

## LD 1529 Testimony in Favor

Dear Senate Chair Talbot Ross, House Chair Pluecker, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee,

My name is Ed Spencer and I want to offer you this testimony in Favor of LD 1529, which would help to protect and preserve both old growth forests and pristine remote ponds and lakes in Maine. My wife and I have lived in West Old Town since 1979 on 120 acres of land bordering Pushaw Stream, a large tributary of the Penobscot River. We raised our two children here. Cheryl is a scientific technician at UMaine and I spent the last half century working in the woods of Maine as a low-impact logger.

During our lives here we have managed our own forests and helped to serve the needs of other landowners. While growing into my role as a steward of the land, there is a constant financial pressure present. Some landowners want to turn their forests into lines on bank accounts, and that is their right. Tree growth taxation plays a huge role in allowing long-term forest management, but even at these reduced rates the tax bill is substantial. My approach has been to develop techniques to allow for enough financial compensation to keep up with expenses, while resisting the urge to take the maximum payoff in the shortest amount of time.

Helping a forest to grow involves choosing certain trees to remain after a harvest. In older growth forests, the choices were made long ago either by men or nature. Once established the mature stands serve to shelter and enhance their surroundings network of species. Old growth achieves a balance with its soil chemistry and the trees protect each other by sharing nutrients. It may seem far-fetched to some, but in Richard Powers' excellent book, *The Overstory*, he describes how trees communicate with each other and signal when they are threatened, thus triggering protective mechanisms. Mycellium enable this communication between the trees through their roots.

The most mature part of our forest contains a sugar maple stand, which blends with other hardwood types as it slopes to the water. While conducting syruping operations with our children, I cut a tree that was in our way. It was an American hornbeam, less than five inches in diameter. When we looked at the growth rings they were so tight it was necessary to use a magnifying glass to count its age, which was over 150 years. This understory tree could survive beneath the sheltering stand and had been there since before the Civil War. Simply put, there is no better classroom for children than a forest, and the older the better.

Wildlife species thrive in mature forests that provide them with food, shelter, and filtered water. Birds love to perch on the highest branches. But our Old Growth forests are slowly disappearing due to a number of factors. Maine needs to protect the climax stands that remain and help to grow new forests. Doing an inventory using modern

technology can help. We should help the landowners who refrain from liquidation harvesting, and contact the institutional investors who may not even know these stands are there.

Maine being the most heavily forested State should lead the way in preserving its Old Growth Forests and remote ponds and lakes. These are priceless assets that can be enjoyed by many. It is interesting to note that the Redwood groves of California were protected by state actions, not federal to start with. As Maine shifts back into being a log-producing State instead of one that primarily serves the needs of paper mills, this provides an opportunity to help create something special: Old Growth Forests for the benefit of all!

The only change I might recommend is for a buffer zone of more than 100 feet. Perhaps a buffer zone of 100 feet with zero cutting allowed, and another 100 to 200 feet with harvest rules similar to along Pushaw Stream, which is 40% every 10 years. I have a network of fellow long-term woodsmen and foresters who all have agreed when I premise that there has been more wind damage in these Maine woods in the last 6 years than in the previous 40 years. Larger buffers make sense whenever possible.

Believe me when I say that at times in my career I was greatly tempted to cut my older trees to make some fast money, but each time we decided to tough it out. Economic pressures on forests are real and need to be dealt with, and hopefully we can help with that. For my part, I will continue to enjoy our forests and the time to bask in their splendor. Please pass this legislation so that Mainers will always have the best forests possible to nurture and inspire us.

It is possible to think of a special forest as a friend who welcomes you and returns your love, akin to a great dog that lives forever.

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Spencer

West Old Town