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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY  
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 593

*An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*

*March 13, 2025*

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Judy East. I am the Director of the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning (BRILUP) within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking neither for nor against LD 593, "*An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program.*"

This bill proposes to provide ongoing funding for eligible expenditures and other authorized purposes under the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Trust Fund in the amount of \$10 million in each of the two years of the next biennium.

LMF, a program within BRILUP, is the State of Maine's primary funding vehicle for conserving natural and working lands. The program was established in 1987 when Maine citizens voted to fund \$35 million to purchase lands of statewide importance.

LMF has garnered broad-based support ever since. LMF respects landowner rights by funding land acquisitions only from willing sellers. LMF pursues a mission defined by the public, provides a tangible return to everyone who cherishes Maine's landscape (from hunter and hiker to snowmobiler and bird watcher), and leverages federal and private funding for state priority purchases.

In the State's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, Strategy E (Protect Maine's Environment and Working Lands and Waters) calls for an increase by 2030 in the total acreage of conserved lands to 30% through the voluntary purchase of land and working forest or farm conservation easements. *Maine Won't Wait* also calls for doubling permanently protected farmland to strengthen access to food grown and harvested in Maine, thereby protecting our food system from supply chain disruptions while preserving and creating jobs. LMF is an essential partner in

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this strategy, having protected almost 10,000 working farmland acres, but achieving this goal will require the protection of an additional 2,000 acres each year.

The LMF Board has proven to be a highly responsible and effective steward of the State's land acquisition priorities, and the Board's response to the most recent allocation to advance those priorities was no exception. In less than 4 years, the LMF Board has protected public access to over 35,000 additional acres by successfully closing on 44 projects. This \$17 million in project awards was matched by \$28 million in federal and private funding. The Board's latest Request for Proposals generated many high-quality project inquiries far exceeding the remaining available funding, including accumulated interest.

The Working Farmland account is also depleted. Of the \$40 million allocated to LMF in 2021, just \$1.2 million remains unallocated for working waterfront (we expect those funds to be encumbered in the next request for proposals in January 2026), and a little over \$1.3 million remains for Water Access. Staff have prepared [an annotated graph](#) to depict the flow of LMF funds through the years.

There remains consistently strong public support for LMF's programs. They provide a practical and effective response to the significant development pressure facing farmland, forests, and working waterfronts, the rising costs of land, and the importance of sequestering carbon. Related and importantly, the Department recommends that the two limited-term full-time positions previously funded to enable the efficient administration of these funds be supported as permanent positions as proposed in the Governor's 2026 – 2027 Biennial Budget.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.