

RE: Testimony in support of LD1529 - An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide

April 17, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Melissa Beall. I am a resident of Cape Elizabeth. Thank you for receiving my testimony in support of LD1529.

Although I have lived in Maine for over 20 years, it is only recently that I find myself immersed in topics of timberland management and nature conservation in the unorganized territories (UT). I have a much better appreciation for how important it is to achieve a successful balance between these activities as both efforts are critical to the health of our state. I would like to express my gratitude to the many individuals who have served and will serve on the Land Use Planning Committee for their stewardship of the North Woods.

I suspect it would be difficult to obtain perfect agreement from experts on how much of Maine's woodlands in the UT should be maintained as late successional and old growth forest. However, I am certain they would all agree that 3% is nowhere near enough and, that with at least a 50% decline since 2003, we are not moving in the right direction.<sup>1,2</sup> The current trajectory has resulted in a much younger forest of saplings, small poles, and small sawtimber across the landscape. Despite even the best efforts to regulate these lands, new strategies need to be considered, additional action should be taken, and we must make a greater effort to measure what is being managed. Therefore, I believe the work must not only continue but also evolve.

At present, LD1529 focuses on how the work can be improved. It creates accountability by directing a report to be generated to measure the conservation management of late successional and old growth forests. It instructs the commission to adopt rules to regulate and reassign the classification of up to 50 additional undeveloped, high value lakes in the UT—most of which are State Heritage Fish waters—that were not included 30 years ago when protective Management Classifications were assigned. Finally, it requires an appropriate department to develop a comprehensive yet feasible strategy that can balance both conservation of these high value resources and the need to maintain responsible forestry management critical to the state. As such, LD1529 improves upon the work.

As Maine residents, we are incredibly fortunate to reside in a state that encompasses one of the largest, undeveloped forests east of the Mississippi. We have the opportunity to cultivate the expansion of late successional and older growth forests, which support a biodiversity of plant and animal species and thereby create resiliency in times of change. I encourage the committee to support LD1529 and help to protect high-value natural resources statewide.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Beall DVM, PhD

<sup>1</sup> Hagan, J., B. Shamgochian, M. Taylor, and M. Reed. 2024. Using LiDAR to Map, Quantify, and Conserve Late-successional Forest in Maine. Our Climate Common Report, Georgetown, Maine. 44 pp.

<sup>2</sup> McWilliams, WH., et al. 2005. The Forests of Maine: 2003. Resour. Bull. NE-164. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station. 188 pp.