

# AS MAINE GOES

*Photographs & text by John McKee*

*Introduction by William O. Douglas*

*FROM AN EXHIBITION AT THE BOWDOIN COLLEGE  
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**A**S MAINE GOES is photographic evidence of the way in which we are despoiling the earth. Its pictures are Maine photographs but they represent conditions in Virginia, California, my own state of Washington, and every other state of the Union. Man has predatory proclivities that have caused him from the beginning of time to wreak havoc on the forests and the topsoil. Modern science has supplied almost endless poisons for killing all planetary life. Modern technology has given us bulldozers that can ruin a trout stream overnight, industrial wastes that pollute our rivers and lakes, cast-off cans, tires, and autos that produce scars on almost every countryside, and smog that makes some cities almost uninhabitable.

Man made China bald through centuries of misuse of water and land. Man with a goat economy and a charcoal-burning economy has made much of the Middle East a wasteland. Persia has been gnawed and chewed by goats that girdle saplings, preventing new forests from arising, and its few remaining magnificent chestnut forests are being reduced to charcoal today. Under the Ottoman Empire the Israeli coast lost at least three feet of alluvial soils. The Sahara Desert continues to advance one mile a year. We are not in as desperate a condition as these older nations, partly because we have not occupied this continent as long as they have occupied their lands, and partly because we have some guardians, such as the U.S. Forest Service, to restrain some of our predatory practices.

But the modern tools of destruction are so deadly and the debris of modern technology so great that new standards are needed that control the relation and attitude of man toward the land, the air, the waters, and the life of this earth. The Zoroastrian religion made *Conservation* one of its Ten Commandments. We need new standards of citizenship defining man's relation to *Outdoors*. New laws are necessary, but education starting with the kindergarten is even more important. Symbols of destruction have dominated us too long.

WILLIAM O. DOUGLAS



*Along U.S. 1, Searsport*

The invitation is an empty one . . .





*Strip commercialism along U.S. 1, Ellsworth*

. . . for the coast is fast being stripped of all that made it unique. Scarcely a mile of it is protected from exploitation. Billboard, drive-in, billboard, gifts, moccasins, motel, billboard—and each billboard, every splashy motel is followed by bigger billboards and splashier motels in a desperate promotional free-for-all. Thus the coast is obliterated.



*The Baptist Church, Boothbay*





*View of the harbor, Boothbay Harbor*

Everywhere commerce reaches for the tourist's dollar,  
proposing an overbearing luxury . . .





*Tourist accommodations, Old Orchard Beach*

. . . or the cheap.





*Along route 90, Rockport*



*Borrow pit along U.S. 1, Sandy Point*



The developer and the highway builder can pre-empt land according to their convenience and leave it, when they are done, a wasteland.

All along the highways the refuse of civilization accumulates: more comforts, more junk. It costs Maine taxpayers half a million dollars yearly to remove litter from highways and public recreation areas, and still there is always more of it. Despite every effort, litter and junk have become a part of the everyday landscape.



Every major river in Maine reaches the coast laden with industrial wastes and the sewage of towns upstream. The Saco, the Presumpscot, the Androscoggin, the Kennebec, the Penobscot, the St. Croix—all the great rivers are now but scummy sewers. No more commercial fisheries, none of the industries requiring clean water, no sport fishing nor other recreational development: this needless contamination deprives us of much.



*Chemical scum, Androscoggin River*



Sewage from homes and cities alike is flushed, raw, into the ocean—an ocean unfit for food production. 70,000 acres of clam flats closed in 1965, and the number increasing yearly. The loss to the Maine clam industry alone amounted to one and a quarter million dollars in 1965.



There are still some untouched stretches of coast. They are fast disappearing, measured by the foot and brought to a ready market; surveyed, sold, built up, and everywhere the land-speculator's boundary-post is as final as a gravestone.

