

Testimony in Favor of LD 2007

D. Gordon Mott

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Chairmen Sen. Carney and Rep. Moonen, and Distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is D. Gordon Mott. I reside in Lakeville, Penobscot County. I am Maine Licensed Forester 772, and a Maine Land Manager in private practice here for 42 years. I was previously employed by Canadian Forest Service and US Forest Service. I have degrees from University of New Brunswick and Yale. I have been a resident and citizen of Maine for 48 years.

In my professional career I had the challenge and the privilege to work for the Passamaquoddy Tribe in some of the years when it was acquiring their lands after the Indian Land Claims Case, and dealing with the spruce budworm outbreak of the 70's-80's as one of the pioneering users of the biological insecticide BT, and as it began to bring their forest land under management. In addition, as a resident and voter in Lakeville, I also had the experience of participating in the prescribed local municipal process to bring the Penobscot Nation land in Lakeville from fee to Trust status.

In the span of my 30 years in the Maritime Provinces and 62 years as a US citizen in Eastern New England I have known a bit about the people of the First Nations. I was a child in New Brunswick as neighbor to a Mi'kmaq First Nation community on the salt water shore at the mouth of the Restigouche River. As a young forester I came to know some of the still uncut and undeveloped forestland of the watersheds in that region including some of the historic woodland trails that were established by the original people of those lands. In recent years I have experienced some of the culture of the current Wabanaki communities in our region in which the original language is still spoken and ancient customs and principles of life and values still exist.

I know that there is a great difference in the way that the Wabanaki People of Maine are treated in that they do not enjoy the same treaty benefits of all the other federally recognized Native American Tribes because of the unequal terms of the Indian Land Claims Settlement Act.

I write to urge you to support the very right and just proposal to bring equality to our Wabanaki citizens who have again and again been strong supporters of our State and Nation in wars, in community values, in art, and in local economies. As our elected representatives, I ask you to act with fairness and justice on behalf of us all.

I know professionally these people strive to be good stewards of their part of Maine's natural resources. Their communities and forest economies are under the same economic stresses and influences as everybody else. But management principles put in place by themselves and the Bureau of Indian Affairs ensure permanent road access for future forest management, careful forest pest control, forest regeneration, young stand development, and

sustained allowable harvest levels – while providing a flow of income to tribal members and tribal government in some of the same excellent ways that management of Maine Public and Park lands are tended. Some members of the Tribes have become professional foresters of distinction contributing in their employment to Tribal, State and Federal Agencies. And in very significant ways they preserve and document Native historical and archaeological artifacts.

For example, I remember with pleasure the day I visited an archeological dig being conducted to document the history of their occupation of the lands downeast since the last ice age in Washington County. I was invited to step down in an excavation pit at what was found to be a historic campsite to see and touch a beautiful just-revealed scraper carved from rhyolite from Moosehead Lake's Mount Kineo. With one hand on it, I reached the other hand across 5,500 years to a Passamaquoddy Tribal Member for a lift up out of the pit. The people have been here in their communities on their land for longer than anybody. Their special rights and privileges from their first and long ownership should be recognized.

That evening I taught a class in a course on Township about using personal computers. The class included one person who constructed a database to catalog the known grave sites of Tribal Members in a historical cemetery. Tribal members were spoken of in class who in past years had to voluntarily isolate themselves away to a lake island to protect the others when they were infected by officially provided smallpox-infected blankets. They were fed with food left on the shore by the community. That class member was also a gifted artistic basket-maker who has passed her prize-winning artistry along to enrich our entire Nation today through her own and the outstanding work of others.

While I found there are differences among individual people in the principles they adhere to – in many ways reflecting the difficult influences they have had to endure over 400 years, there are still unique historic understandings in common about living on the lands, and ownership traditions that merit understanding and deep respect for their inherent rights.

I urge you to give your strongest support to enacting these carefully developed proposals.

It is the absolute fundamental right of these, our Wabanaki neighbors, to have these rights today, as they long had before others came and took them by guile and force.

They themselves have joined in defending and dying for our Constitutional rights in global conflict as distinguished members of our armed services.

They have now patiently, carefully, respectfully and deliberately gone forward, together with a large consensus of many of us, to define the principles, craft the language, and find these fair agreements and bring the clear and simple proposals before you to be acted upon.

Please advance this significant part of Maine's justice with your supportive votes.

Thank you for your consideration and for your public service.

D. Gordon Mott

