



**THOR
INSTITUTE**

TOURISM • HOSPITALITY
OUTDOOR RECREATION

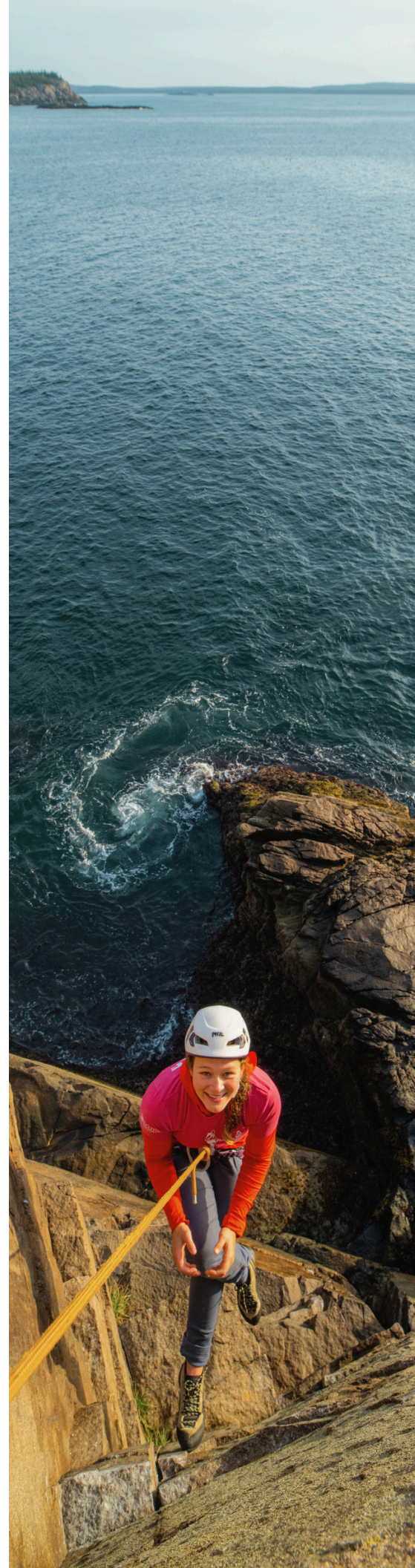
STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 – 2029

**Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor
Recreation Institute**

The University of Maine System



**MAINE'S PUBLIC
UNIVERSITIES**
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor Recreation (THOR) Institute is a University of Maine System initiative that brings together faculty, staff, students, and industry partners to strengthen education, experiential learning, and workforce development in Maine's tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation sectors—one of the state's largest employment sectors, supporting approximately one in five jobs statewide.

Since its founding in 2021, the THOR Institute has leveraged internal and external funding, alongside cross-campus collaboration, to develop innovative pathways in higher education.

This strategic plan outlines the Institute's priorities for the coming years, focusing on strengthening academic collaboration, expanding experiential learning, deepening industry partnerships, and securing long-term sustainability. Through these efforts, the THOR Institute will continue to advance student success, workforce development, and innovation across Maine.

UMS Faculty Serving on the THOR Institute Executive Committee, 2026–2027:

University of Southern Maine: Firooza Pavri, Associate Dean and Professor of Geography.

University of Maine at Presque Isle: Barbara Blackstone, Associate Professor of Exercise Science; Kim Jones, Associate Professor of Business Administration.

University of Maine at Machias: Karen Beeftink, Associate Professor of Recreation and Tourism Management.

University of Maine at Farmington: Clyde Mitchell, Professor of Business; Matthew McCourt, Associate Professor of Geography; Meghan Price, Director of Alpine Operations; Austin French, Director of Career Pathways & Employer Engagement, Lecturer in Outdoor Recreation Business.

University of Maine at Augusta: Brenda McAleer, Dean of the College of Professional Studies & Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs.

University of Maine at Fort Kent: Michael Curran, Associate Professor of Business.

University of Maine: John Daigle, Professor of Forest Recreation Management, and Lauren Jacobs, Senior Lecturer in Outdoor Leadership.

