

February 27, 2023

Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director
The Nature Conservancy in Maine
kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org



***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife***

***RE: LD 258 - Biennial Budget Proposal for the Department of Inland Fisheries and
Wildlife***

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, 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 Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.**

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. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

TNC has worked closely with Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW), and we commend them on their diligent efforts to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of our state. Over the last several years, the Department has taken on new and expanding roles in public education for both Maine people and the many annual visitors to our state.

Specifically, TNC supports the following budget requests:

Staff Positions at IFW

TNC has strong working relationships with various programs and teams at IFW. Staff are critical to implementing the Department's mission and vision, and we strongly support investments in existing staff and creating targeted new positions. We support the re-allocation of funding to support four existing staff positions – a private lands biologist, a wildlife technician, and two foresters. Additionally, we support the new Federal Aid Coordinator position. Managing federal funds and federal grants is complex but a critical part of the IFW team. It is important to make sure IFW is positioned to manage those funds and seize opportunities for new federal dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.

Administrative Services – Energy Efficiency Upgrades (0530, page A-445)

IFW is requesting a modest amount of funding to invest in energy efficiency upgrades across their offices and facilities. These investments would include electric vehicle chargers, LED lighting upgrades, heat pumps, and walk in freezers at the regional offices. The State of Maine is committed to addressing climate change through the Maine Won't Wait Climate Action Plan, and we fully support IFW's efforts to demonstrate the commitment to these goals. These investments will save the Department and therefore the State of Maine funding in the long term.

Landowner Relations Program (Z140, page A-459)

As a large landowner in Maine, we strongly support the IFW Landowner Relations program. This is a critical aspect of IFW's work, and we support the marginal changes and tweaks to implementing this program.

Resource Management Services (0534, page A-472)

IFW is requesting support for both FY23-24 and FY24-25 to match federal grant opportunities that are available to them. Maine has the opportunity to leverage more federal funds than ever before, but the state must provide match to unlock those dollars. This modest investment in match would strongly benefit Maine and IFW's ongoing work and programs.

IFW Headquarters

We understand that IFW is proposing a new office location. The Department is constantly growing and evolving, and the existing space doesn't have room for key infrastructure needs like equipment storage, lab space, or indoor and outdoor classrooms. It is important for IFW to have the space they need to efficiently and effectively carry out their important work on behalf of our State.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments in support of the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife's budget proposal.