



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of

LD 1246 - *An Act to Include Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat in the Definition of "Significant Wildlife Habitat" Under the Natural Resources Protection Act*

April 5, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

A broad-based community, MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. MOFGA certifies 535 organic farms and processing operations representing roughly \$90 million in sales and we are working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers.

MOFGA supports LD 1246 - *An Act to Include Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat in the Definition of "Significant Wildlife Habitat" Under the Natural Resources Protection Act*, which will broaden the range of circumstances in which Maine's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) consults with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF&W) on strategies to avoid or minimize impacts to endangered and threatened species habitat.

The recent spike in Maine's population and the accompanying pressure from development are creating both opportunities and challenges throughout the state. Much of what draws people to settle in Maine, including the rural landscape, the woods and waters, and even the ways that Maine people interact with each other are at risk of changing dramatically. We have a housing crisis, we have a labor shortage, our weather patterns are shifting, our food, farmland and soil is threatened by persistent and bio-accumulative industrial chemicals, and we have a growing list of threatened and endangered species, largely due to the increasing pressure from development. Each of these challenges has an impact on MOFGA's work to create a more local, more organic food system.

Of great importance to organic farmers are the health of the soil and the viability of pollinators and other beneficial insect. The ecological service provided by pollinators is integral to roughly 85% of the world's flowering plants, including more than two-thirds of the world's crop species. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation estimates that more than 100 crops grown in the U.S. "either need or benefit from pollinators, and the economic value of these native pollinators is estimated at \$3 billion per year." And pollinators are an essential part of the web of life as they generate food for roughly 25% of bird species and many mammals.

Biodiversity is critical to the success of organic farming. It's the basis of a healthy ecosystem creating a network of checks and balances in nature. Organic farm systems are required to promote biodiversity on the land using methods that support conservation of natural resources. A major reason why we are working to help farmers embrace organic management practices because we recognize that conventional and industrial farm practices are contributing significantly to the climate crisis and the accompanying decline in plant and animal species, particularly insects. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that the commonly used agricultural glyphosate poses a threat to 93% of animals on the U.S. endangered species list.

In Maine, IF&W has proposed adding eight new species to the Endangered Species Act this year and is likely to add many more in years to come. We have to act now to prevent the loss of more species and we need our state agencies to collaborate to ensure that all vulnerable ecosystems and the species within them are protected.

We understand that Representative Gramlich has worked with DEP, IF&W, and the Governor's Office on an amendment and we are supportive of the amended version. MOFGA is a proud member of Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition which has added this bill to our Common Agenda for 2023. We hope you will support this legislation too. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer questions if you have any.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.