



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony in Opposition to LD 376, An Act to Repeal the Law Regarding the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program

**To the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee
by Jack Shapiro, Climate and Clean Energy Program Director
February 14, 2023**

Senator Lawrence, Representative Zeigler, and members of the Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology, my name is Jack Shapiro. I am the Climate and Clean Energy Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine. NRCM has been working for more than 60 years to protect, restore, and conserve Maine's environment, on behalf of our 25,000 members and supporters. I'm here today to testify in opposition to LD 376, An Act to Repeal the Law Regarding the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program.¹

The Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program was created by the Legislature in 2021 via LD 1710.² The purpose of that bill was to direct the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to solicit bids for wind projects in Aroostook County and a transmission line that would connect those projects to the rest of the New England grid. Just a few weeks ago, after a successful solicitation, the PUC approved a 1,000-megawatt wind project – the King Pine project – and a transmission line to connect that project to the rest of the New England grid. That is to say, this program is already succeeding.

For that reason, it is not clear what purpose this bill would serve. If the intention is to delay or prevent these projects from being built, it is not clear why.

The benefits of wind power, especially today, are well known. Wind power is a great complement to solar, peaking at night and in the winter, when solar peaks during the day and in the summer. Diversifying our renewable portfolio increases the grid's resiliency and reduces costs overall. And, unlike power generated by burning gas or oil, renewable energy projects don't produce the carbon pollution that causes climate change – which is already bringing significant impacts to our state. Some headlines from just the past six weeks include:

- Researchers seek statewide changes to save clam fishery from climate-driven collapse.³

¹ <https://mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0563&item=5&snum=130>

² <https://mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0563&item=5&snum=130>

³ <https://www.themainemonitor.org/researchers-seek-statewide-changes-to-save-clam-fishery-from-climate-driven-collapse/>



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- ‘Mud season’ conditions keeping Maine loggers out of the woods.⁴
- Rising seas are causing ‘sunny day flooding’ on Maine’s coast.⁵
- January warmth takes its toll on winter recreation in Maine.⁶
- Storm batters Maine’s coastal communities, causes widespread flooding and outages.⁷

Renewable energy projects also routinely offer energy at lower costs than fossil fuel-generated power and do not create harmful energy price volatility like natural gas generation. As this committee well knows, the large increases in standard offer supply prices of 83% last year,⁸ and 49% this year⁹ were driven by high fuel prices for natural gas generators in New England, where natural gas still provides about half of our electricity.

In stark contrast, renewable energy, like the power that will be generated by the King Pine project and carried to customers by this new transmission line, has no fuel costs and will come with stable pricing for decades. And those contracts have real benefits: a recent report from Daymark Advisors estimated that new wind projects of this scale will save Maine electricity customers \$35 million per year.¹⁰

In addition, these projects will bring significant economic benefits to Aroostook County and the state as a whole. A 2021 report presented to this committee during the debate on LD 1710 estimated that the construction of both the transmission and wind projects would collectively generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity, thousands of construction jobs, tens of millions of dollars in sales and property taxes paid to the state and local communities, and dozens of ongoing operations and maintenance jobs.¹¹

Finally, these projects were able to be approved because Massachusetts committed to buy 40% of the wind power and cover 40% of the transmission project costs. All of New England benefits from more renewable energy on the grid driving down wholesale market prices, and this example of interstate collaboration bodes extremely well for the years to come, when collaboration and cost sharing across New England states will be critical to solving our climate challenges collectively to bring down costs across the board.¹²

To conclude, infusing our electric grid with low-cost, Maine-made wind energy sourced from Aroostook County – as this program does – is an economic boost to local communities, a win for Maine electricity consumers, and a promising example of regional collaboration on our energy future. The Legislature should firmly reject any attempts to roll back the Northern Maine Renewable Energy Development Program or the projects it is supporting.

⁴ <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/01/14/business/maine-loggers-struggling-warm-winter/>

⁵ <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/01/25/news/portland/climate-change-flooding/>

⁶ <https://www.mainepublic.org/climate/2023-01-13/january-warmth-takes-its-toll-on-winter-recreation-in-maine>

⁷ <https://www.pressherald.com/2022/12/23/southern-maine-facing-high-winds-outages-storm-warning/>

⁸ <https://www.pressherald.com/2021/11/17/supply-cost-spike-to-raise-average-homes-cmp-bill-by-30-in-2022/>

⁹ <https://www.mainepublic.org/business-and-economy/2022-11-16/cmp-customers-will-see-rate-hikes-next-year>

¹⁰ <https://cleanpower.org/resources/market-and-environmental-benefits-of-new-england-renewable-generation/>

¹¹ <https://mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=165179>

¹² https://www.brattle.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Brattle-OSW-Transmission-Report_Jan-24-2023.pdf



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I urge the Committee to vote Ought Not To Pass on LD 376, and would welcome any questions you have.

Thank you.