

Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director

In support of

LD 1881 An Act Regarding Compensation Fees and Related Conservation Efforts to Protect Soils and Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat from Solar and Wind Energy Development and High-impact Electric Transmission Lines Under the Site Location of Development Laws

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the joint standing committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Eliza Townsend, pleased to speak to you in support of *LD 1881 An Act Regarding Compensation Fees and Related Conservation Efforts to Protect Soils and Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat from Solar and Wind Energy Development and High-impact Electric Transmission Lines Under the Site Location of Development Laws*.

AMC is the nation's oldest conservation, recreation and education organization with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,600 members in Maine and own 100,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

The two most pressing environmental issues of our time are climate change and biodiversity loss. They are impacting us now—witness the extreme flood damage last week—and will affect the very future of life on our planet. We must act swiftly, deliberately, and with great determination to address them, and LD 1881 is one smart approach.

Most of us agree that we need to develop alternative sources of energy. Yet, we recognize that developing them has impacts on valuable natural resources such as wildlife habitat and corridors, large forest blocks, and soils of statewide importance. Further, scientists have identified the goal of saving 30% of the world's land and waters by 2030 as an essential strategy to combat biodiversity loss.

This bill creates a predictable and consistent system for compensating for the negative impacts of grid-scale solar and wind energy projects as well as high impact energy transmission lines. Compensation projects will need to be located in the same biophysical region as the development, furthering the likelihood that similar soils or habitat will be conserved. This proposal is a welcome improvement over the current approach, and the development of clear rules for its implementation is among the most important provisions of LD 1881.

We are aware of conversations about the compensation program becoming a funding source for the beloved and effective Land for Maine's Future program. We have more questions than answers about that idea at this point, including whether the purposes of the two programs align. Further, while compensation for large scale development is imperative, development must never be the sole source of funding for land conservation and recreational access.

We strongly support LD 1881 and appreciate the hard work of the many stakeholders who collaborated to bring it forward. We urge your support.