

Testimony on Supplemental Budget LD 209, Part U

\$2million to “address the management and early intervention of Spruce Budworm.”

To: Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committees

Joint Public Hearing, January 21, 2025

From: David D. Griswold, Maine LF #370, 199 Gamage Avenue, Auburn, Maine

Members of the Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on LD 209, Part U. I fully support including \$2 million in the Supplemental Budget to “address the management and early intervention of Spruce Budworm.”

This appropriation is necessary to draw from the \$14 million in federal funds championed by Senator Collins for 2025 Spruce Budworm response efforts as part of the Disaster Relief bill.

As I began my career with International Paper in 1974, the last budworm outbreak was “blowing up”. I watched the larvae feed on buds in the spring and saw pupae covering branches as the life cycle progressed. I witnessed populations so dense that they ran out of food in the trees they were in and webbed down to the forest floor to feed on regeneration. At times spruce budworm fed on hemlock as well as spruce and fir. I witnessed rusty colored crowns of damaged and dying trees covering the landscape as far as the eye could see.

Over the next decade, the feeding frenzy continued. Millions of trees died in the North Woods. Salvage efforts resulted in the clearcut controversy that changed how Maine forests are managed. Harvesting systems evolved to handle smaller stems. Clearcutting recovered value from the dying stands, reduced fuel in the forest, and stimulated the development of a spruce fir lumber industry in Maine.

In 1986 I contributed to an internal study of the spruce-fir supply for the International Paper Mill in Jay. The projections of a reduced supply of spruce-fir in Maine supported changes in spruce-fir sourcing to place more emphasis on New Hampshire and Vermont, and an eventual switch from spruce-fir to aspen in the Androscoggin’s groundwood mill. Other paper mills shifted to more hardwood consumption. By the last 1980’s, salvaged spruce-fir trees were rotting from the outside in, and were not suitable for pulpwood. Spruce-fir stumpage rates rose to unprecedented levels. New competition for hardwood also raised stumpage rates. Wood prices in Maine became the highest of any mill in the International Paper system. Wood cost was one factor affecting the ability of Maine paper mills to compete in the global market.

In short, the last spruce budworm outbreak had enormous impacts on our State.

Spruce budworm is a native species. It is now beginning its cyclical return. Anything that the State and landowners can do cooperatively to reduce the scope and impact of the emerging outbreak will directly or indirectly benefit everyone in Maine.

As we see from the wildfires in California, wildfires have huge financial, social and environmental impact. A spruce budworm outbreak that kills millions of trees is a huge risk to Maine. Climate change is producing more frequent and severe droughts. The mills that provided a market for salvaged spruce-fir, Androscoggin, Millinocket, Madison and Bucksport, are gone. Anything we can do proactively to prevent the North Woods from becoming a tinder box is urgently needed. Otherwise, we may have to look forward to fires we have never experienced, even in 1947, "the year Maine burned".

I have great faith in the Maine Forest Service experts who are collaborating with Maine landowners and drawing from Canadian experience to implement the early intervention plan. That is our best hope. The \$2 million cost which leverages additional federal funds is well worth it given the immense cost of doing nothing.

I urge you to support this line item in LD 209 Part U.

Thank you.