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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON APPROPRIATIONS
AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS, AND STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN SUPPORT OF LD 258**

*An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government,
General Fund and Other Funds and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the
Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024,
and June 30, 2025*

February 17, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, I am Amanda Beal, Commissioner for the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, submitting testimony in support of LD 258, the Governor's proposed fiscal year 2024-2025 biennial budget bill. This testimony will highlight three Office of Information Technology initiatives that are crucial to the Department's work and provided services.

The Governor's budget has three Geographic Information System (GIS) related initiatives. The first initiative, found on page A-22, requests General Fund support of \$500,000 for each fiscal year to conduct aerial imaging acquisition, processing, and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) for state agency projects. GIS tools and digital spatial imagery are fundamental to managing important daily work activities, including land conservation. For example, the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) stewards more than 700,000 acres of State Parks and Public Lands and monitors more than 500,000 acres of conservation easements. GIS tools are used in nearly every aspect of land management, including mapping forest types; planning and monitoring harvesting operations; designing roads; and delineating stream buffers and rare habitat types. Most BPL foresters have hand-held iPads or iPhones that enable them to use and update GIS layers efficiently and in real time.

This initiative will also provide spatial data to BPL for the timely completion of the statutorily required detailed forest inventory of public lands. In recent years numerous large forestland managers have adopted LiDAR to streamline estimates of forest stocking and growth using algorithms that convert imagery to biomass. As a result, LiDAR will effectively replace or complement the costly and time-intensive methods of assessing forest stocking through field data collection. BPL staff have incorporated LiDAR in specific pilot projects involving mapping deer wintering habitats, vernal pools, and ecologically important older-growth forests.

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The second initiative for imagery is on page A-30 and requests ongoing General Fund support for high-resolution orthoimagery aerial images. Accurate and up-to-date imagery is utilized by the Department's Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning to maintain the Conservation Lands Registry ([Title 33 MRS §479-C](#), and [Title 5 MRS ch. 353 Section 6206 1.D.](#)), and complete a statewide mapping update of coastal bluffs, shoreline change, and the coastal submerged lands boundary. The Land Use Planning Commission uses imagery to fulfill certain statutory requirements such as tracking state and regional trends in future land use development patterns ([Title 30-A §4331](#)), and tracking locally designated growth areas in Comprehensive Plans ([4349-A, subsection 1, paragraph A or B](#)). The Maine Geological Survey relies on this imagery for compiling thousands of geologic geospatial data points each year ([Title 12 MRS §542](#)). And our interagency PFAS work utilizes GIS data to identify and map areas properly.

The third initiative on page A-29 establishes two positions supporting the MEGIS and GeoLibrary teams. MEGIS requires additional staffing to support the increased utilization of this technology. The additional capacity will reduce implementation delays and allow for upgrade support.

In summary, the applications of GIS are vast and critical to DACF operations. Current data are incomplete, and additional staffing is necessary to respond to program needs. The support for MEGIS and GIS centralized data is essential for enabling the Department to serve and inform its many constituents, including the legislature, state agencies, municipalities, and the general public.

Thank you for your time and consideration.