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Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director  
The Nature Conservancy in Maine  
[kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org](mailto:kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org)



***Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry***

***RE: LD 593 – An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine’s Future Program***

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to offer written comments in support of LD 593 – An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine’s Future Program.** We appreciate Senator Black’s efforts to bring this idea forward.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

The Land for Maine’s Future Program (LMF) has been an effective tool in protecting some of Maine’s most spectacular places and supporting our natural resource economy for over 30 years. During this time, the program has protected a wide variety of Maine resources including conserving landscapes for recreation and trails, protecting access to working waterfronts for fishermen, providing public water access to lakes and rivers, and supporting working farmland projects.

Each LMF project brings together a unique blend of the same formula – a state agency sponsor, a willing landowner ready to sell or indefinitely give up development rights, community stakeholders, and clear public benefits. LMF funding support also brings federal and/or private dollars to the table to complete these priority projects.

As you might imagine, bringing these pieces together requires patience and persistence. The best thing we can do to support the success of these efforts is build predictability and stability into the process. Long term funding for the Land for Maine’s Future program allows landowners the time they need to make decisions, allows state agency partners to plan further in advance and prioritize projects as they become ready, and allows community and conservation partners more time to pursue match funding.

According to survey of Maine voters TNC commissioned in January 2023 with FM3 Research (Democratic Polling Firm) and New Bridge Strategy (Republican Polling Firm),

nearly all Mainers say that clean water, natural areas, and wildlife are important to their quality of life. 94% said these attributes were extremely or very important – and this opinion is shared overwhelmingly by every demographic group of Maine voters. In the same survey, nearly 7 in 10 voters see “great need / some need” for additional funding to protect air, water and land. The LMF program consistently enjoys broad public support and has been approved by Maine voters each of the six times it has been on the ballot.

The Nature Conservancy strongly supports additional, long term funding for the Land for Maine’s Future program. We urge this committee to pass LD 593. Please do not hesitate to be in touch if our organization can provide additional information or support.