

Doug Welch  
First Light Island Access Working Group  
LD 14

Testimony in Support of LD 14: An Act to Provide Indigenous People Free Access to State Parks, sponsored by Senator Craig Hickman,  
Submitted by Doug Welch, First Light Island Access Working Group

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry: My name is Doug Welch. For the past four years, I have been working with the nonprofit group First Light to increase Wabanaki tribal citizens access to lands in Maine. I submit this testimony on behalf of First Light's Island Access Working Group, which is composed of representatives of 10 Maine nonprofit and public entities. For the past three years the group has been successfully working to increase access to Maine's coastal islands and other coastal properties by Wabanaki people.

Maine's state parks are cherished by Maine residents and visitors alike. By definition they are some of the state's most beautiful and inspiring places, which led them to become state parks in the first place. But they hold an even deeper significance for the Wabanaki people. These special places have been sacred to indigenous communities since time immemorial, supporting both spiritual and practical needs. Waiving visitor fees to the parks for Wabanaki citizens would be a powerful act of recognition and respect, reaffirming their historic connection to these ancestral lands.

This Act would come at very little cost to the state of Maine: the loss of a small number of park entry fees whose budgetary impact would be negligible. This new approach would be consistent with traditional recreational uses of parklands. It aligns with similar policies adopted elsewhere, such as Minnesota, which now grants free access to Minnesota state parks for 11 tribal nations there.

On behalf of the Island Access Working Group, I urge the committee to pass LD 14 and establish unfettered Wabanaki access to Maine's state parks. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Doug Welch  
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