

SOLON'S RECREATION AND CULTURE

Recreation is an invaluable element of community life, particularly in any rural town such as Solon, which offers an abundance of diverse recreational opportunities for all ages.

Most forms of recreation can generally be classified into two categories:

1. **Organized**, or “active,” recreation –examples include activities usually supported by developed facilities and structured programs.
2. **Unorganized**, or “passive,” recreation, which includes activities that may have supporting facilities, but are more often independent or family pursuits; not necessarily activities that have structured programs.

Solon has several recreational facilities and areas that are accessible to the public. This includes a balance of developed recreational infrastructure, such as cooperative recreation providers, and ball fields, as well as unorganized recreational opportunities, such as vast expanses of undeveloped open space and water-based recreation.

Organized or “Active” Recreation

Solon provides organized outdoor recreation opportunities for youth through the efforts of the Solon Recreation Committee. Some of these offerings are school sponsored, such as team sports, while other offerings are through joint recreation programs with neighboring towns. Table 1 below details the public facilities that offer a location for recreational activities.

The Solon Recreation Committee is currently the only organization in town that provides recreational programs in town.

TABLE 1: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITIES

Public within Solon	Baseball	Softball	Football	Soccer	Weightlifting	Track	Tennis	Basketball	Trails	Skiing	Golf
Solon Elementary School								X			
Land behind Solon Elementary School	X	X		X							
Public Outside Solon											
Carrabec Community School & Carrabec High School (North Anson)	X	X		X		X	X	X			
Lakewood Golf Course (Madison)											X
Diadema (North Anson)											X
Eaton Mountain Ski Area (Skowhegan)										X	
Baker Mountain Ski Area (Moscow)										X	

Source: Town of Solon Comprehensive Plan Committee

Organized Youth Recreation

Organized sports activities are available for school-aged children and are provided by both the schools and other leagues, mostly through the efforts of volunteers. The Solon Recreation Department and the Cobra Recreation Committee are responsible for most, if not all the youth sports programs available in town (detailed in Table 2, below).

Recently, Solon partnered with the towns of Embden and Anson to create ‘Cobra Rec’, a district-wide youth sports recreation program with coordinated teams and activities that are open to all district students from pre-K to 6th grade (dependent upon available teams and age ranges). Currently, Solon, Embden, and Anson are the only towns involved in the collaborative district-wide Cobra Rec.

To orchestrate Cobra Rec, the Solon/Embden and Anson Recreation Committees hired a new Recreation Director who oversees coordinating all youth sports activities in the district throughout the year, including scheduling games for the Cobra Rec youth to compete against teams from surrounding towns.

Aside from an equipment storage building, the recreation facilities and other recreational amenities are in good condition. They are of adequate capacity to meet anticipated future needs.

Programs Provided/Organized by the Recreation Department

Cobra Rec is run by a part-time Recreation Director. The Director is assisted by the Solon, Embden and Anson Recreation Committees, who strive to provide their communities with quality programs, activities, and events. The Cobra Recreation Committee meets periodically with the Directors to review and discuss issues relevant to programming, facilities, and budgeting.

Additionally, Solon provides the youth with a three-week summer camp program run by a volunteer.

TABLE 2: RECREATION PROGRAMS IN SOLON

Cobra Rec Activity	Age Group
Baseball/Softball	Pre K to grade 6
Soccer	Pre K to grade 6
Basketball	Pre K to grade 6

Source: Town of Solon

Community Partners

Solon's Recreation Department is supported by generous donations of both time and funds. For 2025, donors and volunteers include, but are not limited to private individuals, businesses, anonymous donors, bottle donations, and many more. The current recreational facilities within Solon and in the region are expected to adequately meet projected growth and changes in the community. The town website acknowledges each donor: <https://solon.maine.gov/pages/recreation-youth-sports>

In addition to Solon's Recreation Department, donors, and volunteers, the town's recreational opportunities are supplemented by outside entities such as the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway, Baker Mountain Ski Area, Eaton Mountain Ski Area, Williams Recreation Area, Moose Alley Riders ATV Club, Solon Snowhawks Snowmobile Club, and too many others to list. The town website provides a short list of recreational areas as well as links to other website with more information: <https://solon.maine.gov/pages/recreational-areas>

The Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway extends from Solon, traveling the length of Route 201 up to the Canadian border. This Byway is filled with locations to stop along the way, including hiking trails, and much more. One great example is Robbins Hill Scenic Overlook, at the beginning of the 78-mile historic and scenic route. Robbins Hill Scenic Overlook includes exceptional views, a picnic area, and hiking trails. MDOT owns the Overlook land and maintains the road. The Old Canada Road Scenic Byway organization maintains the land and the trails.

Baker Mountain is a small, volunteer run ski and sledding mountain with both beginner and intermediate trails. It is operated by season pass holders who volunteer their time. During school vacations the club operates a ski school.

Eaton Mountain Ski Area is a small family-oriented ski area with a mixture of beginner, intermediate, and expert trails that are currently closed for renovations but will hopefully reopen soon.

The Evergreens Campground on Ferry Street offers camping, cabin rentals, a restaurant, historic sites, access to the Kennebec River, and access to ATV trails. The campground is listed as a Historic Site and displays artifacts that were found on the property at the restaurant.

The Williams Recreation Area on Falls Road offers access to the Kennebec River for boating and canoeing and to the 40.2-mile Kennebec Valley Trail that goes from Oakland to Bingham over the old railroad line bed. It is an all-purpose recreation trail. The Solon portion crosses the river over the old railroad trestle at Williams Dam and goes north along the river to Bingham and to other trails to the north. The Moose Alley Riders ATV Club and Solon Snowhawks Snowmobile Club maintain the trails within Solon. Brookfield Energy and the Town of Solon maintain Solon's entry road to Williams Recreation Area, the parking area, and the trail to the canoe portage.

The Williams Recreation Area recently received improvements to river access and the multi-use trails. Ongoing maintenance will be needed to maintain the parking area, boat ramp, and canoe portage trail.

The Town of Solon only allows ATVs on a few of the town roads due to residents' concerns about vehicular safety and noise and dust concerns.

Adult and Age Friendly Recreation

To date, most structured, active recreation programs have focused primarily on youth. But there is an undeniable need for adult and age-friendly recreational opportunities for Solon's older residents.

There are hopes for future expansion of Solon's Rec Department offerings to include adult programs and activities, especially during the winter months. While there is a need for this, nothing has come to fruition yet, partly due to limited financial resources and lack of volunteers.

Historically, most of the recreation programs offered to adults were indoor activities, but the current generation of retiring seniors is more likely to enjoy "active recreation". The trend is for a preference in such activities as hiking, biking, ATViing, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, and boating.

To meet that need RSU 74 works with neighboring RSUs to provide Adult Education opportunities in Solon's area. But, as discussed in the Community Profile chapter, as more folks are choosing to retire and move to Solon, the town may have to consider options for additional adult recreational opportunities.

Unorganized or “Passive” Recreation

Unorganized or unstructured recreation typically refers to outdoor facilities or properties that are open for public use but generally do not have set hours or specific, structured programs. This type of recreation can be divided further into water-based and land-based activities. These activities can range from community beaches and parks to solitary pursuits like hunting, fishing, and hiking.

Water Access and Activities

There are plenty of access points for swimming, boating, and fishing in our Solon and within the surrounding towns. For example, in Solon, Williams Recreation Area was recently improved making access to the river and multi-use trail easier.

The town maintains a list of lakes, ponds, and streams on their website: <https://solon.maine.gov/pages/recreational-areas> Table 3 below also lists water access points.

