

Dear Readers,

Maine is among the most rural states in the United States. An important part of Maine's history and reputation is tied to that rurality: the bounty from its many farms and abundant forests, the unique character and productivity of its rugged fishing communities, and the benefits that come from growing up in small towns. These elements of our rural nature have long been a source of Maine's strength and resilience.

But times are changing. Rural Maine is facing new challenges: young people are moving away when they finish high school because of the absence of jobs and other opportunities, rural healthcare is becoming increasingly limited, municipalities are grappling with complex climate challenges amidst increasingly scarce resources, and internet connections remain limited when connectivity is increasingly important for jobs and linkage to the broader world.

These challenges not only draw upon Maine's strength and test its resilience, they also push us to make hard choices about who we are and who we want to be in a changing world. How can we work together to ensure that Maine's rural regions have opportunities to grow and change while stewarding our precious resources and retaining our essential *Maine-ness*? How can we help others come to know the particular promise and perils of this special place so that young Mainers stay and others come to make rural Maine the next home for their family?

This *MPR* special issue brings together analyses and commentaries about how people in rural Maine are attempting to meet these challenges and about the steps various organizations are taking to support rural Mainers to imagine and pursue a new, different, and prosperous future that is still, somehow, recognizably Maine. A host of committed and innovative leaders offer stories and insights about topics including Maine's farms and farmers, climate change actions, demographic challenges, economic development, healthcare, K-12 education, transportation, outdoor recreation, volunteerism and community engagement, and more.

Threads of strength, creativity, and hope are woven throughout these stories of challenge and change, reflecting the particular grit and adaptiveness of Maine itself. As editors, we thank all the authors for their work in developing this issue that, we hope, will serve as a source of information and inspiration for people in Maine and other rural places struggling with similar issues.

—*The Editors*