



**Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director**

**January 25, 2023**

**RE: LD 25 – An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 25, An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

Supporting the voice, choice, and action of Indigenous Peoples is key to The Nature Conservancy's vision of a world where people and nature thrive. Here in Maine, we continue to learn about the historical and ongoing injustices faced by the Wabanaki Tribes. We acknowledge the urgency of addressing these injustices, and support meaningful action in this direction. Providing free access to Maine's state parks and historic sites is a small but important step.

Beyond the bill in front of us today, we must continue to strengthen the voice, choice, and action of the Wabanaki Communities. TNC remains committed to supporting tribal sovereignty and forging relationships based on mutual support and trust. We do not speak for Indigenous Peoples, but by working together we can elevate their voices and priorities and advance our shared goals. Our work should aim to build rather than burden the capacity of our Indigenous neighbors and providing them free access to Maine's parks and historic sites is a step towards recognizing their long history and ongoing connection to all parts of our State.

We urge this committee to support LD 25. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.