutions, particularly among small businesses navigating ongoing economic uncertainty. Looking ahead, early indicators suggest a robust second quarter, with several organizations expressing interest in financing capital improvements and major equipment purchases.

During this period, outreach efforts included direct engagement with business owners across the fishing, retail, earthworks, and nonprofit sectors. These interactions underscored a consistent theme of resilience, with entrepreneurs actively adapting to inflationary pressures, supply chain challenges, and shifting market conditions. These conversations are contributing to a stronger underwriting pipeline and helping to identify opportunities where targeted capital can have the greatest impact.

In addition to lending activity, program staff continued to support broader economic development initiatives through work with the Washington County TIF Committee. Notably, in the first quarter, staff facilitated the one-time transfer of funds to the Coastal Washington County Institute of Technology, fulfilling a key commitment under the Downeast Wind Community Benefit Agreement. This milestone advances the development of a new technical institute in Columbia, Maine, representing a strategic investment in workforce development and long-term regional economic resilience.

Broadband

Maine Connectivity Authority (MCA) received approval from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for the State Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) plan to connect 22,000 unserved and underserved locations across the state. To see the qualified locations, please visit maineconnectivity.org/bead.

MCA has released a Request for Information (RFI) for the operations, maintenance, and commercialization of the 530-mile Maine Online Optical Statewide Enabling Network (MOOSE Net), which covers the entire expanse of Route 9 that remains largely unserved.

Housing

The Workforce Housing Program Manager and the Community Development team have begun a comprehensive study of the housing landscape in nine municipalities. This includes analyzing existing housing stock, municipal

infrastructure, available land for development, and attainable workforce housing options under the Maine Housing Opportunity Program (HOP). The findings are being entered into a GIS database to create an interactive dashboard that will provide relevant information to municipalities, housing developers, and investors.

A countywide employer survey is also underway to understand how housing affordability affects employers' ability to recruit and retain workers.

SCEC will host the "Washington County Housing Summit: Strategies to Solutions" on May 21 at the University of Maine at Machias. Breakout sessions will address topics such as hidden homelessness, barriers to housing turnover, and successful strategies for creating accessible housing for middle-income earners. The summit will highlight practical tools and strategies to advance housing solutions across the region.

Municipal Assistance & Outreach

SCEC continued comprehensive planning work with Cutler as the town moves toward state review and is actively working with three additional communities on their comprehensive plan updates, including chapter development, data collection, mapping, and committee support.

SCEC has sent six editions of "Municipal Matters," formerly News for Communities, to every municipal office and to other individuals in Washington County this quarter. These emails include information about training, grant opportunities, technical assistance, and other items that can be helpful to towns and cities. Anyone is welcome to sign up to receive these emails.

SCEC's Brownfields coordinator completed a six-month national Nonprofit Land Reuse Learning Cohort that began in October. This program is designed to help nonprofits and community organizations effectively lead brownfield site reuse projects, with a strong focus on community-centered engagement. Through program participation, SCEC maintains access to tools and resources that would otherwise not be available to Washington County, Maine.

SCEC continues to provide staffing and fiscal services to the Washington County Council of Governments Board. The Maine Planning Assistance Program subcontract through the Hancock County Planning Commission has come through with funding from the general MPAP program as well as coastal funding through NOAA.

Staff participation in support of communities includes:

- Moving Maine Network (bike/ped infrastructure development)
- Calais Branch Rail Use Advisory Council
- Maine Community Development Association
- Maine Association of Regional Councils
- Municipal Planning Assistance Program
- Maine Association of Planners
- Maine Municipal Association

With assistance from its Brownfields Committee, SCEC is continuing work with its Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP) to update the list of possible brownfields sites in Washington County.

SCEC has submitted the Site-Specific Quality Assurance Project Plan (SSQAPP) for the Princeton Rec Center mentioned in the last report. This is the proposed scope of work for hazardous building materials assessment activities at each site.

Phase II site visits and Hazardous Building Material Surveys are scheduled for Jonesport and Princeton the first week in April.

SCEC continues to assist municipalities in securing project funding and with implementing projects funded by various grant sources. Current projects include but are not limited to:

- Whiting Mill Pond Dam and Fish Passage project: work is anticipated to begin April 2026
- Jonesport Working Waterfront
- Beals Town Landing
- Machias recreation area and trails
- Calais trails
- Pembroke Fire Department
- Dennysville recreation area

Rural Energy for America Program

The REAP program has been put on hold to comply with Executive Order 14315. USDA will announce a new Notice of Funding Opportunity when new regulations are in place.

Community Resilience Partnership

CRP Regional Coordinator

The coordinator has brought in more than \$191,000 to Washington County communities this quarter for resilience work.

Four training programs are under development focused on erosion management in response to sea level rise and increasingly intense rain events.

