



BANGOR DAILY NEWS

A shady land deal in Belfast as a conservation easement goes missing



by [Murray Carpenter, The Maine Monitor](#) 5 hours ago [7.14.2025]



The lot is now listed for sale for \$295,000, as “an ideal location for retail, office, or mixed-use development.”
Credit: Murray Carpenter / The Maine Monitor

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The 24-acre lot for sale in Belfast, between Renys and Goodwill, is touted as “an ideal location for retail, office, or mixed-use development.”

But ads for the \$295,000 property don’t mention that **state and federal officials in 1997 approved its use as a mitigation site, to compensate for wetlands that the credit card giant**

MBNA filled while building its campus just across Route 3. And that as part of that deal, the parcel “shall be protected in perpetuity from future development.”

The plan that Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved seems never to have been filed as a restriction to the deed for the property. Now, it’s as though it never existed.

The mitigation project took shape in 1997, as MBNA was expanding its Belfast campus. Between 1997 and 2000, MBNA erected five buildings on 141 acres in Belfast, and eventually employed more than 2,000 people at call centers there.

A July 1997 inspection report by Donald Killoy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers noted the intensity of the development: “Exceptionally fast track project—will have up to 900 working on site at once,” Killoy wrote. “32+/- trucks/hr out of site.”

The construction impacted about seven acres of wetlands and a stretch of intermittent stream. Regulators from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers signed off on a wetlands mitigation plan. In exchange for the impacts to the wetlands and stream, the plan called for the restoration of wetlands on a 24-acre lot across Route 3 from the MBNA campus, at the head of the Little River watershed.

The parcel had been filled and altered for more than a century, and heavily used. Starting in 1860 it was used as the Belfast Fairgrounds, with a trotting park, according to Megan Pinette of the Belfast Historical Society.

In the early 1950s the track was used for stock car racing. In the 1960s, it became a drive-in theater. By 1997, when MBNA bought the lot, it was vacant.

In 1998, environmental consultants Jones and Associates supervised the mitigation, which included removing fill and planting trees and shrubs appropriate for a wooded wetland.

In a 1998 Republican Journal article by this reporter, DEP’s David Silver said coalescing several low-value wetlands into the larger mitigation site was a net benefit to the region’s ecology.

Consultant Rick Jones said, “This site is, bar none, the best I’ve seen for a compensation effort.” And Jay Clement of the Army Corps envisioned it becoming a valuable site for non-motorized public access.

As part of the permitting, regulators required that the parcel be forever protected from development.

According to its Army Corps permit, dated July 1, 1997, **“The mitigation lands described in Condition 3 above shall be protected in perpetuity from future development following construction ... The mitigation areas shall be protected by deed restriction as proposed.”**

But the restriction seems never to have been appended to the deed.

By the time of their sixth and final monitoring report, in 2004, the consultants reported: “Compensation goals for this mitigation project have been met ... Dense vegetation and wetland hydrology has created and enhanced nutrient, sediment, and toxicant retention within the wetland. Wildlife habitat values have also been enhanced. Numerous bird and mammal species use this wetland for food, shelter, and other habitat. Amphibian habitat has also been substantially improved through creation of ponded areas.” In the spring, wood frogs, peepers and spotted salamanders breed in the wetlands, as do woodcock.

Bank of America became the owner of the lot in 2006, when it bought MBNA for \$34 billion. In January 2025, Bank of America sold the lot at auction to We Buy and Resell Homes LLC, a Georgia company. According to Belfast Assessor’s Office, the lot sold for \$15,750, and is assessed at \$404,800.

The new owner promptly listed the property for sale for \$295,000, with no mention that it is a wetlands mitigation site. The ad, at CORE real estate, reads, “Zoned commercially, the land is positioned for a variety of business ventures. Belfast is expanding, making this an ideal location for retail, office, or mixed-use development.”

It’s hard to know how the wetland conservation project seeped through the cracks. Among the banker’s boxes of documents related to MBNA permitting in the DEP archives, is an unsigned draft of the deed restriction, from 1997. The draft would not be enforceable, however, until it was signed and filed with the deed.

Maine DEP spokesperson David Madore said the agency is investigating the matter.

“The Department’s approval of the 1997 development was contingent on the restoration and preservation of wetland functions and values on the compensation parcel,” Madore said in an email. “The parcel was intended to be permanently preserved.”

A Bank of America spokesperson declined to comment on the story, as did the Army Corps.

These days, it’s an overlooked and forgotten lot adjacent to a bustling area. Someone is using an area near the road as a toilet.

But back in the wetland, the alders and cattails have grown as intended. On a warm July day, red-winged blackbirds, common yellowthroats, and red-eyed vireos sing. And, from deep in the wetland, comes the croaking of a green frog.