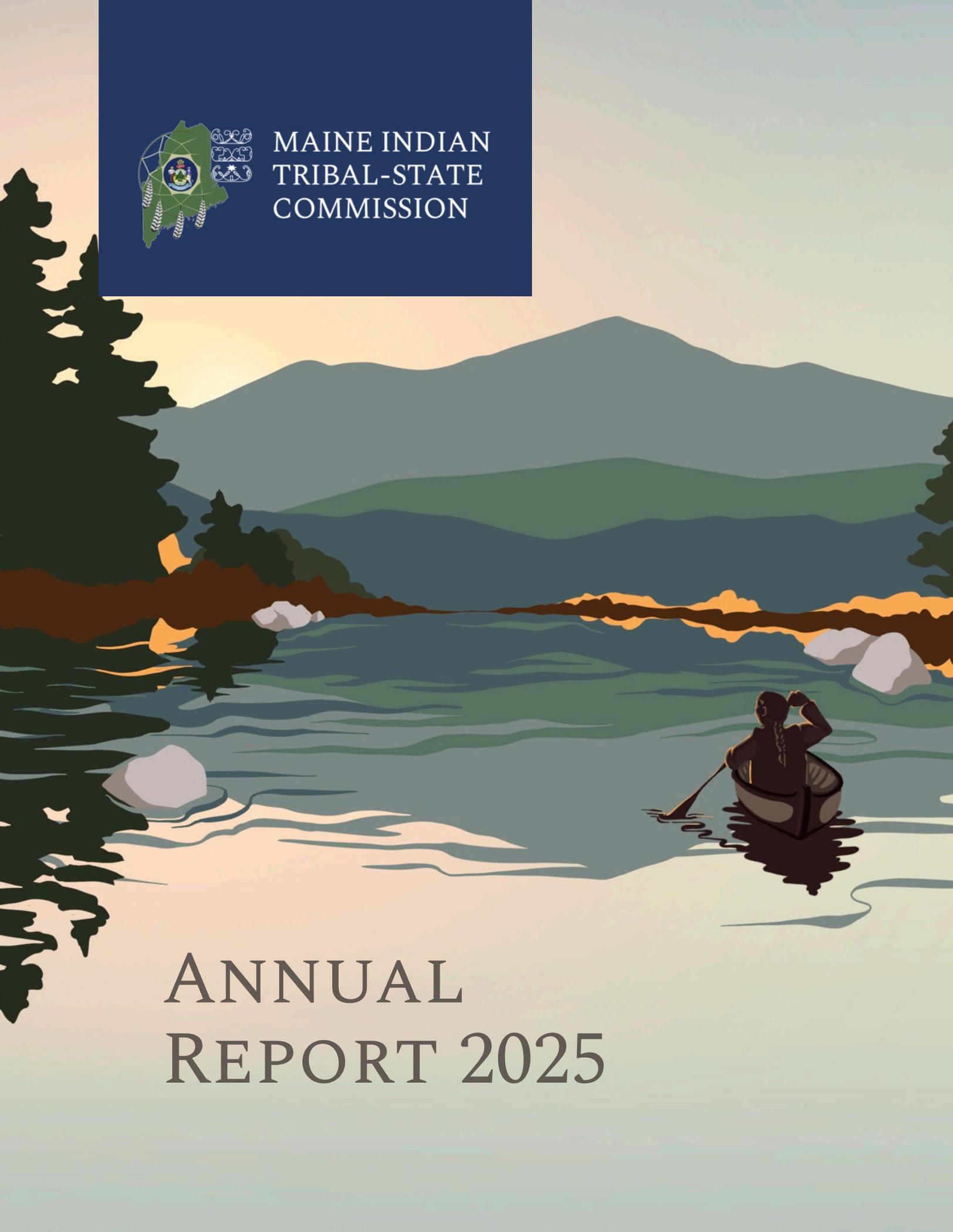




MAINE INDIAN
TRIBAL-STATE
COMMISSION



ANNUAL
REPORT 2025



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Executive Director's Message

2025 marks the 45th year of service for the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission (MITSC) as the intergovernmental body charged with continually reviewing the effectiveness of the Act to Implement the Maine Indian Settlement Act of 1980 ("Implementing Act"). The Commission also monitors the evolving social, economic, and legal relationships between the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (Wolastoq), the Passamaquoddy Tribe (Peskotomuhkati), the Penobscot Nation (Penawahpskesek), and the State of Maine. An updated Mission Statement, clearly defined Focus Areas, and a detailed Work Plan shaped the MITSC's initiatives throughout the year. On behalf of the Commission and staff, I am pleased to share the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission's Annual Report as required by its Bylaws, Article III(E). The accomplishments outlined in this report reflect the Commission's renewed motivation and growing sense of purpose.

