



LD 593 - An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program

Testimony in Support

Todd Martin - Northeast Senior Program Manager – National Parks Conservation Association

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. My name is Todd Martin. I live in Winslow, Maine and serve as the Northeast Senior Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. NPCA is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with more than 1.6 million members and supporters – with 8,000 right here in Maine. Together we work to protect and preserve our nation's most iconic and inspirational places for future generations. I am honored to be here representing NPCA to testify in support of LD 593, An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program.

For more than 105 years, NPCA has been speaking up for our national parks and the natural, historic, and cultural resources that make them so special. I am proud to advocate for national park sites here in Maine including Acadia National Park, Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, Saint Croix Island International Historic Site, the Frances Perkins National Monument, and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

The Land for Maine's Future Program is Maine's most successful land conservation funding mechanism. Since it was established in 1987, LMF has helped to conserve more than 600,000 acres, guaranteeing public access to some of the most beautiful and ecologically critical areas of our state. LMF also helps fund improvements to working waterfronts, working forests, and farmlands to support our natural resource-based economies. Each time an LMF bond appears on the ballot, Maine voters overwhelmingly approve the bond measure by more than 60%. LMF has broad bipartisan support, as demonstrated by this bill's long list of bipartisan sponsors.

We need the Maine Legislature to act now. LMF funds are running dry and could be completely depleted by the end of this year unless the legislature acts. LD 593 would direct \$10 million to the Land for Maine's Future Program in 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 to maintain the momentum that began in 2021, when Maine lawmakers approved a \$40 million LMF investment in the state budget.

As advocates for national parks, we are especially supportive of this legislation as it would allow our conservation partners in Maine to access critical matching funds to complete conservation projects abutting the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, 270 miles of which cross western and

northern Maine. We are aware of several conservation efforts in the works abutting the Appalachian Trail that could benefit from LMF matching funds. These projects would ensure the trail is protected from encroaching residential and commercial development, expand public access to recreation lands, protect the visitor experience on the trail, preserve critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, and support the economies of towns along the trail.

Since 1987, LMF has helped fund several conservation projects abutting the Appalachian Trail including in the Grafton Notch, Height of Land, Orbeton Stream, Mount Abraham, The Bigelow Mountain range, and Gulf Hagas. According to the National Park Service, more than 3 million people hike on the AT each year, with 9,000 completing a through hike of the entire 2,197 trail. Most hike northbound, finishing atop Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park. The trail is a driver of Maine's outdoor recreation economy as hikers support local businesses in rural Maine during their hike. The AT landscape also provides critical habitat for threatened and endangered species including Canada Lynx, Northern Long Eared Bats, Atlantic Salmon, just to name a few.

We urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 593 in order to support ongoing funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program. Thank you for your time, attention, and public service.

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