Contributing Scholars: Ryan Naylor and Lydia Horne, Postdoctoral Associates at the University of Maine.

Staff: Tracy Michaud, Director; Kelli Park, Outreach Coordinator; Eileen Moran, UMS Liaison.

BACKGROUND

Maine's economy is not just supported by tourism and the outdoors; it is defined by it. Total economic impact from Maine's tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation (THOR) industries surpassed \$16 billion, driven by a record high in direct visitor spending. Supporting roughly 115,000 jobs state-wide, the THOR sector accounts for nearly one in every five Maine workers (Maine Office of Tourism; Maine Department of Labor).

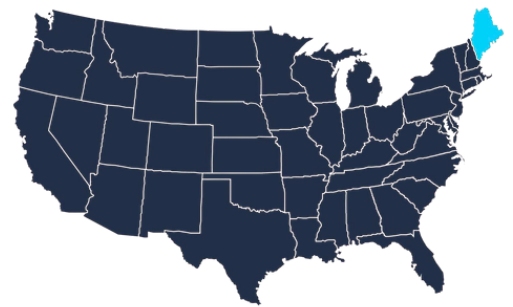
The impact of these industries extends far beyond state borders. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), global travel and tourism contributed a record \$11.6 trillion to global GDP. The sector continues to outpace overall global economic expansion and remains on track to be a primary driver of world economic growth through 2030.

However, THOR industries face ongoing systemic challenges—both locally and globally. Despite strong visitor spending, the sector continues to navigate a persistent talent shortage and a growing demand for professionals who possess cross-disciplinary expertise spanning hospitality, outdoor management, business, and sustainability. Stronger, interdisciplinary higher education pathways remain critical to equipping the next generation of industry leaders.

Building on the initial catalyst support of the Maine Jobs Recovery Plan grant, the THOR Institute continues to execute its multi-year strategic roadmap through 2026. With foundational recovery efforts complete, new grant funding and institutional partnerships are driving the next phase of statewide educational programs, workforce development, and career pathways across Maine and beyond.



According to 2025 research presented by the Maine Office of Tourism, 14.15 million visitors spent more than \$9.37 billion in Maine, generating an economic impact of \$16.56 billion.



In 2025, the industry supported 108,800 jobs for Maine residents—underscoring tourism's continued role as an economic powerhouse, as longer stays and higher visitor spending drove record economic impact despite a slight dip in overall visitor volume.



According to a U.S. Travel Association report, nearly 40 percent of workers whose first job was in the travel industry reached an annual career salary of more than \$100,000 and one-third of Americans who started in travel earned a Bachelor's degree. (Maine Tourism Association, 2026)

THOR INSTITUTE: OUR PURPOSE

Mission

The THOR Institute serves as a convener among all of the universities in the UMS as they provide for Maine's higher education and workforce development needs in the tourism, hospitality and outdoor recreation economies.

Vision

The THOR Institute strives to be the state of Maine's foremost educational coordinator among the tourism, hospitality and outdoor recreation economies, using experiential, place-based learning to offer:

- (1) exemplary opportunities and services for all students pursuing THOR education and career pathways;
- (2) acceleration of the THOR workforce in Maine as well as on a national level;
- (3) leadership in research and innovation as it relates to THOR industries.

Enriching Maine's talent pool in THOR-related industries



THOR INSTITUTE GOALS 2026–2029



Reduce THOR employee shortages and undertraining; increase skills for higher paying careers



Enhance Maine's authentic identity, visibility and capacity as a THOR destination, contributing to the economic success of THOR industries



Enrich equity, diversity, cultural exchange, as well as align Maine's THOR economies with environmental sustainability, advocacy, and resource protection



Feed the pipeline of higher education enrollment, student success, and in-state retention



Enhance unified accreditation opportunities in the UMS in a way that best serves students while showcasing the niche strengths of each campus



Expand leadership role in research and innovation as it relates to THOR industries

