

**Testimony of Sharon S. Tisher in Support of L.D. 870, “An Act Regarding the Membership of the Land Use Planning Commission” before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry**

March 20, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee:

My name is Sharon Tisher. I am a Lecturer Emerita at the University of Maine with joint appointments in the School of Economics and the Honors College, and a retired attorney. I have taught environmental law and policy and Honors courses at the University of Maine for the past thirty years. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of L.D. 870. I approach this topic from the vantage of someone who is awed by the magnificence, and the ecological significance, of what exists within the 10.5 million acres of Maine’s unorganized territories:

- The largest undeveloped forested landscape east of the Rocky Mountains, which is part of the largest and most intact temperate forest in North America
- 21,000 miles of rivers and streams, including the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, the Penobscot River, the St. John River, the Headwaters of the Kennebec, the Dead River, and much of the Aroostook River
- More than 3000 lakes and ponds, including Moosehead Lake, Flagstaff, the Fish River Chain of Lakes, Chesuncook, and so many more.
- Majestic mountains and preserved lands, including Baxter State Park, the Bigelow Range, Nahmakanta, and Big Spencer.
- Remarkable biodiversity, from land-locked salmon to native brook trout and from Canada lynx to moose. (When my family relocated to my home state of Maine in the 1990’s, and I was enlisted to work on the first State of the Maine Environment report, I found myself in the midst of a major controversy about whether or not lynx were present at all in Maine, or extirpated. I am delighted to see their now undisputed come back.)
- A globally significant bird area, hosting plant species that span the full spectrum of biodiversity in Maine.

Much of this landscape is a working forest which contributes substantially to Maine's economy, and these 10 million acres support traditional recreation activities for countless Mainers and visitors annually.

It's a remarkable place. And the LUPC is a vital planning authority which has the daunting responsibility of making decisions that retain the special character, natural resources, and natural resource-based economy of this vast jurisdiction.

I support LD 870 because I firmly believe that a diversity of perspectives and a diversity of skill sets are needed for the LUPC to do its best possible work on behalf of the people of Maine. Increasing the size of the Board to 13 makes sense. It provides an opportunity to bring more resources and expertise to the challenges in the next decades of land and waters stewardship in the unorganized territories.

I also support the proposal that the governor be responsible for a total of five of the 13 appointments, and that they "represent the broadest possible interest and experience that can be brought to bear" on LUPC's responsibilities. The "broadest possible interest and experience" will guide the governor's selection to individuals with who know the unorganized territories, and have the qualifications specified in the bill.

Maine's unorganized territories are a treasure. LD 870 will help us pass that treasure along to future generations, including my granddaughter Ophelia, who lives in South Portland, and already at the age of "3 ¾" is fascinated by many species of Maine wildlife. The University of Maine students I have taught in the Ecology and Environmental Sciences Program and the Honors College relish many opportunities to explore, enjoy, and study the lands and waters of this state and will likely do so for the rest of their lives. There's no doubt that Maine's natural habitats and recreational areas are a major draw for the students who come to UMaine from around the country and the world. I am presently hosting in my home a Ph.D. candidate from Kenya, who is developing a plan to track and protect endangered birds that will be of use in his home country as well as elsewhere around the world.

On the downside, however, I recently learned from a talk by Maine ecologist and conservation biologist [Janet McMahon](#), who has been studying the Maine forests for about as long as I have been teaching environmental law at the University of

Maine, that by the time her grandchildren are her age, at the rate the forest environment is changing, loons and chickadees may no longer be found in Maine. They are among Ophelia's favorite creatures.

I appreciate this opportunity to present testimony and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon S. Tisher, J.D.

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