*Georgetown*



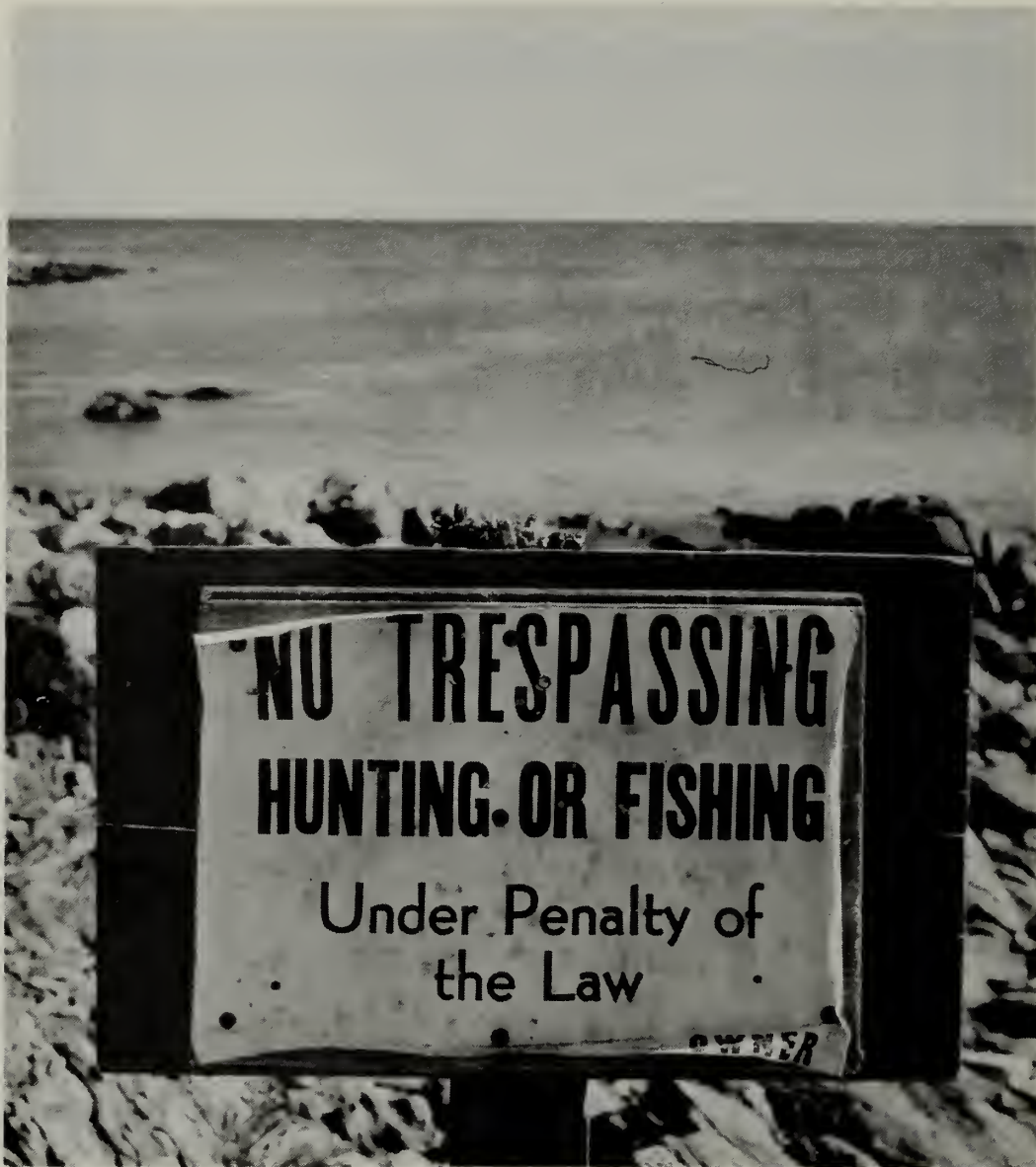
*Good shore is scarce, becoming more so as more and more people discover America's last coastal frontier. So writes one promoter, urging us to buy up a hundred feet of what remains. And to the towns, today's tax payments speak louder than the incalculable benefits, economic and other, to be derived from the preservation—intact—of some of America's last coastal frontier.*





*Ripley Neck*





*Curtis Cove*

Maine's non-urban coastline is 2,612 miles in length. Of this, all but 34 miles is private property. Camps, cottages, houses, estates—and everywhere a NO TRESPASSING sign. There won't be enough coast for everyone. We must find a way to protect significant portions of it to serve the recreational, educational, spiritual needs of a growing population, but the PRIVATE signs proliferate even as we wait.



