

Nola Prevost
Brewer
LD 1529

Dear members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee,

My name is Nola Prevost, I'm a Maine Master Naturalist, a writer, and an administrative specialist at the University of Maine. I hope to share some key pieces of information that the committee will find helpful as you consider 'An Act To Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide,' in particular as pertains to its ecological effects.

The benefits of old-growth forests on the species that inhabit them have been well documented around the world. I have been doing some work on carnivore conservation advocacy this spring, and I learned that the main factor that increases rates of predation on deer and small mammals is limited habitat and lack of dense forest cover for prey to conceal themselves with. Increasing our standards for the management and preservation of late-succession forests would be an easy way to reduce carnivore-human conflict by preserving critical habitats and setting a foundation for protecting more in the future.

And from a climate change standpoint, not only do old-growth trees store considerably more carbon over time than younger trees, so do the things that live in and off of them as well. My particular area of interest is in mushrooms and fungi, and one of the coolest things about fungi is that globally, they can sequester as much as 36% of annual CO2 emissions, and that's just in the living mycelium - the roots of the fungi - and that's just in the forests as they exist today (Hawkins et al., 2023). So conserving old-growth forests means more carbon captured from the atmosphere, helping us reduce the severity of the climate crisis overall.

This bill also offers additional protection for high-value remote ponds, with the possibility of expanding access to Maine's natural landscape. As a Maine Master Naturalist who leads nature walks in our parks and preserves, this excites me because it means more education opportunities and areas to research, more trails for conservation communicators to provide more programs for the public, enriching nature education for everyone. Imagine how much more we could learn about Maine's ecosystems by restoring some of their pre-colonial conditions and conserving the precious old-growth we still have.

For example, I've done a walk on forest succession and understanding the landscape, which includes looking at the history of the land. Right now, the stories that are most relevant to a lot of this lands' recent history involve the overdevelopment for livestock pastures now-abandoned and turned to grassland, or wildfires that weren't contained, leaving birches to sprout up where the old pines used to flourish, or waterways that were diverted for logging shipments. But I want to tell new stories, different stories about these lands one day. I'd love to be able to tell people about the time Mainers came together to bring back the old-growth forest, how we prioritized the health of the ecosystem and the vibrant biodiversity that we've come to be so proud of here, and how we even saved our lumber industry by protecting our forests for future generations of foresters. And maybe by the time I'm old enough to retire, and I plan to retire here in Maine, I hope I can say that, sure, we humans at one time were not very thoughtful about how much we took from the forests, but when we had the opportunity to be, we took it and ran with it. LD 1529 is one such opportunity, and that is why I encourage you to vote "Ought to Pass" so that we may work towards that future together.