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Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director
The Nature Conservancy in Maine
kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org



Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

RE: 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 Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1349 - An Act to Review State Lands and Waterways That Have Sacred, Traditional or Other Significance to the Wabanaki People.**

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. TNC 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.

Our organization has collaborated with Indigenous Peoples across North America and has learned that when Indigenous communities have the authority to manage lands and waters, it leads to more durable conservation and stronger, more vibrant communities. Here in Maine, we not only have the opportunity to work with Wabanaki partners to advance the health of our shared natural world, but we also have the responsibility to do so. TNC has committed to work with and in support of the Wabanaki Tribes in Maine to support this goal, and we support the creation of a Commission to review state-owned lands and waterways with the intention to develop a process to return lands and waterways of sacred, traditional or other significance to the Wabanaki nations.

Before parties can engage in meaningful dialogue, it is important to develop a process by which to gather information to inform that dialogue. The Commission outlined in this bill would identify areas of significance to the Wabanaki Tribes, examine similar processes used in other states and by the Federal Government, and collect insights from communities and public comment. With this knowledge, 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 2034. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.