



Testimony in Support of LD 895

An Act to Increase Public Access to Outdoor Recreation

As a statewide organization dedicated to connecting Maine teens to life-changing outdoor experiences, Teens to Trails strongly supports LD 895. This bill would establish the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program to provide immersive outdoor education to students enrolled in grades 4 to 8 and a Program Fund within the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service.

The timing for this legislation couldn't be better. Maine's recently released 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap clearly identifies the critical need to engage youth in outdoor experiences as a key strategy for growing our state's \$3.4 billion outdoor recreation economy. This sector already employs 30,000 Mainers, making up nearly 5% of our statewide workforce - ranking 7th nationally for outdoor recreation employment percentage.

The Roadmap specifically calls for "expanding programming to teach outdoor recreation skills" and "engaging and equipping Maine's youth for careers in the outdoor industry." LD 895 directly addresses these priorities.

When young people develop meaningful connections to Maine's natural places, multiple benefits follow:

- They gain practical skills and confidence
- Our communities become more vibrant and resilient
- We create pathways to outdoor careers that Maine desperately needs

The health and well-being benefits of this bill cannot be overstated. As noted in Maine's Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap, outdoor recreation has "a profound impact on physical and mental health." Research consistently shows that time spent outdoors reduces stress, anxiety, and depression while improving physical fitness and cognitive function. For teens specifically, outdoor experiences can:

- Improve attention span and academic performance
- Reduce behavioral challenges
- Lower rates of obesity and related health conditions



- Build social skills and emotional resilience
- Decrease screen time and digital dependence
- Establish healthy lifestyle patterns that last into adulthood

The program proposed in LD 895 represents a smart investment in Maine's future workforce while addressing immediate needs in youth development.

Maine's identity and economy are deeply intertwined with our outdoor heritage. By supporting this legislation, you're ensuring that legacy continues with the next generation who will steward our natural resources, grow our outdoor businesses, and sustain our communities.

Teens to Trails urges you to vote in favor of LD 895 and make this investment in Maine's youth and economic future.

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