



Testimony in Support of LD 402, An Act to Move the Natural Areas Program from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and to Amend the Law Governing Administration of the Bureau of Resource Management Within the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Before the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Luke Frankel, Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director

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Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director and Staff Scientist at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 24,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am here today to testify in support of LD 402, An Act to Move the Natural Areas Program from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and to Amend the Law Governing Administration of the Bureau of Resource Management Within the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Created in 1989, the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) is the state's primary entity responsible for conserving Maine's biodiversity. MNAP accomplishes this by inventorying land and documenting the presence of rare plants and ecosystems across the state within publicly available datasets. These datasets include the locations of rare and exemplary botanical features, large undeveloped habitat blocks, and designated riparian areas, among other natural features. This data is frequently used by landowners, municipalities, land trusts, and other State and Federal agencies to make informed decisions about land management.

We strongly support the proposed plan to move MNAP from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) because it will increase efficiency by streamlining multiple programs. Two initiatives that are currently carried out by DIFW but rely heavily on information from MNAP include the Beginning with Habitat (BwH) program and the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) process. MNAP became an integral part of the SWAP back in 2021 when threatened and endangered plants were first included in the plan through an amendment, and this plan is currently in the process of its regular 10-year update. By transferring MNAP over to DIFW, communication within these two initiatives among others will become more effective and efficient, saving both time and taxpayer dollars.

As the State agency that "protects and manages Maine's fish and wildlife and their habitats" as stated in its mission,¹ DIFW is the rightful home for a program focused on protecting biodiversity. We would like to thank both DACF and DIFW staff for their work in preparing for this transfer and urge the Committee to set the process in motion by voting Ought to Pass on LD 402. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/Strategic-Plan.pdf>