



Natural Resources Council of Maine
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**Testimony in Opposition to LD 1685,
*An Act to Increase Acreage Eligibility and Change Requirements for Filing Plans Under the
Maine Tree Growth Tax Law***

May 11, 2023

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Committee on Taxation, I am Melanie Sturm, the Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to LD 1685.

The Tree Growth Tax Law is one of the few incentives in Maine for landowners to maintain their forests. It is one of Maine's "current use" property tax programs, along with the Farmland Program and Open Space Program, that lowers property taxes for qualifying landowners. Since 1972, the Tree Growth Tax Law has helped Maine landowners keep their property as working forests, preserving many values of forestland, including their recreational and scenic qualities, economic benefits to the forest products sector, and use as wildlife habitat. *Maine Won't Wait*, the state's four-year climate action plan, recognized the importance of forests in capturing and storing carbon as well. To date, the Tree Growth Tax Program has succeeded at preventing development in inappropriate places.

NRCM has concerns with the provision in LD 1685 that would increase the acreage eligibility requirement from 10 to 25 acres of forested land beginning April 1, 2025. We have no issues with the other provision of the bill related to the State Tax Assessor retaining copies of required forest management and harvest plans. Increasing the minimum acreage for enrollment in the Tree Growth Tax Program to 25 acres would result in less land being enrolled in the program. This could significantly reduce the beneficial effects of the Tree Growth program, leading to more development on large lots and creating undesirable sprawl and subdivisions. When considering this bill, it would be helpful to know the number and locations of parcels between 10 and 25 acres that would fall out of Tree Growth if this bill were enacted. We are fairly certain that such information would reveal that forested land located near municipalities would suddenly become vulnerable to development.

NRCM believes that protections for Maine's forests should be strengthened not weakened, and that tampering with the Tree Growth Tax Law would be counterproductive to the state's other interests in sustaining a strong forest products industry, protecting wildlife habitat, and enhancing nature-based climate solutions through forest carbon sequestration and storage.

I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose the portion of LD 1685 that would change the eligibility threshold for the Tree Growth program from 10 to 25 acres. Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.