



Maine Coast Heritage Trust

A Statewide Land Conservation Organization

Testimony on LD 1349: An Act to Review State Lands and Waterways That Have Sacred, Traditional or Other Significance to the Wabanaki People

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1349 on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust conserves and stewards Maine's coastal lands and islands for their renowned scenic beauty, ecological value, outdoor recreational opportunities, and contribution to community well-being. We provide statewide conservation leadership through our work with land trusts, coastal communities, and other partners. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres in Maine.

Enactment of LD 1349 would enhance work being done throughout Maine between the state's land trust community and the Wabanaki Nations to return important lands to Tribal ownership and enhance access for Tribal members to conserved properties. These efforts are strengthening historical and cultural ties, as well as expanding critical economic opportunities. While the voluntary conservation done by land trusts is primarily focused on private lands, which is most of Maine, what has been lacking has been a similar assessment of public lands, including the more than one million acres of conservation areas owned by the state. LD 1349 is an important step toward addressing this.

To ensure the evaluation process of Maine's public lands is most effective and transparent, LD 1349 would establish a public process by which to gather information to inform the dialogue. The Commission outlined in LD 1349 would identify areas of significance to the Wabanaki people, examine similar processes used in other states, and by the Federal Government and collect insights from communities and citizens. With this knowledge and public feedback, the State can advance a respectful dialogue about how to restore meaningful access to these lands and waterways for Wabanaki people. We urge this committee to support LD 1349.