The years 2024-2025 were a period of meaningful transitions. Sandra (Sandy) Yamal, Commissioner from the Passamaquoddy Tribe's Sipayik community, completed her term and was succeeded by former Tribal Chief and State Representative Rena Newell, who brings deep insight and experience to the role. Long-serving State Commissioner Richard Rosen concluded his term, and MITSC welcomed Governor Mills' appointee, Gordon (Nels) Kramer, a Fisheries Biologist, who retired from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, after 36 years managing inland fish populations in the Penobscot Region. He joins fellow State Commissioner Robert (Bob) Checkoway who was reappointed by Governor Janet Mills to a third term. Additionally, Managing Director Paul Thibeault retired after five years of dedicated leadership. Paul played a key role on the Maine Tribal-State Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and was instrumental in advancing the 2022 Tribal-State Collaboration Act.

MITSC is deeply grateful for the unprecedented level of encouragement received from the Maine public and private funders in 2024-2025. This support has significantly advanced the Commission's educational mission. MITSC has created a comprehensive online library of legal, historical, and culturally informative materials on the Settlement Act that helps the Commission meet its responsibilities and serves the needs of stakeholders and the public. New private grant funding enabled MITSC to promote the findings and recommendations of the SEA RUN study report. We are

excited about the launch of the SEA RUN audiobook, narrated by four Wabanaki tribal members and featuring beautiful Wabanaki singing. Our work continues to develop a Wabanaki Cultural Competency Curriculum for training Maine state workers and other individuals.

We are proud to share the year's significant progress and illuminate the promising path to improved state-tribal relations that lies ahead.

Moving forward together,

Jill E. Tompkins

Executive Director

Penobscot Nation Citizen





“[A]ny legislative solution to this [land] claim . . . should be directed to a workable resolution which is fair and just for all parties involved. For the Congress to attempt anything short of this would be less than responsible. The test of a good legislative solution is fairness and equity to both Indian citizens of Maine, and non-Indians citizens of Maine and non-Indian citizens throughout the United States.”

Hearings Before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs on S. 2829
to Provide for the Settlement of the Maine Indian Land Claims, 96th Cong, 1-2 (1980)
(statement of Sen. John Melcher, Chair, Senate Select Comm. on Indian Affairs).



Katahdin

Advancing MITSC's Mission



HISTORY

In the 1970s, the Passamaquoddy Tribe and the Penobscot Nation filed claims to nearly two-thirds of Maine, or almost 2,000 square miles. The claims were based on the Nonintercourse Act of 1790, which required Congress to approve any transfer of land from Indians to non-Indians. The tribes alleged that the states of Massachusetts and Maine acquired their lands without Congress' approval, violating the Nonintercourse Act. The U.S. District Court for the District of Maine found the claims viable.

In 1980, an agreement was reached between the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, and the State of Maine to settle the claims. The resulting negotiations led to the enactment of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (Settlement Act), which President Jimmy Carter signed on October 11, 1980. It consists of two statutes, one enacted by Congress and the other promulgated by the Maine Legislature. The federal act settled the claims and awarded the tribes money as reparations for the

land illegally taken from them. In 1986, the federal Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians Supplementary Claims Settlement Act was enacted. The Aroostook Band of Micmacs (Mi'kmaq Nation) Settlement Act was passed in 1991. The Settlement affirmed the sovereignty of the tribal nations but left in place much of the authority that the State had taken onto itself to regulate the tribes. Given this new division of power and authority, there was concern that future disputes could arise. According to one of the Settlement negotiators, the original vision for the Commission was to provide an institutionalized forum for ongoing discussions of the tribal-state relationship. It was anticipated that the commission might serve as an official body to explore possible future changes to the agreement. The commission was not given power to force future amendments but could provide a setting for ongoing dialogue.¹ However, the actual statutory language of 30 MRSA § 6212 is much more circumscribed than was initially contemplated.

¹ Patterson, John M.R., "The Maine Indian Land Claim Settlement: A Personal Recollection," *Maine History*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Article 5, 194 (June 1, 2012).

MISSION

We work to secure a future where all value Wabanaki self-determination, Wabanaki cultures are preserved and lands protected, and the mutual well-being of tribal and non-tribal communities is promoted through education and relationship building.



Statutory Duties



The Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission's original statutory duties include:

- To continually review and make reports concerning the effectiveness of the Implementing Act, and the social, economic, and legal relationship between the tribes and the State of Maine.
- To recommend approval of lands to be included in the Passamaquoddy Tribe or the Penobscot Nation's territory.
- To designate, subject to approval by the State of Maine Legislature, extended reservations.
- To enact fishing rules on certain ponds, rivers, and streams within or bordering Indian Territory.
- To make reports about fish and wildlife policies on non-Indian lands to protect Passamaquoddy and Penobscot fisheries and wildlife.

