



**Testimony on 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 Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee; Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust in support of initiatives related to the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program found in part Z162.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust seeks to advance the conservation of lands and waters in Maine to ensure ecological wellbeing and foster thriving communities. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres, including over 160 places open for traditional outdoor recreation.

Four years ago, the legislature approved two limited term positions within the LMF program. This was done to both return the program to its previous level of staffing, after a series of cuts in the 2010s, and to ensure the program had the capacity to effectively implement a 4-year/\$40 million appropriation simultaneously approved by the legislature.

Both limited term positions have played critical roles in the past few years, as the LMF program has strategically invested the \$40 million in support of Maine people and in furtherance of policies enacted by the state legislature, policies that included a targeted focus on protecting deer habitat in Northern Maine and an increased emphasis on conserving places closer to the state's population centers. In response, LMF is working to acquire more than 9,000 acres of critical white-tailed deer winter habitat in Aroostook and Somerset Counties. At the same time, the program is busy completing numerous projects in the Greater Portland Region, York County, along the Mid Coast, and in southern Androscoggin County. In sum, since 2021 LMF is on track to:

- Expand public access for traditional outdoor recreational activities on 80,000 acres of land, spread out across more than 50 communities throughout the state,
- Preserve more than 29,000 acres of working forestlands,
- Conserve a dozen productive farms and agricultural areas,
- Protect seven working waterfront properties, and
- Secure five new recreational water access sites.

These recent accomplishments build upon a nearly four-decade long track record of success. Since Maine voters first approved funding for LMF in 1987, the program has protected:

- Over 640,000 acres of conservation and recreation lands with guaranteed access for traditional outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, hunting, wildlife watching, and fishing,
- 73 recreational water access sites for boating, fishing, and swimming,

- More than 158 miles of former railroad corridors available for trail users, including ATV riders and snowmobilers,
- 42 farms totaling 9,819 acres,
- 30 commercial working waterfront properties from York to Eastport, and
- More than 365,000 acres of privately-owned working forestlands.

Maine people continue to look toward LMF as a critical tool for both supporting key natural resource-based industries including fishing, farming, forestry, and tourism, as well as securing public access to special outdoor places of regional and statewide importance that make our state a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

In 2025, the LMF program has two priority needs. The first is to make permanent the two limited term positions included in this year's budget, as both will expire on June 30th. In addition, LMF has spent or committed nearly all the \$40 million approved by the legislature in 2021. To ensure the program continues to deliver for Maine people in 2025 and beyond, it is critical the legislature also look to recapitalize LMF this year. Multiple bipartisan proposals will be considered later this session to do just that. We look forward to working with the ACF and AFA Committees to find the best path forward.