TABLE 3: WATER ACCESS AND ACTIVITIES

Public Water Access within Solon			
Water Body	Boat access	Type of boat access	Fishing?
Kennebec River	Yes- North of Williams dam	Boat launch	Y
Kennebec River	Yes- South of Williams dam	Canoe portage	Y
Ironbound Pond	Public Boat Launch	Carry-in boat launch	Y
Baker Pond-	No public access	No public access	N/A
Fall Brook	N/A	N/A	Y
Chase Pond-	No public access	No public access	N/A
Public Water Access Outside of Solon			
Water Body	Boat access	Type of boat access	Fishing?
Embden Pond, Embden	Yes	Boat ramp	Y
Fahi Pond, Embden	Yes		Y
Sand Pond, Embden	Yes	Boat ramp (size limits)	Y
Wyman Lake, Pleasant Ridge & Moscow	Yes- both Pleasant Ridge and Moscow	Public boat launch	Y
Kennebec River, Bingham	Yes – at end of Lander Ave. and off Old Church St.	Boat ramp	Y
Wesserunsett Lake, Madison	Yes - off Grange Rd, E. Madison	Boat ramp	Y

Source: Town of Solon

Table 4 below lists areas for swimming access. Solon residents usually go to the public beach at Wyman Lake in Pleasant Ridge, Embden Pond in Embden, or Lake Wesserunsett in Madison to swim. Swimming programs are also available to Solon's youth through the summer camp program at Sandy Beach Campground.

TABLE 4: SWIMMING AREAS WITHIN AND AROUND SOLON

Access Within Solon		
Public		
Body of Water	Beach area	Other info
Ironbound Pond	No	-
Kennebec River @ Evergreen Campground	Yes	-
Private		
Body of Water	Beach area	Other info
Baker Pond	No	-
Access Outside of Solon		
Public		
Body of Water	Beach area	Other info
Embden Pond	Yes	No fee
Fahi Pond	No	-
Sand Pond	No	-
Lake George, Skowhegan/Canaan	Yes	Daily fee or season pass
Wyman Lake, Pleasant Ridge	Yes	No fee
Private		
Body of Water	Beach area	Other info
Wesserunsett Lake, Abnaki Campground, Madison	Yes	Daily fee or season pass
Wesserunsett Lake, Sandy Beach Campground, Madison	Yes	Daily fee or season pass

Source: Town of Solon

Land-Based Activities

Land-based recreation consists of activities such as hunting, hiking, birdwatching, ATVing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, cycling, and many more. These activities take place throughout town, but many depend in large part upon public access to large tracts of undeveloped land. This access can be in the form of publicly owned or managed tracts of land but can also include easements or landowner agreements permitting public use of private land, such as with snowmobile trails or access to large tracts of land held by timber companies. Continued access to these opportunities is contingent upon the continued goodwill of landowners.

Development in rural areas and expanded posting of land could potentially limit future outdoor recreational opportunities in Solon unless steps are taken to preserve open space.

TABLE 5: RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Within Solon			
Property	Ownership	Uses	Approximate acreage
Land behind Solon Elementary School	RSU 74 / Town	Baseball and softball fields	2
Kennebec Valley Trail		Multi use year-round trail	2 miles (Solon Portion)
Parkman Hill Rd	Town	Hunting	300
Parkman Hill Rd	Private- Somerset Woods	Hiking, bird watching, cross country skiing	650
Robbins Hill Scenic Overlook	MDOT/OCR	Hiking, bird watching, cross country skiing	128
Outside of Solon			
Property	Ownership	Uses	Approximate acreage
Kennebec Valley Trail - Oakland to Bingham		Multi use year-round trail	40.2 miles

Source: Town of Solon

Trails System

Solon has an abundance of recreational trails for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing and other recreational activities. The most notable trails throughout Solon and beyond are snowmobile and ATV trails, as Solon lies within the Interconnected Trail System (ITS), which is an intricate web of recreational trails that traverses the entire state. Snowmobile trails can be used during the winter for other types of recreation; however, care should be taken, as these are primarily snowmobile trails. The trail system changes every year, and trail access is dependent upon the favor of private landowners.

Solon has become somewhat of a snowmobile and ATV destination due to easy access to the ITS trail system. While the tourist population has been a boon to the local economy, it comes with its own specific set of challenges, detailed further in the Transportation chapter of this plan. See the Transportation chapter for more information on the ITS system through Solon.

