

John Maddaus
Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine
LD 1349

Testimony of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine
In Support of LD 1349 An Act to Review State Lands and Waterways of Sacred,
Traditional, or Other Importance to Wabanaki People

Presented for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, January 22, 2024.

Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is John Maddaus, and I am chair of
the Legislative Committee of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal
Diocese of Maine. On behalf of the Committee on Indian Relations, I ask you to vote
Ought to Pass on LD 1349.

For 32 years, the Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations has lived into our mission
“to deepen our relationship with the Wabanaki of Maine, to stand with the tribes in
the pursuit of justice, to affirm their inherent sovereignty, and to support the
preservation of Native languages and culture.”

What does it mean to pursue justice for the Wabanaki nations? Return of lands stolen
from the Wabanaki nations during the past 400 years must be high on any list! The
federal funding provided to the tribes to purchase back some of their ancestral lands
as part of the land claims settlement of 1980 was a step in that direction, although it
came at the cost of state infringement on Wabanaki sovereignty. More specifically,
since the lands acquired had to be from willing sellers, these lands were not
necessarily those most important to the Wabanaki, and the Passamaquoddy Tribe and
Penobscot Nations have yet to acquire all the acreage that was promised. The
Wabanaki now control less than 1% of their ancestral lands. In short, the process of
land return is still a work in progress.

Some recent progress in land acquisition and access has been accomplished through
cooperative efforts among the Wabanaki Nations, the Wabanaki Commission on Land
and Stewardship, First Light Community, and several partnering conservation and
land trust organizations. Successful land transfer efforts include the Mi'kmaq
Nation's acquisition of Sunrise Tree Farm in Aroostook County, the return of the
island formerly known as Pine Island to the Passamaquoddy Tribe in Washington
County, and the return of lands in Williamsburg Township, Piscataquis County, to the
Penobscot Nation. We celebrate these efforts, and we see LD 1349 as an invitation to
the State of Maine to join in this work of seeking land justice.

LD 1349 would create a commission of state and tribal representatives and Maine
citizens to review what state lands and waterways are of most significance to the
Wabanaki, to investigate the feasibility of land return, and to propose how return
could be accomplished. The commission process, including public hearings, would
provide a way to seek answers to the many questions that will inevitably arise.

From the 1970 return of the sacred Blue Lake and 48,000 acres of surrounding lands
to Taos Pueblo in New Mexico, signed into law by President Nixon, to the 2016
creation of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah with a co-management partnership
that gives participation and voice to five Indigenous Nations, land return and land
access is on an on-going, nationwide process.

We urge the State of Maine to join with Indigenous peoples, conservation
organizations, and the federal government in exploring how the unjust taking of
Indigenous lands in the past can be addressed as we move forward. We urge you to
vote Ought to Pass on LD 1349. Thank you for your time and your consideration of
our testimony.