

ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS

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President Bush will mark Earth Day in Maine, a state known to many visitors for its picturesque landscape and relatively unspoiled environment, by touting the partnerships that have preserved land across the state. Today, the president will visit the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve at Laudholm Farm, a unique combination of a working farm owned by a private trust with a federally owned reserve. Because it is also Volunteer Week, the president will praise those who give of their time to work on conservation projects in Maine and beyond.

If the president really wants to foster partnerships that will benefit the Maine environment, he could start by getting the Environmental Protection Agency to work with states to crack down on highly polluting coal-fired power plants in the Midwest and South. Instead, Maine and other states have had to sue the agency to enforce its rules. These plants, grandfathered under the Clean Air Act because it was assumed they would be shut down by now, continue to spew huge amounts of mercury, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and other pollutants that are carried to Maine by the prevailing winds.

Just last week, the EPA added portions of four more Maine coastal counties to a national list of counties that fail to meet ozone requirements. These counties are home to no large cities or manufacturing facilities, so it is clear that the pollution isn't coming from thousands of cars stuck in rush-hour traffic or from tall smokestacks at local power plants or factories. In fact, as much as 80 percent of the dirty air in Maine comes from outside our borders.

If the Bush administration were Maine's partner, it would compel power

plants to reduce mercury emissions so that fish caught in the state's lakes and rivers could safely be consumed. It would require power plants to install pollution control technology to reduce the amount of nitrogen oxides that fall on Maine as acid rain. The same technologies would reduce the amount of particulate matter that blocks the views from Acadia National Park and sends thousands of Maine residents to hospital emergency rooms each summer due to asthma and other breathing difficulties.

The president is right to praise successful partnerships. Coastal America, a group that brings together numerous federal agencies, has engineered successful projects such as dam removals and fish passage installations across the state and nation. A coalition working to remove and upgrade dams on the Penobscot River includes conservation groups, federal and state agencies and tribal representatives. This group was initially invited to meet with the president, but later told their presentation was canceled. Probably because they want money from the federal government to help cover the estimated \$50 million cost of the ambitious project that would open hundreds of miles of fish habitat.

The Bush administration has also increased funding for conservation projects, money used by the state and conservation groups to preserve land in the Down East lakes region and the Katahdin Forest, for example. Still, this funding falls significantly short of congressional expectations for the conservation trust fund.

Bettering the environment takes strong laws, money and hard work. Volunteers can provide much of the latter, but they need the federal government to come through with the other two.