*Linekin Neck*



It is clear to whoever looks at the coast that *to develop* has become synonymous with *to destroy*. For many persons now, and probably for an even greater number in the future, the value of the coast will lie in its wild promontories and its unpolluted coves, if there are any left. Even measured in dollars of property value and revenue, an unspoiled stretch of coast will no doubt prove more valuable than a sprawl of cottages and gift shops; for as greater numbers of people move onto the coast, develop it and use it without restraint, deterioration is quick. Forests become cottage sites, motels spew over headlands, all the hi-fi and rotting refuse of civilization squat on a coast no longer wild, no longer valuable except for yet more intensive development: an invitation to decay. In the first indiscriminate bulldozing, then, lies the destruction of what made this coast unique; and still they advertise, they promote, they speculate and bulldoze and pollute, unconcerned that they are strangling the very source of their wealth. Worse: no voice disputes their right to devastate. Yet what will remain for those born today is scarcely doubtful: two thousand miles of commercial exploitation and NO TRESPASSING signs, and a handful of preserves where the last vestiges of a wild coast are trampled, ceaselessly.



*Dawn, Popham Beach*

MAINE'S Travel Promotion Director, counting tourists like traveler's checks, crows about the booming tourist year, but some people are concerned that Vacationland may soon become another seaside slum. No one who has seen U.S. 1 on a summer day will deny that there are plenty of people. Indeed it's a safe guess that if the Promotion Director keeps busy, every American from east of the Mississippi will have spent one vacation in Maine. Whether many will come back, and whether there will be anything special for them to come back to, is another matter.

Maine calls its coastline unique. Maine is doing its best to make it just as dreary, just as run-down, just as commercial and picturesque and suburban—and, in places, just as exclusive—as anyone's seashore anywhere. A vista of surf breaking over rows of sewage pipes cannot be called scenic, and if Maine still has some untouched stretches of coastline, there is always a promoter with a bulldozer and a couple of loads of ready-mix ready to fix that, and who is there to object?

Maine now has acquired all the marks of civilization. If there is litter like never before, though, it is not simply because there are more people or more careless people. State and local agencies are allied in an all-out attack on litter; at the same time, merchandisers are loading us with more and more packages and wrappings, all designed to catch the eye and protect the product, many of them labeled *disposable* but none of them, of course, labeled *chemically inert*. If the old tin can was slow to rust, the improved aluminum one will last as long as the disposable quart bottle or the plastic six-pack. So it is good news that Maine beer wholesalers are combatting the roadside beer can; they are putting anti-litter decals on their delivery vans. And one of the nation's leading can manufacturers has donated comic books putting across an anti-litter message—ten thousand comic books for distribution in Maine. But this is fluff compared to all the gaudy disposables crammed on the shelves or brought right to the front seat by the courteous car-hop. And while the litterbag may be a good idea, it will probably never get a fair test until the American car has a convenient place to keep it, and until the American gas station has a convenient place to get rid of it.

The car hulks strewn over the state have been declared nuisances; the persons responsible may be taxed or obliged to put them somewhere out of sight—but the ton of metal remains, whether dragged to a remote corner of town or not. It is also a consideration that, for many towns, the remote corners may soon be the most valuable ones. So we must find some real way of ridding ourselves of these derelects. There is the sick joke to be seen on the billboards: help conserve our natural resources, buy car X. We might seriously ask the conservation-minded manufacturer to go so far as to take back and melt down our worn-out purchases. The paper companies have developed a mobile tree harvester—from standing tree to limbed log in less than sixty seconds. Would a scrap steel harvester be less profitable? From rusting hulk to re-usable steel in less than sixty seconds.

Turning the public school system into an advertising medium is no doubt unthinkable, but the public highway system is turned to private gain



with scarcely an objection. The taxpayer must drive amidst a panorama of billboards—distractions by design, and therefore hazards; certainly clumsy intrusions on the landscape of Vacationland. He who pays the piper gets the advertising. One wonders why other parts of the landscape, some of them made equally valuable through expenditure of public funds, have not yet been developed by the advertiser. Is Quoddy Head Light somehow less suitable for a sales pitch than the road leading to it?

