

Good afternoon Madam Chairman, committee members. My name is Timothy E. LeSiege and I am here today to speak in favor of passage of LD 138 "An Act to Exempt Airports from Certain State Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat Protections". I am here as a Professional Engineer, an Aviation Engineer to be precise. I currently work at Jacobs Engineering Group as an Aviation Project Manager, primarily for projects here in Maine, but the vast majority of my experience in this arena comes from my 17 years working as the Aviation Engineer at MaineDOT. My former position consisted of overseeing design and construction projects at Maine's 32 NPIAS airports, all of which receive funding from the Federal Aviation Administration and MaineDOT.

Of these airports, 26 of these are considered General Aviation Airports or GA. As such receive an appropriation of only \$150,000 per year of what is called Entitlement funding from the FAA. The remaining six airports are Commercial Airports and get a much larger amount. This funding is meant to be used for all aviation-related capital improvement projects. This is a Reimbursement program. Grants must be applied for in order to receive the monies that are spent on these projects. I want to share two mission statements with you today, first the FAA, whose "continuing mission is to provide the safest, most efficient aerospace system in the world." The second mission statement is that from the MaineDOT which is "To support economic opportunity and quality of life by responsibly providing our customers the safest and most reliable transportation system possible, given available resources." I'd like to highlight the most important word in both statements, "safest".

I tell you this today as background. With regards to Certain State Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat here in Maine, the NPIAS airports are disparately affected. Please think about an airport for a moment and the vehicles that use it, aircraft. Are you aware of the hazards wildlife bring to airports? I'd like to read you an opening excerpt from the USDA report entitled "Wildlife Strikes in the United States 1990-2023". The report starts by stating "Although

birds are critical ecologic, economic, and esthetic components of the environment deserving rigorous international protection, they can at times conflict with human activities such as aviation. Aircraft collisions with birds and other wildlife (wildlife strikes) have become a growing concern for aviation safety. Factors that contribute to this threat are increasing populations of large birds and increased air traffic by quieter, turbofan-powered aircraft. Globally, wildlife strikes with civilian and military aircraft combined have killed more than 491 people and destroyed over 350 aircraft from 1988- 2023. Specific to the USA, wildlife strikes with civilian and military aircraft have killed 76 people and destroyed 126 aircraft from 1988-2023.” This is the beginning of a 147-page report discussing wildlife incidents at airports, the vast majority of these incidents being bird strikes. It’s a long report, but I can summarize here in just a few words, airports and airplanes don’t mix well with wildlife. Remember, it was birds that caused Sully to land in the Hudson River, a miraculous landing to say the least, but it was birds that caused the incident. The two most dangerous times of flight, takeoff and landing, both airport related.

Every NPIAS airport is responsible for creating a Wildlife Management plan and program. These programs include grass maintenance, rubbish management, wildlife harassment, and at times wildlife depredation. Many of the laws regarding wildlife, both State and Federal, protect not only the animals, but their habitat. It is the habitat that is most problematic for the issue we are talking about today. Please let me put this bluntly, airports are not the place to create and maintain wildlife habitats, in fact, they are one of the worst places. I’d like to give you the cycle of issues here with regards to an airport. Airports are broad expanses of grassy land interrupted by segments of pavement. Grassy lands are home to rodents and small birds, depending on the length of grass. Very short grass houses very small rodents, when maintained at very short height, the small rodent population grows, as this population grows, so does the predator population, small carnivorous mammals, and, more problematically,

raptors, hawks, eagles, and owls. All very dangerous to aircraft. Short grass is also very much appreciated by turkeys and geese, the bane of all airports in Maine. How do we prevent raptors, geese and turkeys? Grow the grass a little taller. Herein lies the problem, if you grow it too tall it becomes the habitat of larger mammals, like fox, coyotes, and worse, whitetail deer. USDA has determined the optimum length of grass to be, I believe, 8-10". Tall enough to keep the geese away, and hide small rodents from raptors, but short enough to keep away deer and small mammals. It's a vicious cycle.

Maines protection of our State Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat requires airports to NOT cut grass all summer to protect the habitat for small birds that may or may not even exist in these locations, remember, this is protecting habitat! It also requires that airports to NOT do any construction near these habitats from late spring through early summer. Think about this, when is Maine's construction season? It starts in spring, usually late spring by the time mud season is over and the roads are no longer posted and ends in Mid-November. But by these rules, airports lose up to four months of a seven-month construction season. This makes for tight schedules and high construction costs! Regardless of cost, let's go back to the grass cutting, is creating habitat for wildlife at an airport, especially right beside runways and taxiways really the right thing to do? Not only is unsafe for airplanes. It's unsafe for the very wildlife we are trying to protect! The safest way to protect the actual wildlife is to NOT have their habitat at an airport! Remember, wildlife and airports don't mix, why are we forcing them to do so? Why are we creating and maintaining their habitats at airports? We should be discouraging it! I could go on regarding all of the issues I, and my colleagues in the aviation industry, go through with Maines environmental laws. But suffice to say, Maine's environmental laws, while well intended, are onerous and costly to deal with and as another issue very hard for MaineDEP to keep up with. It should come as no surprise that MaineDEP is understaffed and overworked. The time frame for environmental permits and investigations negatively impacts airport projects and

funding, but this is another discussion. This committee and, the full legislature, can help Maine's airports become some of the safest in the Nation by passing this one Act. It's not all that is needed, but it is a great step in the right direction. By passing this Act, you will aid Maine airports in meeting the mission statements of both the MaineDOT and the FAA in making our airports "the safest, most efficient aerospace system" and "the safest and most reliable transportation system possible." Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions anyone has at this time.