More recently, MITSC has been tasked with reviewing and commenting on proposed competitive solicitations for the development and construction of offshore wind power projects in the Gulf of Maine. Additionally, the Commission monitors state agency compliance with the Tribal-State Collaboration Act and is a repository for the agencies' biennial reports.

Despite not being explicitly tasked with mediating tribal-state disputes, throughout its 45-year history, MITSC "has served as a fulcrum for trying to balance the inconsistencies of a political solution to possibly the most far-reaching crisis in the history of the State of Maine."² With MITSC's involvement, relations between tribes and non-tribal entities saw improvements in 2024-2025.

² Rolde, Neil. (2004). *Unsettled Past, Unsettled Future – The Story of Maine Indians*, p. 318.

Focus Areas



MITSC's projects come within one of five Priority Focus Areas.

IMPROVING THE SETTLEMENT ACT'S EFFECTIVENESS AND TRIBAL-STATE RELATIONS

MITSC issues research reports and participates in Tribal-State Task Force efforts to reach mutually beneficial solutions to Settlement Act-related conflicts. The Commission tracks the implementation of the Maine Tribal-State Collaboration Act by reviewing agency agreements and reports. MITSC has begun planning a Wabanaki-focused cultural competency training designed to enhance tribal-state working relationships.



EDUCATION & OUTREACH

The Commission has created and maintains a comprehensive online library of resources about the Settlement Act. MITSC produces "Tributaries," a narrative journalism series about the Wabanaki peoples, their history, and their present-day concerns. The Commission monitors and advocates for the implementation and funding of the Wabanaki Studies Law of 2001. The "Wabanaki Cultural Competency Training" is being developed by the Commission and will have its inaugural session in the fall of 2026.



NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

The Commission develops fishing rules for Indian territory boundary waters that balance fisheries conservation needs and tribal sustenance rights. MITSC published “SEA RUN,” a report outlining the detrimental impact of historical Maine policies on tribal fisheries and offering remedial solutions. MITSC tracks environmental conditions potentially harmful to Wabanaki lands and populations and explores preventive and remedial measures.



SUSTAINING CULTURES

The Commission promotes Wabanaki inclusion in State land decision-making. MITSC provides opportunities for Wabanaki culture and language to be preserved and shared. The Commission monitors the repatriation of Wabanaki lands, remains, funerary objects, and cultural heritage items.



ECONOMIC & REVENUE DEVELOPMENT

MITSC collects and analyzes data on Wabanaki successes and barriers in economic development. The Commission tracks the implementation of Wabanaki-owned sports betting and provides recommendations for operational improvement. The first-ever survey of Wabanaki economic enterprises is being conducted by MITSC and will publish a report of its findings.



Commission Composition



BOB CHECKOWAY



ZEKE CROFTON-MACDONALD



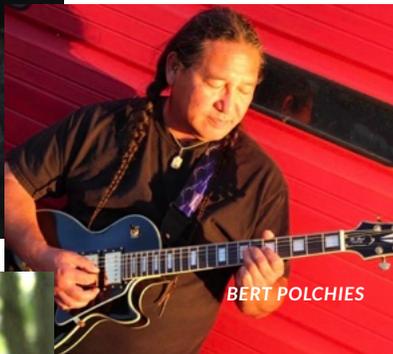
NELS KRAMER



NEWELL LEWEY



DARREN RANCO



BERT POLCHIES



JOEY BARNES



RENA NEWELL



SAM ST. JOHN

The Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission consists of 13 members. Six members are appointed by the Governor of the State of Maine, subject to review by the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary and confirmation by the Maine Senate. The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians appoints two members, the Passamaquoddy Tribe appoints two, and two are appointed by the Penobscot Nation. The Commissioners serve three-year terms. Public Law 370, "An Act Regarding the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission," establishes staggered terms for the Commissioners appointed by the Governor. The 13th member, the Commission's Chair, is selected by a majority vote of the Commissioners and serves a four-year term.