The Solon Snowhawks Snowmobile Club uses and maintains 18 miles of ITS 87 and Connector Trail 113, plus another 18 miles of club trails throughout town. The Club holds monthly meetings from September to May. The Club is supported by an active membership base, along with other supporters and municipal grants, in addition to all monies returned to the town by the State Treasurer from snowmobile registrations, which is used to maintain trails and bridges.

The Moose Alley Riders ATV Club has trails that span Solon, Bingham, Moscow, Pleasant Ridge, and Embden resulting in about 150 miles of trails. The Club meets on the 2nd Thursday of the month, alternating between the Bingham Town Office and the Solon Fire House; however, they are in the process of building their own clubhouse in Bingham.

A need has been identified for additional ATV trails, but landowners are hesitant to allow access across their land due to the damage ATVs can cause and have caused in the past. Another issue is that many of the newer ATVs are much larger than they had been in the past, which requires wider trails. This is a concern and factor for landowners who already allow access as well as for landowners who are considering allowing access.

The Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway maintains numerous trails across the extent of the byway. As an example, not only does the Robbins Hill Scenic Overlook have gorgeous views, but this location also has hiking trails that can be used in the winter for cross-country skiing.

Public Use of Private Land

A significant portion of outdoor recreation in Maine- including hunting, fishing, hiking, and motorized recreation- takes place on private land with the generous permission of landowners. Maine has a strong tradition of allowing recreational access to private property, supported by long-standing expectations that visitors will respect the land and property of others. Unfortunately, instances of misuse, trespassing, and property damage have undermined this tradition. In some cases, landowners have responded by posting their property or restricting access, resulting in the loss of recreational opportunities on lands that were historically open to the public.

Another cause for land posting is residential development in rural areas. With more houses being built in the rural areas it limits where hunting can be safely done.

Regardless of the cause of declining public access to private land, it has far-reaching effects. For example, it is a challenge for the Moose Alley ATV Club to find landowners willing to have ATV trails on their property. The Solon Snowhawks Snowmobile Club also occasionally has to reroute its trail due to a landowner withdrawal of trail permission.

As Solon is largely dependent upon seasonal recreation opportunities for outdoor tourism, this is something that could have detrimental effects on the town.

Hunting

Hunting in Solon frequently occurs on both private property and on land owned by timber company giant, Weyerhaeuser, or other smaller timber companies.

The posting of private land is a trend statewide, particularly in towns that are more built up, with large parcels that have been subdivided. The posting of property in Solon is not related to large subdivisions, though. Large timber companies and private landowners own the commercial forest that covers much of the town. And, while the owners of these vast forests appreciate the role their properties play in drawing tourists to the area and how crucial tourism is to Solon's economy, in many cases, they have been forced to restrict access in some areas.

The availability of land to hunt and the abundance of hunting opportunities is a significant contributing factor in Solon's tourist industry. Solon and the surrounding areas are ideally situated for a variety of hunting pursuits. In addition, visitors hunting in nearby towns or people traveling through often go to Solon for the restaurant or convenience stores, which also boosts the local economy.

For many Solon residents, hunting is a way of life. They grew up hunting certain parcels that always allowed public access. These secret hunting spots are often handed down through generations. The impact of restricting public access on private property affects more than just the tourism industry.

Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly common for private landowners to post their land with no hunting and no trespassing signs. This limits access for both hunting and fishing in Solon.

There is no statistical data available on the percentage of land in Solon that is open to the public for hunting or fishing access, making it difficult to track or quantify the amount of land that has been restricted. However, it is undeniable that disallowing public access to private properties is an increasing concern.

Regional Resources for Recreation

Solon participates with neighboring communities in providing recreational resources to residents. Residents have access to many public and private recreational facilities in the immediate area, including:

- Baker Mountain Ski Area- which is supported by Solon taxpayers
- Numerous outfitters for whitewater, hunting, and fishing
- Lodging & campgrounds
- ATV/Snowmobile rentals
- Guide services
- Skowhegan Outdoors
- Pine Grove Lodge and Cabins
- North Country Flying Service (Bigam and Greenville locations)
- Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway- which is supported by Solon taxpayers

Conserved Lands

There are many public and private tracts of land in Solon, used for multiple purposes, including conservation and/or public recreation. Table 6 lists conserved land areas and ownership.

