



# Maine Forest Products Council

*The voice of Maine's forest economy*

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## Testimony in Support of LD 402

**“An Act to Move the Maine 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”**

March 18, 2025

Patrick Strauch, Executive Director

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Patrick Strauch, and I reside in Exeter, Maine. I'm speaking as the Executive Director of the Maine Forest Products Council in support of this bill with a suggested friendly amendment.

The MFPC landowners have worked with the MNAP staff for many years and assisted in the location and identification of many special plant species and natural areas. With the land certification movement, MNAP cataloging these plants and areas has been helpful to private landowners who are voluntarily protecting these sites as they make operational harvesting plans. Imperative to this collaborative relationship between MNAP and the landowners has been the understanding that plants of all sizes belong to the private landowner, similar to the culture within the ACF department that works with the farming community.

Landowners have increasingly participated in collaborative wildlife conservation planning with IF&W. This work is based on the fundamental understanding that IF&W's charge to manage and regulate wildlife owned by the State is done in wildlife habitat owned by the landowners. We believe the greatest wildlife conservation benefit will be achieved by collaborations that adhere to the balancing of public values with private land rights. To help institutionalize the relocation of MNAP from DACF to IF&W we would seek clarification that the voluntary, non-regulatory functions of the Maine Natural Areas Program are codified in the following amendment to §12822, paragraph 2:

**2. Natural heritage database.** The commissioner shall maintain a natural heritage database that must contain data from inventories and other data sources and other relevant biological, ecological or other information about natural areas described in subsection 1 and about ecologically significant sites that harbor or otherwise contain these features. Information contained in the natural heritage database may be made available as necessary or appropriate for conservation and land use planning, environmental review, scientific research and inquiry, education or other appropriate use. For the purposes of this subsection, "appropriate use" is one that will not jeopardize endangered species or habitats. The commissioner may not adopt rules to regulate plants and natural areas in the database.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this issue and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.