

My written testimony on LD 1529, An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide

Dear Folks,

My understanding is that this bill would “**strengthen protections for some of Maine’s most ecologically significant natural resources: remote, undeveloped ponds and rare stands of older growth forest** that store carbon, support wildlife, and define the character of the North Woods”.

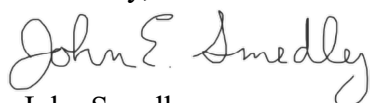
I am enthusiastically in favor of these goals! While not an ecologist, I am a scientist and keen observer of nature. I was introduced to the Maine Woods in 1975, while participating in the first ever Colby Outdoor Orientation Trip (COOT). It was also my first backpacking experience. Eighteen first-year students, four upper class students and two faculty were split into two groups for four nights at Baxter. We all stayed at Roaring Brook the first night. Next morning, my group hiked up to Chimney Pond for two nights, and then over the North Peaks trail to Russell Pond for one night. We couldn’t summit Katahdin due to weather; on our hike with full packs to Russell Pond, we ascended the Saddle Trail. Atop the ridge we faced rain, fog and winds gusting to 70 mph. I could see one person in front, and one in back, while the rest was a blur. As we descended out of the storm towards the Russell Pond campground, the sky began to clear a bit. Astonishing views appeared below, the damp woods smelled rich and delicious, and I was hooked!

I visited Baxter several times in those undergraduate years, and routinely bicycled in the countryside around Waterville. Eight years later, Ph.D. in hand, I was blessed with an offer from Bates College, and jumped at the opportunity to live again in Maine. I’ve been atop Katahdin and across the Knife Edge several times, and have camped several times at South Branch Pond, while doing the Traveler Mountain loop. My appreciation of the woods continues to deepen.

Meanwhile, dramatic changes are unfolding in the North Woods, due both to climate change and to human intervention, as discussed in a recent NRCM webinar. I support LD 1529 because I believe that pristine woods offer *foundational opportunities for folks to experience the natural world*. It’s true that I can ride my bike north toward Greene and beyond and see beautiful clouds and peaks, but it’s not quite the same as being enveloped by the views, sounds and smells of the forest in a more remote area. Many of us know this, but others have not yet had the experience, be they born or not yet born. Let’s offer them the opportunity by preserving what we have! I am also strongly in favor of actions that store carbon, having taught about the physics and chemistry of climate change at Bates for more than three decades, while watching the rate of change increase more dramatically than expected. Addressing climate change in our country is clearly under attack, and our strong response is required.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

  
John Smedley