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Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources

RE: LD 1915 - Resolve, to Establish a Grant Program to Issue Shellfish Licenses to Qualified Disabled Veterans

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to submit written comments in support of LD 1915 , Resolve, to Establish a Grant Program to Issue Shellfish Licenses to Qualified Disabled Veterans.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

Our organization fully embraces the principles of equity and recognizes the importance of integrating them into all aspects of our work to achieve TNC's vision of a world where "the diversity of life thrives". It is with great enthusiasm that we express our support for the proposed bill that directs the Department of Marine Resources to establish a program aimed at awarding grants for shellfish restoration projects, with a special emphasis on shellfish seeding, to municipalities that commit to reserving municipal shellfish licenses for qualified disabled veterans.

TNC has committed to continually identifying and seizing opportunities to understand, check, surrender, share, and use our power to increase equity. One of our strategies for connecting people with nature includes, "Working with communities to promote lasting economic prosperity through natural solutions and community driven sustainability." The proposed program accomplishes this goal by lifting up the community of disabled veterans and ensuring that they are able to engage in meaningful work that benefits both our environment and their personal well-being.

TNC urges the committee to support LD 1915. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and I am available to answer questions at any time.