

Luke Sekera-Flanders
Bangor
LD 226

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, members of the ENR Committee,

My name is Luke Sekera-Flanders, and I am testifying in support of LD 226.

Sears Island is remarkably one of the largest uninhabited and relatively undeveloped islands on the East Coast. The nuance that it was inhabited up until about 100 years ago and the fact that there have been impacts from previous development efforts deserves to be acknowledged. Still, while some use this history to diminish its ecological significance as it stands today, it is worth remembering that the vast majority of what is now the Katahdin National Monument was devastated by centuries of logging, yet I hope we would all agree that the ecological and cultural value of those lands today is incalculable.

I understand that in our necessary pursuit of alternatives to fossil fuels, which have hugely, demonstrably negative impacts on our climate, environment, and public health, there will still be imperfect outcomes and moments where we have to choose between the lesser of two evils. However, we have to consider how the looming possibility of development on Sears Island, even if for renewable energy purposes, aligns with our other priorities. The health of Penobscot Bay is intrinsically tied to the health of the Penobscot River. The marine ecosystems that surround Sears Island are critical to supporting the fish and other species which animate the bay and the River. The return of these species to the bay and river also mark a revival of local, natural food systems, which are also critical in our response to climate change. To put these ecosystems at risk seems contrary to the tremendous labor and resources invested by the Penobscot Nation and other organizations to restore the health of the Penobscot River. Protecting Sears Island even aligns with the mandate of the Maine State Legislature as found in Title 38, Chapter 3, Subchapter 1, Subsection 418-A titled Protection of the Penobscot River:

The Legislature finds that the Penobscot River is a unique and valuable natural resource. The Penobscot River serves as an example to the Nation that good public policy carefully implemented can restore and preserve our natural resources. The river has supported, and is again beginning to support, the greatest run of Atlantic salmon and 11 other species of anadromous fish in North America, providing a unique fishing opportunity for Maine residents and members of the Penobscot Indian Nation. The Legislature declares that the preservation and restoration of the Penobscot River is of the highest priority.

With the importance of protecting and restoring the Penobscot River in mind, I hope you will join me in supporting the conservation of Sears Island and its critical aquatic ecosystems.

Thank you for your consideration of this challenging issue.

Luke Sekera - Flanders