

**Written Testimony Regarding Slate of Mining Bills (LD 1363, 1433, 1476, 1471, 1495, 1508)  
Public Hearing on April 13, 2023**

By Evelyn deFrees, Searsmont (submitted online)

Greetings, Senator Stacy Brenner, Representative Lori Gramlich, and members of the Maine Legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

**I am Evelyn deFrees. I currently live in Searsmont and was born, grew up and still have family on the East Andover Road in Rumford.** I have appeared before this Committee over many years as staff and contracted advocate for many of the state's environmental and conservation organizations. Today, with these comments, I speak only for myself. On this issue, I am unaffiliated with any organization except by history and experience. I am grateful for the chance to share these comments which are focused on the slate of mining bills which generally call for various changes to the state's Metallic Mineral Mining Act (Mining Act) as it does or would apply to future proposals for mining in Maine. Several bills seem to be aimed at the recent lithium discovery on Plumbago Mountain in Newry and Rumford. In short, I ask you respectfully not to amend the Mining Act in any way that would weaken protections for Maine's natural resources and people.

**Why this matters to me.** I spent my early years living with my family on the East Andover Road, across an open field from the Ellis River with Plumbago Mountain enclosing the valley. We swam in, fished and canoed the Ellis, bicycled the East Andover/Route 5 loop, hiked up Rumford White Cap when the only trail was a narrow dirt track up from Farmer's Hill Road. Years later, I married my husband in a field beside the Ellis River in the shadow of that mountain.

**Ellis River Valley.** Scrolling to today—on the western side of Plumbago, the Valley has substantial conservation land stewarded by Mahoosuc Land Trust, acquired with help from the Land For Maine's Future Fund. Conserved forests contribute to carbon capture, wildlife corridors and open space. This land ensures everyone can climb Rumford White Cap from a well-marked trail, and everyone can walk and ski along the Ellis River Preserve. A few miles downriver, the Ellis River aquifer provides the public water supply for the Town of Rumford and, ironically, for Nestle/Poland Spring water operations. On the eastern side of Plumbago are Puzzle Mountain preserve, Grafton Notch State Park, the AT (which crosses Route 26 between Baldpate and Old Speck), Mahoosuc Public Reserved Land and further away, Sunday River recreation area. Across Rte 26 from the mountain's slope is the Bear River with many falls and local swimming holes.

**Local natural resources.** One of western Maine's major assets these days is the natural environment. The region is now a growing recreation destination. Residents work, raise their families, farm the fields, fish in the rivers and lakes and benefit from the open space and quality of life. Visitors increasingly arrive for hiking, hunting, paddling, skiing, and vacations in all seasons. Even the Androscoggin River, long dismissed as too polluted to save, has now—with much state effort—been deemed clean enough in most sections for paddling, fishing, and swimming. Tourism is more than ever a major contributor to the regional economy, one that relies on clean water, clean air, open space, and natural beauty. Plumbago and its lithium deposits sit right in the middle of this landscape.

**Clean tech for climate strategies.** Both professionally and personally, I am deeply committed to building a low-carbon future to combat local and global climate change. I have worked on projects to advance clean energy, electrification for vehicles and buildings, climate planning and more. I recognize that supplies of lithium are part of attaining this goal (specifically for EV batteries). Yet, it matters where and how the

minerals are dug out and what the effect on local land and water will be.

**Please don't amend the Mining Act.** A major mining operation on this mountain could have a detrimental effect forever on the Ellis River Valley and the surrounding area. The slope of Plumbago Mountain descends directly to the Ellis River with only a narrow road and farm field in between. Would anyone move to the Valley, or come to climb Rumford White Cap if greeted by a mining operation going full bore? For me, most of the proposed changes to the long-debated and carefully drafted current Mining Act are alarming. Those more expert than I will elaborate on the Mining Act's important protections for water quality and for taxpayers. We must ensure that regulations continue to prevent toxic tailings runoff and to provide significant owner financial investment for safe and complete clean-up at the end of any excavation.

**Questions I hope you'll consider and resolve before acting on the mining proposals.**

- What does a full examination of the world- and nation-wide sources of lithium tell us about the need or urgency for extraction right here in Maine?
- What do we know about the future of clean tech and electrification of vehicles and housing? Are we sure newly excavated lithium will continue to be sought or will there be continued innovation for more easily captured components thus reducing the need for lithium in future?
- What are the specifics of scope, depth, character of the lithium deposit and plans for extraction (not just the current explorations but full build-out)? How much rock/spodumene needs to be mined to capture how much usable lithium and what will that process of extraction entail?
- Where would the lithium-containing rock be processed and what effect would that have on the local region?
- Do lithium-containing spodumene and any co-located minerals contain any properties that would lead to toxic acid run-off or leachate during the mining or processing operation?
- How can we ensure that current and future Plumbago lithium mining proposals will not degrade the water quality of the Ellis River (to the west) and possibly Bear River (to the east), including the aquifers in the Ellis that supply water for the Town of Rumford?
- How can we ensure that any application for excavation of any metallic mineral goes through a thorough application process to ensure protections for water quality, mountain and valley wildlife habitat, and natural landscapes?
- Before any action is taken, how can we ensure that there are laws and regulations in place to protect a rural area like the Ellis River Valley from the major ongoing environmental disturbances of new road building, truck traffic, noise and dust impacts from mining blasting, rock crushing and other mining operations?
- Presented with the allegedly biggest mineral deposit discovery in recent history, can we give the Mining Act a chance to do its regulatory work before we debate new changes that might weaken its protections?
- What other mining proposals may be waiting in the wings and how do we ensure that we have the regulatory protections in place in the future for all of them?

As you deliberate, please imagine the impact of a major lithium mine on Rumford's Ellis River Valley and Newry's Bear River Valley—the wildlife, water quality, conserved forestland and fields, quality of life of its residents and the economy of western Maine. **Thank you for your time** and attention to all the information that now lies before you.

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