Fewer than thirty towns in the state of Maine treat any of their sewage. Many of the others continue to pour their wastes into the waters. There are, of course, laws about pollution, and now there are federal and state funds available to municipalities for construction of sewage treatment plants. The number of such plants is expected to increase rapidly. But perhaps some funds should also be put into research on small-scale treatment—something less expensive than a septic-tank system and more adaptable to the ledgy terrain of the coast.

Perhaps too, some kind of loan or of research aid should be made available to private industry, since chemical pollution is no less appalling than is sewage. Suggestions that a mill treat its effluent conjure up the spectre of the company's closing down, moving out to where gross water pollution is permitted—this at a time when the paper companies, for one, are reporting record sales and record profits. In the opinion of many, there should be no place where this senseless contamination is allowed; indeed, with the passage of federal anti-pollution legislation, this ideal may now be within reach. The National Association of Manufacturers itself is studying the lack of uniform pollution regulations from state to state, with an eye to equalizing the competitive positions of the states.

There is, of course, the simplistic view that we must choose between wages with pollution, or clean rivers with unemployment. But even paper mills can clean up their effluent without jeopardizing their profits; the S. D. Warren Company has already taken substantial steps in this direction, at its own expense and before being required to by law. And with clean water, there will be opportunities for new industries and recreational development; a diversified economic expansion will perhaps be possible. Though we can calculate the dollars saved by leaving wastes untreated, it is difficult even to estimate our potential income lost through pollution.

Billboards, litter, junkyards, pollution—these are problems already partly solved, thanks to recent legislation and the work of many state agencies. But there is a more fundamental threat: the PRIVATE sign. Of course no one opposes private ownership, and the landowner has every right to protect his privacy. But it is not hard to foresee the day when he will be obliged to isolate himself behind barbed wire, because the coast will be lined with PRIVATE signs and the number of people wanting to get a glimpse of the ocean will go on increasing. Many persons believe that the public has a right to get an occasional glimpse of the ocean; not just of banal mudflat or of run-down beach, but of cliff and forest and cove—precisely the places that are selling fastest today. If such places are psychological and spiritual neces-

sities for many inhabitants of twentieth-century America, who can estimate their value in the next century?

Our coast, we say, is unique. Perhaps it is, although some will compare it with the coast of Oregon. One significant thing about this comparison is that, of the entire shoreline of Oregon, all but twenty-three miles is in public ownership, and that about a third of the Oregon coast has already been set aside as parklands. Of Maine's coast, less than 1½% is thus preserved.

California is another example: already enjoying one of the most extensive state park systems, not to mention its national parks and wilderness areas, the state in 1964 voted a \$150 million bond issue for acquisition of new park lands. We will doubtless be told that California's larger population makes this a necessity; but if the resident of San Diego decides to visit his Pelican Beach State Park, he will travel farther than the resident of Cleveland, Ohio, or of Norfolk, Virginia, who sets out for Quoddy Head. So Maine is no less susceptible to the pressures of population than is California; Maine is simply doing less about it.

In 1963 someone drew up a tentative draft of a Maine coastal parks system: an integrated system of parks and preserves maintained cooperatively by local, state, and federal agencies. The idea was favorably received by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in Washington, a number of people were consulted, and a sketch of the proposal was sent to the State House in Augusta, where it was apparently filed with the rest of the ideas to be thought about. Indeed, state surveys and inventories and long-range development plans have been in the works for a number of years now. But this is only a beginning, and it is not hard to believe that by the time all the plans are submitted and reconciled and a final plan is approved and someone gets around to implementing it, there won't be much left to work with. The finest parts of the coast will almost certainly be submerged beneath cottages and clam stands. A simple survey from the driver's seat is persuasive enough for many persons.

Not that we must rush in with picnic tables and prohibitions. To the contrary: the coast will require a judicious program of preservation and of development. We will want recreation facilities in some places, commercial development in others, and some places left undisturbed, as natural preserves; some places for the automobile tourist, some for the hiker; some public lands, some private. But all of this according to a coherent plan, one committed to the general good rather than that of the individual speculator. We already see the alternative in today's melee of speculative development: instant sprawl. Immediate preservation measures—provisional land-use classifications, for example—would allow time to deliberate on this program of rational development and preservation. But there is no more time to dawdle. Unless Maine decides right now to control the promise of development, we will never be able to choose, for Maine's great asset will have been squandered, irresponsibly and definitively.





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