

Jean Wiecha  
Portland  
LD 226

To the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Jean Wiecha and my husband and I share a family cottage on Penobscot Bay in Northport. We live in Portland.

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of LD 226, "An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections".

Our cottage sits near Brown's Head facing Sears Island about four miles across the bay. My husband's grandfather purchased the cottage in the 1920s and our children now comprise the fourth generation honored with stewardship of our small stretch of shore. We treasure being able to see Sears Island, covered from north to south in trees, standing guard over upper Penobscot Bay. Throughout the summer we hike there, sail there, and sometimes just sit there. Its woods are peaceful and its views inspire awe.

Yet we are always worried about the island's fate. Sears Island has come under assault by industry and developmental pressures repeatedly over the years. It's time now to take steps to protect and preserve Sears Island in perpetuity and prevent destruction and disruption of the natural habitat it provides. Northern Penobscot Bay needs a comprehensive conservation plan, but in lieu of that we can start- now- by protecting Sears Island.

We understand that hard decisions have to be made for industry and energy in our climate crisis, but there is an easy decision that should be foundational in these discussions: protect land and water. Undisturbed habitats are resources we cannot replace. They should always come first. Leaving a piece of Sears Island unprotected will always mean that the entire island is at risk, because when habitat is disrupted, wildlife flee. For this reason, it makes great sense to end the ongoing tension over the portion of Sears Island controlled by the DOT, and put the entire island into a conservation easement.