

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 1817

**“An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All
Maine Students Program”**

DATE OF HEARING: May 10, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. I am Emily MacCabe, Director of Information and Education at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, providing this on behalf of the Department, in support of **L.D. 1817**.

This bill establishes the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program to provide immersive outdoor education to serve students enrolled in grade 4 to grade 8 in the State.

Our agency supports the intent and focus of the bill, particularly as it relates to educating our youth on the State’s outdoor heritage, environment and natural resources, protecting and managing fish, game and other wildlife and their habitats including restoring endangered species and safely enjoying the outdoors.

The Department has a full-time Outreach and Education Supervisor who works with schools to train teachers on developing outdoor focused curriculum through Project Wild and Nature of Teaching.

The Department also offers several ongoing education programs for youth including camps offered in partnership with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and many “Next Step” Learn to Hunt workshops in partnership with local community organizations and fish and game clubs. The Department also supports a number of existing public-school programs that offer outdoor learning opportunities through outing clubs or extracurricular offerings.

Additionally, our agency offers safety education courses both online and in-person related to hunting, trapping and operation of recreational vehicles in the outdoors. The course content meets national standards, and the in-person courses are led by certified volunteer instructors across the state. Many are associated with an organized fish and game club, adult education program, or civic organization.

While we feel that the elements of this bill provide meaningful learning opportunities for students in Maine, we do have significant concerns with the fiscal impact of this bill, which is expected to be \$12 million per biennium. Funding for this effort has not been included in the Governor’s proposed budget. Additionally, we are concerned about the potential need for additional resources from our agency to train or assist the schools with ongoing efforts. It appears, based on the bill language that Inland Fisheries and Wildlife may be asked to have a staff represent the agency on the advisory committee. I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or be available to answer questions during the work session.