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Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

RE: LD 183 - An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50 Percent of Any County

Senator Talbot Ross, 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 submit written comment in opposition to LD 183 - An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50 Percent of Any County.** This bill is a repeat of an effort from the 130th Legislature that was unanimously opposed by the ACF Committee and we urge you to oppose this idea again.

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. The Nature Conservancy 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.

In our direct experience here in Maine, we have seen tremendous benefits to communities, economies, and natural resources from conservation efforts. According to survey of Maine voters TNC commissioned in January 2023 with FM3 Research (Democratic Polling Firm) and New Bridge Strategy (Republican Polling Firm), nearly 7 in 10 voters see "great need / some need" for additional funding to protect air, water, and land.

LD 183 would set arbitrary limits on publicly owned land and seems to be raising transparency issues that are already fully addressed in the public process for establishing public lands. The definition of "publicly owned land" in this bill is broad and to our knowledge not consistent with any other definition of publicly owned land in Maine statute. The phrase "or other ownership interests" in the definition would include a huge range of properties from state parks, recreation areas with federal or state funding, to community parks or municipally owned properties, and privately-owned lands where a public entity holds a conservation easement.

Restricting public land ownership by county erodes property values and the rights and tools available to private landowners. Today landowners have many options and programs available to them as they manage and plan for the future of their properties. Some may seek to sell or donate their lands to public entities; others may want to permanently preserve their legacy by ensuring their lands remain as working forests or working farms through easements. These tools are popular with landowners, but LD 183 threatens to make them unavailable in the future for certain landowners depending on where they happen to be located. We urge you to vote ought not to pass on LD 183.