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***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources***

RE: LD 258 - Biennial Budget Proposal for the Department of Marine Resources

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, 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 the biennial budget proposal for the Department of Marine Resources.**

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 have been working in Maine for more than 60 years protecting land, restoring rivers and streams, rebuilding groundfish populations in the Gulf of Maine and taking action to address our changing climate.

As part of our strategic plan, TNC is working to conserve and restore critical marine species and habitat so the Gulf of Maine can thrive in the face of climate change and provide the goods and services necessary to support long-term sustainable use by Maine's coastal communities. We work closely with the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) on a variety of levels to ensure Maine's fisheries and the communities that rely on them are sustained and supported into the future.

TNC focuses primarily on leveraging transformational science and management. We support ongoing research and data to best inform our partners and their management strategies. Maine's Department of Marine Resources needs robust funding to carry out their mission and continue to work collaboratively with the many stakeholders engaged in the Gulf of Maine.

The proposal before you from DMR represents continued investment into this critical work. It highlights opportunities to bolster existing programs and allows the staff at the Department to better implement their work to conserve marine and estuarine resources, support scientific research, work with industry, local, state, and federal officials, and to enforce laws and regulations.

Specifically, TNC strongly supports the following budget requests:

Bureau of Sea Run Fisheries and Habitat (Z295, page A-407)

The Nature Conservancy works closely with the Bureau of Sea Run Fisheries and Habitat to promote policies and regulations that encourage habitat protection and access for fish and wildlife. There is substantial work to be done to support the 12

native species of sea-run fish and the communities that rely on them. We support the modest, administrative changes to this Bureau.

Bureau of Marine Science (0027, page A-525)

The staff team at Maine DMR are critical to carrying out its mission and mandates. The Bureau of Marine Science engages in scientific research, monitoring, and assessment to manage and restore marine and estuarine resources. They collect landing and harvest data for Maine's fisheries and participate in developing management plans for state, interstate, and federal fisheries. The proposals in this section of the budget continues three limited-period positions into the next biennium and increases the capacity of one position by marginally increasing the work hours. Investment in existing staff is a smart way to ensure this essential work is carried on uninterrupted.

Bureau of Policy and Management (0258, page A-400)

The proposed changes in this Bureau are modest adjustments to perform the administrative functions of DMR more efficiently. It increases the hours for one Resource Management Coordinator and addresses increased administrative costs, and provides funding for the increased costs of legal services provided by the Department of the Attorney General. One important addition is the establishment of an Aquaculture Inspector position that will support lease compliance. We know aquaculture is a growing area of DMR's work and strongly support staff additions in this area.

Marine Patrol Aircraft (0029, page A-536)

This one-time expense is a critical investment in the ongoing needs for monitoring and data collection, in addition to supporting Maine's top-notch Marine Patrol team. The Department currently uses a smaller aircraft that has limited operational capacities, which unduly limits their abilities to effectively carry out a variety of work. As Maine's climate changes and our ocean waters warm, many fishing related activities shift further offshore. As a science-based organization, we want our state to have the right equipment to accurately conduct aerial surveys, gather data, monitor on-water activities, and provide critical search and rescue services.

General Operations and Infrastructure Maintenance

Other proposals in the budget request include needed investments in existing DMR infrastructure – including their lab facilities and fleet of watercraft. By establishing maintenance funds for both these purposes, DMR will be able to pro-actively address preventative and ongoing maintenance for these important pieces of equipment. As stated previously, TNC is supportive of state agencies having the right equipment and technology available to them so they can support multiple needs – gathering consistent and timely data to better inform research and resource management decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Department of Marine Resource's budget proposal.