The coordinator aided three towns in the submission of four grant requests totaling more than \$894,574. This included submitting a Coastal Communities Grant for Roque Bluffs and Jonesport to address coastal erosion. The coordinator wrote a CDS request for Roque Bluffs to expand its town landing as well. Further, the coordinator wrote an AARP Challenge Grant for Cherryfield and a T-Mobile Hometown Grant for Machias for improving bike/ped infrastructure. Finally, the coordinator assisted Calais in developing and submitting a U.S. Department of Transportation Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant aimed at connecting the end of the extending Downeast Sunrise Trail to downtown Calais.

CRP Service Provider

Through its Fall 2024 Service Provider grant, SCEC has fully enrolled Calais, Machiasport, East Machias, and Pembroke in the Community Resilience Partnership. The Calais community action grant (CAG) application was awarded, but Machiasport was not. East Machias and Pembroke CAGs will be submitted in the 2026 round.

SCEC continues working on the additional 2024 Service Provider grant to assist with community vulnerability assessments for five communities (Machias, Machiasport, Roque Bluffs, Cutler, and East Machias). Staff have met with all communities and mapping is progressing. Once the assessments are complete, staff will assist each community with submission of a community action grant to support resilience measures.

CDBG/NBRC Technical Assistance

- Participated on a statewide committee offering an online “Master Class” series on housing. The final class took place on January 14. Recordings and materials for each session can be found at mainecda.org/training-events/.
- Participated in the Sunrise Trail initiative.
- Staff training on the CDBG program.

- Participating on the Maine Community Development Association Board (MCDA), the CDBG Advisory Group.
- Met with communities to discuss CDBG opportunities.
- General community development activities.
- Potential public infrastructure grant opportunity this year.
- Updated business advisor on microenterprise grants and information for a local business.
- Met with DEIN facilitators and the Roux Institute to discuss possible municipal leadership training and innovation opportunities.
- Public Service Grant letter of intent for a nonprofit expanding into Washington County.
- Staff assisted with NBRC Catalyst spring pre-applications for the City of Calais, Green & White Hope, and the University of Maine at Machias. Calais was invited to submit a full application; the other two were not at this time.

SCEC provides LDD services (Catalyst program technical assistance) to the following organizations:

- Beth Wright Cancer Center
- DownEast Institute
- Cherryfield Town Square
- GrowSmart Maine
- Island Institute
- Town of Beals
- Danforth Water District
- Town of Jonesport

Maine DOT Regional Planning Services

SCEC staff provided the following regional planning services to Washington County communities during January, February, and March 2026:

- Scoping a BUILD application with the Eastport Port Authority.
- Attended an Infrastructure Adaptation Fund training program and began assisting towns with applications (including Cherryfield).
- Information mapping and data gathering for the MaineDOT Vulnerability Grant.
- Assistance to the City of Calais with a Village Partnership Improvement project and scoping the extension of the Downeast Sunrise Trail.
- Scenic Byway infrastructure planning with the gateway communities of Calais and Cherryfield.
- Planning for in-town bike/ped trail interconnections with the Town of Machias.
- Planning for expansion and repairs of the Downeast Sunrise Trail, amenity improvements at Coalition campsites, making village connections, and scoping grant funds.
- Comprehensive planning with the Town of Cutler.

ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

SCEC is able to undertake its work in collaboration with the following current active partners: Aroostook Mental Health Center, Coastal Enterprises Inc, College of the Atlantic, Cooperative Development Institute, Community Caring Collaborative, C.O.R.E, DownEast Acadia Regional Tourism, Downeast Institute, Downeast Public Health Council, Downeast Salmon Federation, Eastern Maine Development Corporation, Eastern Maine Electric Cooperative, Greater East Grand Economic Counsel, GrowSmart Maine, Healthy Acadia, Hancock County Planning Commission, Island Institute, Machias Savings Bank, Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Maine Community Foundation, Maine Development Foundation, Maine Office of Community Development, Maine APEX, Maine Seacoast Mission, Maine Sea Grant, Maine Small Business Development Center, Mano en Mano, Manomet, National Digital Equity Center, Northeastern Workforce Development Board, Northern Border Regional Commission, Northern Maine Development Commission, Northern Forest Center, State of Maine, University of Maine at Machias, Wabanaki Aspirations, Washington County Adult and Community Education, Washington County Community College, Washington County Development Authority, and Washington County Government.

The activities in this report are a broad representation of economic development services provided by SCEC on the County's behalf over the past quarter. It is not representative of all on-going projects, programs, and initiatives previously reported on. This report does not include confidential and/or proprietary information related to work with specific businesses or development projects. SCEC is available to discuss specifics in Executive Session at the discretion of the County Commissioners.

Respectfully submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles J. Rudelitch", written over a thin horizontal line.

Charles J. Rudelitch, Esq.
Executive Director