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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in support of
LD 993: An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. I am Laurie Osher and I represent District 25, the majority of Orono. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to express my support for **LD 993: An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine.**

I come to you with a request to support this bill, not only as your colleague, but as soil scientist with experience with the importance of stakeholder input. I worked on the staff of National Forests in Alaska and Colorado and on the Forest Management team of a National Forest in California. In each location, I had a front row seat to the development and implementation of forest management planning by the nation's premier forest land management agency. The scientists at my agency were knowledgeable about the science of forestry, but the system was set up to share the plans with stakeholders near the end of the planning process. During those years, USDA Forest Service forest management plans were regularly contested by stakeholders who had been left out of the planning process.

The first of my forest service jobs was at the Tsongas National Forest in SE Alaska. I was hired to join a team that was completing an inventory of soils and forest ecosystem types. It was an expensive data gathering experience because it was executed in response to a lawsuit by environmental non-profit organizations contesting the forest management plan. Our team of 6 lived on a boat and were flown into the forested mountains each day. If that work had been done as part of the original forest plan, the team would have been camping out, and using less expensive means of transportation.

The forest plans on all three of those National Forests proposed timber sales on sacred areas of the indigenous peoples and none of the forest planners consulted with representatives of the tribes early in the planning process. There were complaints and challenges and lots of evidence that involving stakeholders early may be a good idea.

Since then, the federal government has changed land management policies to ensure that stakeholders have a voice in the creation of National Forest policy and laws have been created to encourage communication between government scientists and community representatives at the state level. This board will advise the bureau on conditions and trends in the forests of the State, facilitate dialogue between representatives of communities with diverse interests with respect to our forests, and provide input in the development, updating, and implementation of the state forest action plan. The board will have 21 members; 4 appointed by the Governor, 9 appointed by the Senate President, and 8 appointed by the Speaker of the House. It will meet at least four times a year.

I thank Representative O'Neill for sponsoring LD933. LD933 creates the Maine Forest Advisory Board to advise the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's Bureau of Forestry. The creation of this board is required under one of those laws created since I left the employ of the USDA Forest Service: the federal Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008.

I encourage you to vote to pass **LD 993: An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine.**