

Sen. Rachel Talbot Ross, Rep. Bill Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Barbara Vickery and I live in Richmond. I am writing in support of LD 1529, An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide.

As a conservation biologist I spent my career as Director of Conservation Programs for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I had the privilege of working with others to develop strategies to conserve the best of Maine's remarkable natural heritage. Maine's north woods are special, even unique. The extent of undeveloped forest is vast, unique in the lower 48 states east of the Mississippi. The miles of high quality rivers and streams and the thousands of natural lakes are unparalleled. These are what most of us treasure about Maine's north woods.

But within those woods there are two resources that deserve additional attention because they are so scarce and so vulnerable. Stands of big, old trees are at this point a very rare commodity in the north woods. While some have been permanently protected from harvest through conservation, the percent of Maine's forest in the Unorganized Territory in such a late successional or old growth state is estimated to be only 3%. Given current economic pressures, without some new strategies, that proportion will inevitably be cut in half within a decade. Yes, trees grow back. But with current rotational cycles of 50-60 years we would have lost such older stands from the landscape. It takes more than a hundred years to begin to develop the habitat for mosses, lichens, liverworts, soil fungal networks, cavity nesting birds from woodpeckers to owls, martens, and myriad invertebrates that characterize such forests. We need that diversity and the resilience it supports.

This bill offers promising NON-regulatory approaches to encouraging the conservation of such older stands by highlighting their importance in LMF criteria, and most importantly by calling for DACF to engage a broad group of stakeholders in developing additional incentive-based strategies.

Maine is blessed to have hundreds of completely undeveloped lakes many of which support healthy populations of brook trout, unique within the range of that iconic and beloved fish, earning them the designation of State Heritage Fish waters. Fortunately, following the Maine Lakes Assessment in the 1980s about 200 of the most special of Maine's 1,500 lakes were placed in a protective status designed to preserve their remote character. However, more than 50 lakes that

would have qualified were left out. Over time, these will inevitably lose that remoteness, as camps are built and roads come closer. It is time to close that gap and add 50 lakes that meet the stringent criteria already established to a special management class for undeveloped high value lakes.

With these two sets of measures Maine can conserve some of its most scarce and precious heritage for future generations to enjoy and marvel at.

I urge you to vote ought to pass on this bill.