Nine members constitute a Committee quorum, and seven members must vote in favor of a decision for it to be valid. At this time, there are four vacancies in the Commission seats to be filled by the Governor's appointment. The following Commissioners served during 2024-2025:

- Joseph (Joey) Barnes
PASSAMAQUODDY AT MOTAHKOMIKUK
- Robert (Bob) Checkoway
STATE OF MAINE
- Oshikiyol (Zeke) Crofton-Macdonald
HOULTON BAND OF MALISEET INDIANS
- Gordon (Nels) Kramer *STATE OF MAINE*
- Rena Newell *PASSAMAQUODDY AT SIPAYIK*
- Robert (Bert) Polchies *PENOBSCOT*
- Darren Ranco *PENOBSCOT*
- Samuel (Sam) St. John
HOULTON BAND OF MALISEET INDIANS
- Newell Lewey
*A PASSAMAQUODDY TRIBAL CITIZEN,
SERVES AS MITSC CHAIR*



MEETINGS

MITSC endeavors to make its meetings accessible to as many individuals as possible. In-person sessions are held on or near a Wabanaki reservation. MITSC livestreams every meeting, and recordings are available on YouTube. Minutes of the meetings are found on MITSC’s website at www.mitsc.org. Meetings were held in 2024-2025 at the following locations:

JANUARY 12, 2024	Randall Student Center, University of Maine at Augusta
MARCH 15, 2024	Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians Community Center, Houlton
MAY 10, 2024	Wabanaki Cultural Center, Calais
JULY 10, 2024	University of Maine at Presque Isle
SEPTEMBER 13, 2024	Cobscook Institute, Trescott Township
NOVEMBER 8, 2024	Penobscot Nation Nicholas Sapiel Jr. Building, Indian Island
JANUARY 10, 2025	Passamaquoddy Tribal Offices, Motahkomikuk
APRIL 18, 2025	Randall Student Center, University of Maine at Augusta
JUNE 6, 2025	Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians Community Center, Houlton
JULY 18, 2025	Mi’kmaq Nation Tribal Offices, Presque Isle
NOVEMBER 14, 2025	Passamaquoddy Tribal Administration Building, Sipayik

MEETINGS DURING 2026 WILL BE HELD AS FOLLOWS:

JANUARY 9, 2026	Colby College, Waterville
APRIL 10, 2026	Penobscot Nation Nick Sapiel Jr. Building, Indian Island
JULY 10, 2026	Passamaquoddy Tribal Offices, Motahkomikuk
OCTOBER 9, 2026	Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians Community Center, Houlton



“In the next five years, MITSC can deepen its impact by creating more spaces for Wabanaki voices—especially youth and culture bearers—to be heard and supported. There is also a need to continue fostering public education rooted in Wabanaki truth, not just policy. As we move forward, MITSC must continue to serve as both a watchdog and a bridge: holding the State accountable, while also offering pathways forward that are grounded in mutual respect, truth, and our spiritual responsibilities to future generations.”

- Commissioner Robert Polchies

STAFF & CONSULTANTS

MITSC has two full-time staff members: Jill Tompkins, Esq, a Penobscot Nation citizen, is the Executive Director, and Rachel Bell is the Projects Coordinator. Thanks to a Columbia University Fellowship, Teresa Singh, an attorney licensed to practice in Australia and a recent recipient of an LLM degree, conducted legal research and writing for MITSC over 23 weeks. Her work focused on the SEA RUN implementation projects detailed later in this report.

The Commission is assisted by several talented consultants: Rafi Hopkins, President and Creative Director of Section Sign LLC., experienced attorney and legal researcher Judson (Judd) Esty-Kendall,

Esq, Passamaquoddy tribal citizen, Dr. Anthony (Tony) Sutton, PhD, an Assistant Professor of Native American Studies and Food Systems at the University of Maine and Faculty Fellow at the Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions, and Patricia (Pat) Maller, MITSC Office Manager and Bookkeeper. Paul Thibeault, Esq., former MITSC Managing Director, assisted with improvements to the Commission’s online library. Former Executive Director of MITSC and the Wabanaki Alliance, John Dieffenbacher-Krall assisted in developing a Commission communications strategy and successfully promoted the launch of the SEA RUN audiobook.

Annual Budget

The Commission's revenue and expenses during Fiscal Year 2025 were:

