



Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
c/o Office of Fiscal and Program Review
5 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 6, 2025

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

Dear Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Gattine, and Members of the AFA Committee:
Sen. Tepler, Rep. Doudera, and ENR Members:

My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon’s Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine’s wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on LD 210, specifically, the proposed budget initiatives and language related to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Maine Audubon supports the proposed budget initiatives and language related to the DEP¹ as each are essential to the agency fulfilling its responsibility to protect and restore Maine’s natural resources and enforce the state’s environmental laws. We strongly support any and all efforts—in and beyond the proposals before you—that will strengthen the Department’s ability to recruit and retain employees. Currently, many Department positions are vacant, primarily because the pay is not commensurate with the position’s required skills and responsibility. Position vacancies are hindering the Department’s ability to do its best work protecting and restoring Maine’s natural resources.

The proposed additional FTEs requested in this budget under the Maine Environmental Protection Fund are of particular interest to our organization. The additional environmental specialist and licensing positions are critical to helping DEP do their best work to ensure that essential environmental permitting decisions are processed fairly, quickly, and commensurate with statutory standards. For example, it is our understanding that Department staff are exceedingly challenged to meet permit review deadlines, at a time when the state is experiencing significant growth and development pressure

¹ Budget proposals related to the DEP can be found [2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget](#) – Part A, A-250–A-266.

and more frequent and severe storm events. Relieving this pressure is not just about relieving stress—it's about giving employees the space to consider potential natural resource impacts and carefully balance development and disaster needs. I reiterate, the urgency of climate change demands that the Department act as soon as possible. Greater staff capacity will help the Department act.

Additionally, we enthusiastically support Part MM,² which would increase funding to support the Board of Environmental Protection (BEP) as they continue to tackle some of the most difficult issues facing our wildlife and wildlife habitat. Whether it be the responsible siting of our critical renewable energy resources, or ensuring adequate protection of our precious wetlands, the BEP covers a wide breadth of complex issues that require careful attention to detail and deep knowledge of our state's resources. As a citizen board, BEP members are tasked with an incredible amount of work, and we believe that members and DEP supporting staff should be adequately supported. In order to ensure timely and successful interpretation, administration, and enforcement of our critical environmental laws, it is vital that we adequately resource all work undertaken by the Board of Environmental Protection.

Supporting the proposed budget initiatives and language in the Department's budget, as well as considering other opportunities to expand DEP's capacity, will allow the agency to do their best work. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy

² Language proposals related to the DEP can be found [2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget - Language](#) – Part MM, p. 86.