TABLE 6: PERMANENTLY CONSERVED/PRESERVED PROPERTIES IN SOLON

Name	Location	Designation	Interest	Size (approx. acres)
Indian and Fowl Meadow Islands	Islands in the Kennebec River	Privately conserved	Somerset Woods Trustees	34
Henderson	S. Main St. and Kennebec River	Private easement	Somerset Woods Trustees	107
Pfeiffer	Shore of Lilly Pond	Private Easement	Somerset Woods Trustees	122
Wentworth Pond Access	Wentworth Pond	State Water Access	MDIF&W	1
Groundswell Seed Farm	Parkman Hill Road	Private Easement	Maine Farmland Trust	81
Ofria Preserve	Along Kennebec River	Private	Somerset Woods Trustees	3
Somerset Woods Trustees	Parkman Hill Road	Privately conserved	Somerset Woods Trustees	650
Robbins Hill	Route 201	State-owned	Old Canada Road	128 acres -west side of 201 & 9.4 acres- east side of 201

Source: Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Maine Natural Areas Program

The acreage formally preserved accounts for a fraction of the total land base in Solon. The amount of preserved acreage shown in Table 6 above represents the formally preserved and undeveloped land in Solon and does not include properties enrolled in the Open Space, Farmland, Forest Farmland, Tree Growth Tax Law Programs, or the vast acreage of working forestland.

Currently, the open spaces commonly used for recreational purposes are a mixture of publicly owned and privately owned lands. For example, the Solon Snowhawks Snowmobile Club secured trail access to numerous privately owned parcels over the course of many years, though access is exclusive to snowmobiles.

Solon does not currently have an open space fund for the acquisition of property.

Community Partners in Retaining Recreational Opportunities

While Solon does not directly partner with organization in conservation efforts, there are partners throughout town and beyond that work to preserve land for recreational purposes in Solon. Interested parties include:

- Solon Snowhawks
- Somerset Woods Trustees
- Moose Alley Rider ATV Club
- Cobra Rec
- Solon Recreation Department
- Weyerhaeuser
- Brookfield Renewable
- Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway

Cultural Resources

- The Coolidge Library, on South Main Steet, is open to the public three days a week for perusing or taking out books. They also have computers for public use.
- There is one unofficial museum in Solon; it is at the Evergreens Campground, and it displays Native American artifacts.
- The historic South Solon Meeting House holds concerts and readings periodically.
- Other performing arts activities are available, such as plays at Lakewood Theater in Madison and Skowhegan Opera House in Skowhegan, as well as additional nearby venues.

Analysis and Key Issues

- Solon provides its residents with a good mixture of both passive and active recreational opportunities, supplemented by offerings in nearby towns.
- Solon's recreational facilities are in good condition and are sufficient in meeting anticipated future needs.
- The town has a Recreation Committee that oversees the ball fields and town recreation programs. The town also has a 3-week summer camp program.
- Solon partners with Anson and Embden in their youth recreation offerings. It is called Cobra Rec and is overseen by the Recreation Director and Recreation Committee.
- The Cobra Rec teams compete with other teams from surrounding towns.
- Solon's town website does an excellent job of broadcasting recreational offerings, options, and places.
- Since Solon is situated amongst some of the finest ATV/snowmobile trails in central Maine, Moose Alley Riders ATV Club and Solon Snowhawks Snowmobile Club are active in the community.
- There are no formal adult recreation activities managed by the town.
- Solon does have water access for fishing, boating, and swimming.
- The town has an abundant trail system for ATVing, snowmobiling, skiing, hiking, etc.
- As with many other towns in the region, public access of private property is increasingly becoming restricted as more property becomes posted and unavailable.
- There are numerous recreational resources for outdoor recreation in and around Solon, which speaks to how well known the area is for four season recreation.