REVENUE

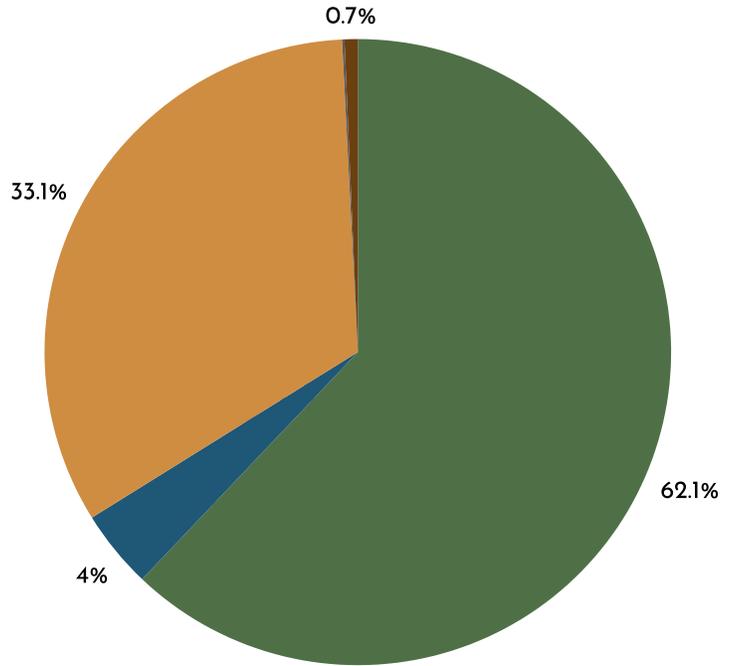
STATE GENERAL FUND	\$268,500
TRIBAL CONTRIBUTIONS	
Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians	\$5,000
Passamaquoddy Tribe (Motahkomikuk)	\$5,000
Passamaquoddy Tribe (Sipayik)	\$2,500
Penobscot Nation	\$5,000
GRANTS	
Anonymous Grantor (2-year grant)	
Project: Wabanaki Cultural Competency Training Development	\$43,000
Common Counsel Foundation	
Native Voices Rising 2024 (3-year grant)	
Project: Wabanaki Food Sovereignty Through Sustenance Fishing Restoration	\$25,000
Elmina B. Sewall Foundation (1-year grant)	
Project: MITSC Outreach Enhancement Project	\$30,000
Maine Initiatives Grants for Change (3-year grant, \$15,000 per year)	
Improving Effectiveness in Racial Justice Advancement	\$45,000
INTEREST	\$533
DONATIONS (SEA RUN CONTRIBUTIONS)	\$2,937
TOTAL REVENUE	\$432,470

EXPENSES

SALARIES	\$159,042
FISCAL SPONSORSHIP	
Cobscook Institute (5% of each grant)	\$7,150
CONSULTANTS	\$45,602
COMMISSIONER PER DIEM FEES & EXPENSES	\$10,071
OPERATING EXPENSES	\$26,002
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$247,867

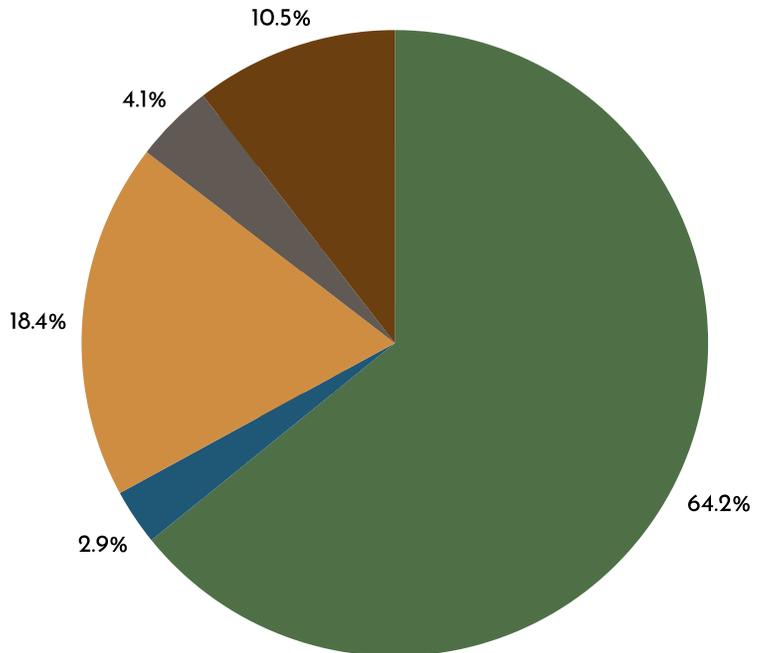
Revenue

- State Funds
- Tribal Funds
- Grants
- Interest
- Donations



Expenses

- Salaries
- Fiscal Sponsorship
- Consultants
- Per Diem Fees & Expenses
- Operating Expenses



II.

Regulatory Activities

FISHING RULES UPDATE

Under the Implementing Act, MITSC is responsible for creating fishing rules for certain inland waters located within or bordering Indian territory of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. Several meetings have been held between the State's and the tribal nations' fisheries biologists to discuss the rule updates. There have been significant developments since the rules were enacted in 1998, including the extension of MITSC authority to rivers, streams and larger ponds located in Houlton Band Jurisdiction Land. The Passamaquoddy Tribe and the Penobscot Nation have acquired additional trust lands with waters that fall under MITSC jurisdiction that were not included in the original rules. The tribes and the State IF&W department have cooperated in exchanging data to update the fishing maps.

