



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony in support of LD 25, An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks

**To the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
by Josh Caldwell, Climate & Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator**

January 25, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Josh Caldwell. I am the Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I am submitting this testimony today in support of LD 25, An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks.

The Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization with more than 25,000 supporters statewide and beyond. For more than 60 years, NRCM has been protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment, now and for future generations. We work statewide to:

- Protect the health of Maine's rivers, lakes, streams, and coastal waters;
- Promote sustainable communities through initiatives that reduce toxics pollution and waste;
- Decrease air and climate-changing pollution through energy efficiency and renewable sources;
- Conserve Maine lands and wildlife habitat, including our treasured North Woods; and
- Defend the federal environmental policies and programs that help protect Maine.

Our work is conducted upon unceded Wabanaki land, and it is incumbent upon us as an environmental advocacy organization to support the Indigenous peoples of this land. NRCM recognizes and honors the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq Nation, and Maliseet Tribes of Maine. These Tribes have stewarded Maine for generations, stretching back to before colonial settlers forcibly occupied the area, and have experienced a legacy of broken treaties and genocide. In defiance of these injustices, the Wabanaki maintain spiritual, cultural, and physical connection to these lands.

We acknowledge this history and recognize Indigenous sovereignty. NRCM is committed to actively using our voices, our resources, and our power to support Tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy. We know how important it has been over the 63 years since our organization was founded — and how essential it will continue to be — to work together with the Wabanaki knowledge-keepers to protect the land, air, water, and wildlife of Maine.

Enabling free access for members of federally recognized Indian nations, tribes, or bands to State-owned parks is an important step in the process of land justice. It may be a small step relative to the magnitude of the historic injustices perpetrated against the tribes in Maine, but it is unquestionably the right thing to do as soon as possible.

For these reasons we urge the Committee to support the passage of this important bill. Thank you for your consideration.