

Testimony in Support of LD 870

An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission

By Buzz Lamb

March 20, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. My name is Buzz Lamb.

I have been involved in state, local and county government over the years. I grew up in the real estate business and worked as a computer consultant for IBM where I had the opportunity to work closely with a broad range of industries from Kittery to Fort Kent including forest products landowners and producers. Raised by a mother who grew up on a North Anson dairy farm, I live on a farm in New Gloucester where we raise livestock and poultry while actively overseeing three hundred acres of farmland and certified forests – small by UT standards, by large enough to understand both the opportunities and challenges faced by land owners.

But one of my true passions is Maine's North Woods. I own property in three unorganized townships, including camps on Lobster Lake and the West Branch of the Penobscot in Piscataquis County. I have both worked and recreated in the unorganized townships for more than 80 years – from when horse hobbles and rivers drives delivered pulp to the mills to today when computer driven harvesters can determine the best use of a tree before falling and cutting it to length.

Despite having grown up a mile from the ocean, I consider the UT Maine's most treasured landscape – spiritually, economically and environmentally. It is one of the few places you can experience true darkness and silence. It dependably delivers renewable raw materials every year. It contributes to climate change mitigation by capturing CO2 and helping manage flood waters before they flow into the more populated parts of the state. And it will provide resources that if well stewarded will enable us to profit from higher value uses being developed by the University of Maine – providing economic opportunity while storing CO2 and reducing our dependence on plastics.

The forests in the unorganized townships of Maine represent the largest undeveloped forested area in the Eastern US. In addition to the thousands of miles of trails, and spectacular rivers, lakes, and streams, this region is home to rare habitats that cannot be found elsewhere in the world. The unique beauty of Maine's UT attracts thousands of visitors to the area each year, supporting local outdoor recreation and tourism economies. For many, when they see Maine's North Woods, they realize that this is the real Maine – it's what sets our state apart.

Because of Maine's longstanding tradition of public access to private land, this region is unique in that it serves as working forest in support of Maine's forest products industry, while still allowing for hunting and fishing that supports the livelihoods of guides and neighboring communities around the state. Although foundational to the multi-use nature of the land, this patchwork of private ownership makes the role of land use planning critical not only to protect the character of the landscape, but to also manage inevitable conflicts that result from the diverse interests of working forests, vacation homes and recreational users.

The Land Use Planning Commission serves this role by acting as the regulatory body for the unorganized townships, which together span 10.4 million acres – more than half the state. The Commission is tasked with the difficult job of balancing the protection of regional character, public safety, the environment, and private landownership rights.

Although not perfect, the Land Use Planning Commission is the best thing we have to serve this important role. It is for this reason that I spoke out in 2011 when there were three bills being considered by the legislature that would have abolished what was then called the Land Use Regulation Commission.

I speak again today because I believe it remains essential that the Land Use Planning Commission Commissioners represent the wide range of backgrounds and interests of landowners and key industries in the unorganized townships. By requiring the Governor and the eight counties with the most acreage of unorganized townships appoint persons with backgrounds in the areas of

“forestry, land use planning, conservation, fisheries, wildlife, outdoor recreation and natural resources-related businesses that operate in the commission's jurisdiction,” LD 870 will help ensure that the Commission appreciates and considers the diverse array of perspectives and areas of expertise needed moving forward. I also support expanding the size of the Commission to 13, with five appointments assigned to Maine’s governor.

For this reason, and to help protect the landscape that I have cherished my entire life, I urge you to support this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Robert S. Lamb, Jr.".

New Gloucester, Maine