Newly added waters are subject to the fishing laws and regulations of the State until MITSC certifies to the State Commissioner of IF&W that the commission has met and voted to adopt its own rules. In issuing its amended rules, MITSC must comply with the Maine Administrative Procedures Act. Lands or waters subject to MITSC regulation must be conspicuously posted to give the public notice of the limitations. Although the Commission could require separate licenses to fish MITSC waters, the working group recommended that any valid license issued by a tribe or the State be given full faith and credit and no additional license will be required.

It is anticipated that MITSC will complete the public hearing and approval process and that the revised rules will become effective in 2026.





MITSC-REGULATED WATERS GENERALLY INCLUDE:

- Any pond more than 10 acres in surface area where 50% or more of the shoreline is within Indian territory,
- Any section of a river or stream both sides of which are in Indian territory, and
- Any section of a river or stream on one side of which is within Indian territory for a continuous length of ½ mile or more.



PHOTO: JOE DANA

The tribal nations retain the exclusive authority to enact ordinances regulating the taking of fish on any pond in which all the shoreline and all submerged lands are wholly within tribal jurisdiction and that is less than 10 acres in surface area.

A working group comprised of Commissioners Bob Checkoway, Nels Kramer, and Sam St. John, and Jill Tompkins and Rachel Bell is drafting the amendments to the rules which have not been changed since 1998.. In promulgating the rules, MITSC is required by 30 MRSA § 6207(3) and §6207-B(3) to “consider and balance the need to preserve and protect existing and future sport and commercial fisheries, the historical non-Indian fishing interests” and the tribes’ desire to establish fishing practices for sustenance or economic independence. Traditional tribal fishing techniques and ceremonial practices must also be considered by the Commission. The ecological interrelationship between the fishery regulated by MITSC and other fisheries throughout the State must be examined as well.

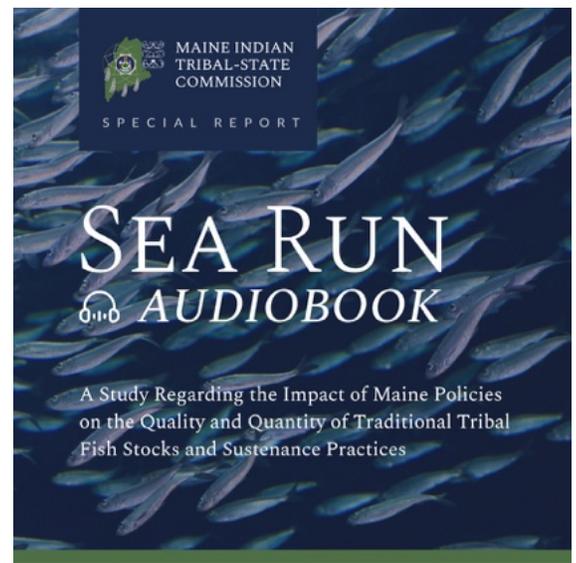
III.

Restoration of Tribal Sustenance Fisheries



SEA RUN PICKS UP SPEED

In June 2022, MITSC published a report co-authored by Professor Anthony (Tony) Sutton and attorney Judson (Judd) Esty-Kendall entitled “SEA RUN - A Study Regarding the Impact of Maine Policies on the Quality and Quantity of Traditional Tribal Fish Stocks and Sustenance Practices.” The beautifully illustrated report features quotes from Wabanaki tribal members about their memories of and concerns for Maine’s sea-run fish populations. To make Sea Run accessible to the visually impaired, MITSC created an audiobook version featuring Wabanaki voices narrating the story.



The audiobook endeavor was part of the MITSC Outreach Enhancement Project, which was generously funded by a \$30,000 grant from the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation. Four Wabanaki tribal citizens served as narrators—Dawn Neptune Adams (Penobscot Nation), Dale Lolar (Penobscot Nation), Dwayne Tomah (Passamaquoddy Tribe), and Sue Desiderio (Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians). The sixteen-hour recording was created by Post-Hypnotic Press, who also produced the audiobook, *THE GATHERINGS*. The audiobook was released on Indigenous Peoples’ Day, in front of a crowd of more than 80 people at the Veazie Salmon Club—the site of the former Veazie Dam and famous historic salmon pools. Former MITSC Executive Director John Dieffenbacher-Krall assisted the Commission with media publicity and event planning. A free copy of the audiobook and the media coverage of the launch are posted on MITSC’s website at <https://www.mitsc.org>. Copies of the printed version of SEA RUN are also available for free.



