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***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources***

RE: LD 210 - An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to offer written comments in support of the biennial budget proposal for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).**

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. 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. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

Proposals related to the Department of Environmental Protection can be found in the 2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget - Part A document starting on page A-250.

The environmental laws administered by DEP provide the underpinning for Maine's way of life. To successfully carry out its mission, DEP needs appropriate resources. This is true under normal circumstances, but the Department has seen an increased workload in recent years that will continue to grow in the next two years. The budget proposal before you is modest but continues investment in DEP's core programs and mission - air and water quality protection. Specifically, TNC supports the proposed additional FTEs requested in this budget. Two of the proposed positions are for Land Licensing work which will help DEP ensure important permitting decisions are processed quickly while also maintaining high review standards.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment and I am happy to answer questions at any time.