THOR INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES 2026–2029

Objectives	To Which Goal(s) (Page 4) does this most closely match?	2 0 2 6	2 0 2 7	2 0 2 8	2 0 2 9
Establish the THOR YourPace degrees (AS, BS)	1, 3, 4, 5	X			
Establish the THOR YourPace minor	1, 3, 4, 5		X	X	
Establish THOR YourPace Certificates: • Sustainable Tourism • Hospitality • Outdoor Recreation	1, 3, 4, 5		X	X	
Increase utilization of in-person programmatic offerings: • Growth of All-UMS THOR (in-person) minor • Growth/coordination of in-person certificates • Growth and support for each university's unique degree/other program offerings	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	X	X	X	X
Maximize awareness of THOR's critical impact in Maine by executing a targeted multi-channel communication strategy across newsletters, social media, and video.	1, 2, 3, 4	X	X	X	X

THOR INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES 2026–2029

Objectives	To Which Goal(s) (Page 4) does this most closely match?	2026	2027	2028	2029
Re-envision and/or continue building collaborations with partners to strengthen the student pipeline through potential opportunities: 1. High school leadership/counselors/students in the state of Maine; relationship building and every-other-year conference (<i>funding dependent</i>) 2. THOR fellowship program (<i>funding dependent</i>) 3. Early college opportunities 4. Other higher ed entities (both within and external to the UMS, such as community colleges, university/college centers) 5. THOR industry and workforce partners 6. THOR statewide advisory board	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	X	X	X	X
Establish Stackable Professional Micro-Credentials by partnering with tourism, outdoor and hospitality organizations to embed high-value industry badges (<i>funding dependent</i>)	1, 4, 5, 6	X	X	X	X
Establish new offerings aimed at public, alumni, visitors (e.g., 3-day course on agri-tourism, food, wine and beer in Maine); youth summer camps; experiential educational programming for adults.	2,3			X	X

THOR INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES 2026–2029 (CONTINUED)

Objective	To Which Goal(s) (Page 4) does this most closely match?	2026	2027	2028	2029
Establish and/or strengthen collaborations with partners that yield new or continuing faculty research opportunities : • Other higher education entities (both within and external to the UMS) (e.g., Greenland and other North Atlantic partners) • THOR industry and workforce partners	2, 3, 6	X	X	X	X
Serve as the UMS convener of multi-university collaboration through the following Davis Educational Foundation grant supported actions: • Develop five multi-university, interdisciplinary courses offered to any student in the UMS • Hold six faculty workshops instructing why/how to create multi-university, interdisciplinary courses offered to any student in the UMS • Create a system-wide Collaboration Guide • Nurture an ongoing community of experiential learning partners at the system level (including, but not limited to, UMS web resources)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	X	X		
Establish an in-person THOR office/ collaboration space (<i>funding dependent</i>)	1, 3, 4, 5, 6		X	X	X

ALIGNMENT WITHIN THE UMS & BEYOND

The University of Maine System,
Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028

- Building a Foundation for our Future



University of Maine and University of Maine at
Machias: A Framework for the University's Future



University of Maine at Augusta

- 2021-2025 Student Centered Education for a Diverse and Digital Future



University of Maine at Farmington

- 2026-2029 Reimagining the University (2026-2029 Strategic Plan)



University of Maine at Fort Kent

- Mission & Vision

University of Maine at Presque Isle

- Expect The Unexpected 2028



University of Southern Maine

- Vision 2028



State of Maine

- Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029 A FOCUS ON TALENT AND INNOVATION. In its 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy, the state of Maine outlines a dynamic and nonpartisan roadmap designed to foster collaboration among the public, private, nonprofit and education sectors for the purpose of creating a diverse and sustainable economy.
- The Maine Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap (the Roadmap) 10-year strategic plan for Maine's outdoor recreation economy



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/CONTACT

This iteration of the THOR Strategic Plan is intended to cover 2026–2029, and shall be considered a working document subject to additions and updates as programming continues to develop.

To learn more about THOR Institute programming, please visit our website at maine.edu/thor