IMPLEMENTATION OF *SEA RUN* RECOMMENDATIONS

The *SEA RUN* report offered five recommendations for implementation intended to promote discussion and cooperative action. MITSC competed for and was awarded a three-year, \$25,000 grant from Native Voices Rising of the Common Counsel Foundation, which enables the Commission to begin implementing three recommendations. The grant-funded project, “Wabanaki Food Sovereignty through Sustenance Fishing Rights Restoration,” highlights the differing cultural understandings of the term “sustenance” and will demonstrate that the State of Maine’s current narrow definition is contributing to Wabanaki peoples’ food insecurity and cultural harms. MITSC is addressing the situation through (1) education of the citizenry, starting in elementary school, about how Colonial and subsequent state policies deliberately separated the Wabanaki from the fisheries, (2) conducting formal research in historical Wabanaki understandings of the concept of sustenance as communal in nature and identifying other non-Wabanaki tribal definitions of sustenance, (3) working with Wabanaki citizens to identify a term to supplant “sustenance” that more accurately captures the concept of community benefit, as opposed to being focused on individual needs, (4) investigating precedents elsewhere in the United States where replacement of fish from toxic traditional fisheries or access granted to clean water bodies for the exercise of displaced tribal sustenance fishing rights occurred, and (5) issuing a report on the elements necessary for successful tribal-municipality collaboration on dam remediation and co-management of fisheries and drafting a model ordinance establishing such a collaboration. MITSC fellow Teresa Singh drafted two legal memos reporting her research findings that can be found on MITSC’s website here: <https://www.mitsc.org/library>.

Improving Tribal-State Relations



EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

It is virtually impossible to engage in productive dialogue if the parties are not working from the same knowledge base. Given the federal government’s failure to honor its trust responsibilities to the Wabanaki nations, the State of Maine has, for over 160 years, exercised almost complete dominion over the tribes. Therefore, it is a key goal of MITSC to improve public understanding of Wabanaki nations’ history and sovereignty, the principles of federal Indian law that ground the Maine Settlement and Implementing Act, and the components of the Settlement Acts themselves.

Despite the passage of the 2001 Wabanaki Studies Law, very few schools offer any education on the Wabanaki tribal nations and their history. MITSC provided testimony in support of LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies,” which was approved by Governor Mills on March 14, 2024. MITSC hosted an information table at the Common Ground Country Fair on September 19-21, 2025. To spark conversation, MITSC hosted a simple quiz visitors could take to test their Wabanaki knowledge. Forty-six people took the quiz, but only seven answered all the questions correctly.

During 2025, MITSC redoubled its efforts to conduct outreach and raise public awareness of the Wabanaki nations, their sovereign status, and their governmental



authority. Guidelines for MITSC’s online library were adopted and its holdings were substantially increased. Former MITSC Executive Director Paul Thibeault assisted with developing the library collection and writing plain-language summaries of some of the most significant court opinions. Rafi Hopkins and Rachel Bell reorganized and streamlined the entire website to improve visual appeal and user experience. The library now has a wealth of new multimedia resources, is easily navigable, and, through the inclusion of Wabanaki terms and pronunciations, is more culturally reflective.

In addition to the audiobook production, MITSC provided public information on SEA RUN’s findings and recommendations through appearances of co-

authors Dr. Tony Sutton and Judd Esty-Kendall at events at Bagaduce and the Common Ground Fair. For the first time, MITSC participated in the Walking the Working Waterfront event on May 31, 2025, by hosting an informational table at the Gulf of Maine Marine Research Institute, in Portland, Maine. The Commission is pursuing additional opportunities to share the study in 2026.

INCREASING COLLABORATION & CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The Tribal-State Collaboration Act, 5 MRSA § 11051, enacted on May 22, 2022, requires each of 16 State of Maine departments to adopt a policy that promotes positive government-to-government relations between the State and the federally recognized Indian tribes within the State, promotes cultural competency in the agencies’ interactions with Indian tribes and tribal members and establishes a process for collaboration between the agencies and Indian tribes regarding the agency’s programs, rules and services that substantially and uniquely affect the Indian tribes or tribal members. Each agency is required to designate a liaison to assist in developing and ensuring implementation of the collaboration policy and to serve as a contact person to facilitate effective communication between the agency and the tribal nations. Each designated agency is required to file a biannual report with the Legislature and MITSC on the activities it engaged in under the Act. Copies of the collaboration reports may be found at www.mitsc.org. The tribal nations may also file a biannual report that includes a summary of their collaboration with the agencies and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Act.



“My motivation for wanting to participate on the Commission is to be involved with the review and revision of the fishing regulations of MITSC waters. [MITSC’s most successful accomplishment in its 45 years is] bringing tribal and non-tribal members together to work for the betterment of the relationship between the parties.”

