

Linda Woods
Waterville
LD 1529

To: Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee
From: Linda Woods (Waterville)
Re: Testimony in Support of LD 1529: An Act to Enhance the Protection of
High-Value Natural Resources Statewide
Date: April 14, 2025

What an opportunity you have: by voting to support LD 1529 you would be strengthening protections for some of Maine's most ecologically significant natural resources. Just as the voters did in 1976 when they protected the Bigelows from development, you could be preserving remote, undeveloped ponds and rare stands of older growth forest. Voting in the affirmative would help to protect key components of the largest undeveloped forest area east of the Mississippi. Older growth forests once covered roughly 70% of the North Woods and now make up just 3% of Maine's Unorganized Territories. Without action, much of what is left will be gone in 35 years.

Although Maine is divided into 16 counties, natives often think of the state in terms of regions: the North Woods is one of these unofficial designations. The North Woods is a geographic region covering nearly 3.5 million acres and known for its low population, immense woodlands, and amazing recreational opportunities. Even though this is moose and bear country, it is astonishingly rich in birds. On an average day of birding, an individual might encounter at least 16 separate warbler species. Although I am not a birdwatcher myself, I know that is a hobby for many people. Since the black spruce is common in the North Woods, a birder could encounter the black-backed woodpecker or an American three-toed woodpeckers: both would be considered a rare treat. I myself have seen Canada jays, boreal chickadees and spruce grouse as I wandered through this region.

The North Maine Woods hosts the headwaters of five of our most important rivers. The remote, undeveloped ponds support the last stronghold of native brook trout in the United States. Each of these contributes to this area being a recreation destination for many people. Lately I have read many articles stressing the importance of getting outside as a way to alleviate the concern created by the current political situation. Solid, intact forests provide an excellent opportunity to surround ourselves in green, a color that has been identified as being a stress-reliever.

As "people from away" move to Maine for its natural beauty, more and more areas are under development pressure. LD 1529 takes a balanced approach to protect these natural resources by directing agencies to create a statewide conservation strategy, improve tracking, and elevate protection through existing programs like Land for Maine's Future and the Land Use Planning Commission's Lake Management Program. I strongly encourage you to vote YES on LD 1529: An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-Value Natural Resources Statewide.