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March 13, 2025

The Honorable Rachel Tablot Ross, Chair
The Honorable Bill Pluecker, Chair
Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Joint Standing Committee
Cross Building, Room 214
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 593

Dear Senator Ross, Representative Pluecker and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Joint Standing Committee:

My name is Chris Beichner, and I am the President and CEO of the Forest Society of Maine (FSM). Thank you for accepting my written testimony in support of LD 593, An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program, sponsored by Senator Russell Black of Franklin County.

Forest Society of Maine is a nationally accredited land trust that works statewide with willing landowners to conserve the ecological, economic, recreational, and cultural values of Maine's North Woods. In 2024, FSM celebrated our 40th anniversary of land conservation throughout the state. Over the decades, the Land for Maine's Future program has helped FSM and landowners conserve tens of thousands of acres through projects like Niatous Lake with the Robbins family (1997), Amherst Mountains Community Forest (2009) with the town of Amherst, Gulf Hags – Whitecap (2016) with the Carrier family, and Kennebago Forest (2023) with Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust and Wagner Forest Management.

Most of these conserved lands remain in private landownership and management but protected from development by permanent conservation easements. However, they still provide significant economic benefit to the local and state economy. Conservation easements and the Land for Maine's Future program directly support two of Maine's largest economic industries – forest products and outdoor recreation, which have a combined impact of \$14 billion and thousands of jobs generated annually.

I am humbled to say that FSM has an outstanding reputation among forest landowners, and there is significant interest in working with FSM to conserve their land. This upcoming summer, FSM will conserve an award-winning 1,000-acre tree farm with help from LMF. This demonstrates a continued need for the grant program.



A statewide land trust working to conserve and maintain the many values of forestlands in Maine



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We have several other exciting projects under development and at least one project where LMF funding could help secure public access to land and trails that are lynchpin to Maine's motorized trails network and fundamental to the character and quality of life of surrounding communities. Conserving future land would be difficult to achieve without the critical support LMF. That's why it is so important for you to support LD 593 – to ensure that important projects can move forward and protect these benefits and resources for all Mainers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christopher J. Beichner
President & CEO



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