

John Wyatt
Winterport
LD 226

Sears Island
Testimony in Support of LD226

My name is John Wyatt, a resident of the town of Winterport, and a frequent visitor to Sears Island over the past two decades. As a birder my testimony focuses on bird migration on the island.

Sears Island is a major passage area and concentration point for a wide range of migratory birds. Warblers, Vireos, thrushes and many other passerine species land on the island at night during their annual spring and fall migrations. They will then move off the island the following morning, flying from its northern end heading to the mainland. This movement of birds can entail several thousand individuals in a single morning. Indeed, Sears Island has some of the highest numbers and greatest concentrations of migrating songbirds of any location in the entire state. I have witnessed huge numbers of individual species flying off the island from the area where the causeway is located at the Island's northern tip. For example, 75 Blue-headed Vireos, 245 American Redstarts, 33 Bay-breasted Warblers, and 400 Dark-eyed Juncos, have been recorded by me on single mornings. Others have recorded equally high or higher numbers of several species on single fall mornings, including 200 Blackpoll Warblers—a state threatened species.

Any tall structures and power lines constructed on the island will be deadly hazards for migratory birds. From my observations, even the current utility wires that follow the causeway and service the island's cell tower, already kill several birds through collision strikes each fall. Lighting at the proposed Windmill Port will disorient birds passing overhead. Noise from the port, which might only be a nuisance to our ears, can frighten birds and other animals as well.

Trees on the island are a major food source for birds, harboring insects and producing seeds that migrant birds glean for much-needed energy. It strikes me as truly amazing as to how many insects the large numbers of these birds must be consuming. I have watched migrating birds move through the trees constantly looking for and feeding on caterpillars before flying off, and this happens day after day. Tree loss on the island will only have detrimental impacts on all wildlife.

Access onto the island, currently served by the causeway, is planned to be heavily altered for the wind port, with road "improvements" and rail lines added. This is precisely the area where so many birds gather, feed, and fly off the island, because from this point it is the shortest distance to the mainland. For wildlife and birds especially, any development of a port will eliminate vital habitat and cause great harm.

This remarkable movement of birds primarily occurs in the very early morning and is overlooked by most people. Nevertheless, it still happens on many fall and spring days, and on certain days the number of birds seen flying across the causeway area can be spectacular. I believe it likely that during migration, birds are also moving from nearby Isleboro to Sears Island, and then on towards the mainland. Sears Island needs well-done environmental studies that adequately cover its usage by migrant birds, and I don't believe those have ever been undertaken. I am confident that data from such environmental studies would further support arguments against future commercial usage of the island.