–Commissioner Nels Kramer

Under the Act, agency employees whose work substantially and uniquely affects tribal nations or their citizens are required to receive training that encourages communication and collaboration, positive government-to-government relations, and “cultural competency in tribal issues.” Unfortunately, there was no agency or entity designated to provide the required training, nor was funding provided for its development and delivery. As an intergovernmental entity comprised of tribal and state representatives having worked to improve tribal-state relations for over four decades, MITSC realized that it was uniquely situated to develop the training. MITSC applied for funding to create the “Wabanaki Cultural Competency Training” and was awarded a \$45,000 grant over three years (\$15,000 per year) by the Maine Initiatives 2024 Grants for Change Fund.

The Commission’s staff is assisted in the curriculum development by Wabanaki individuals who have experience in conducting cultural competency training. The curriculum will be reviewed by Wabanaki citizens knowledgeable in their culture and traditional ways to ensure authenticity. Each agency liaison is responsible for coordinating the training of agency employees.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

As part of its role in advising the State of Maine Legislature, it becomes necessary from time to time to become involved in the State’s legislative process. The Commission provides oral and written testimony during the public hearings. MITSC will participate in certain circumstances such as when a bill: mentions the Commission or may impact its statutory authority or responsibilities, involves subject matters within MITSC’s authority, work plan, or expertise, may affect all Wabanaki tribal nations residing in the State of Maine, has been identified as a priority by tribal leadership and a request to testify has been made by the Governor of the State of Maine, a leader of the Maine Legislature, or the highest elected tribal leader.

Overall, I think MITSC’s most significant accomplishment is the current ongoing work toward [recognizing] tribal sovereignty. Being a liaison between the State and the Tribes I believe has streamlined some bureaucratic processes that wouldn’t have been possible without the Commission.

- Commissioner Sam St. John

During the 131st Maine Legislature, MITSC monitored 16 different bills of interest to the Wabanaki nations. Of those, only three heavily amended bills were passed. MITSC submitted testimony supporting LD 1349, “An Act to Review State Lands and Waterways That Have Sacred, Traditional or other Significance to Wabanaki People,” LD 1642, “An Act to Strengthen the





Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools,” LD 1834, “An Act to Establish the Office of Tribal-State Affairs,” and LD 1835, “An Act to Require the State to Notify Tribal Governments When New Laws Are Enacted That Need to be Certified by Tribal Governments.” MITSC tracked 24 bills during the 132nd Legislature. Testimony was prepared in support of LD 395, “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations,” LD 785, “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act,” and LD 1474, “An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.”

At MITSC’s request, State Representative Laurie Osher (Orono) sponsored LD 999, “An Act to Include Employees of the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission in the State’s Group Health Plan and to Clarify Future Eligibility for the State’s Group Health Plan.” The bill was necessary because of language in 30 MRSA §6212(4) that authorizes MITSC to employ personnel but states, “These employees are not subject to state personnel laws or rules.” Consistent with its independent intergovernmental nature, MITSC’s employees were deemed not eligible to participate in the State of Maine’s employee group health plan. The cost of the State’s health coverage is at least 30% lower than that of private insurance. MITSC applied for and received an unrestricted general operating grant from the 2024 Grants for Change, which enabled it to cover the significant cost of private medical and dental coverage for MITSC staff for two years. LD 999, which added MITSC to the list of entities whose employees are eligible for the group health plan, was enacted on June 12, 2025. MITSC staff will be able to enroll in the State Group Health Plan in 2026 at a significant savings to the Commission.

In Gratitude



2025 was a record-setting year for fundraising, thanks to the generosity and encouragement of our supporters. MITSC is deeply grateful to everyone who made our progress possible.

Funders

Anonymous
Common Counsel Foundation –
Native Voices Rising
Elmina B. Sewall Foundation
Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians
Maine Initiatives Grants for Change
Mi'kmaq Nation
Passamaquoddy Tribe
Penobscot Nation
State of Maine

Donors

Anonymous
Mi'kmaq Nation
Town of Veazie
Veazie Salmon Club

Partners

Cobscook Institute (Fiscal Sponsor)
Maine Department of Inland Fish & Wildlife
Maine State Archives
University of Maine Folger Library
Wabanaki Tribal Fisheries Staff

Volunteers

Darel Bridges
Kathleen (Katie) Donlan
George Friedlander
SEA RUN Audiobook Launch Volunteers

Consultants

John Dieffenbacher-Krall
Judson (Judd) Esty-Kendall, Esq.
Rafi Hopkins, Section Sign LLC
Patricia (Pat) Mallar
Alison Brynn Ross
Anthony (Tony) Sutton, Ph.D.
Paul Thibeault, Esq.

SEA RUN Audiobook Production & Launch

Chief Kirk Francis
Commissioner Robert Polchies
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