

**Testimony of Nava Tabak, Natural Resource Director
Baxter State Park**



**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
Public Hearing Date: May 6, 2025**

**In support of LD 1724: “Resolve Authorizing the Baxter State Park Authority to Convey Certain
Land in Cumberland County”**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Nava Tabak, I am the Natural Resource Director for Baxter State Park. I am testifying in support of LD 1724, A Resolve Authorizing the Baxter State Park Authority to Convey the Austin Cary Lot, an undeveloped state-owned property in the Town of Harpswell, Cumberland County.

Encompassing over 200,000 acres in northern Maine, Baxter State Park is the state’s largest protected area. The Park is a unique public charitable trust that is administered by the Baxter State Park Authority and is financially independent; it draws no General Fund dollars from the state. The Park includes the Scientific Forest Management Area - a nearly 30,000-acre area that is managed to demonstrate sustainable and scientific forestry.

Many people are surprised to learn that the Baxter State Park Authority also manages the Austin Cary Lot, a 228-acre property located over 200 miles away from Baxter State Park on Sebec Island in Harpswell (Figure 1). The Austin Cary Lot was originally managed by the Maine Forest Authority (1973-1983), and then by the Bureau of Public Lands (1983-1985), before being transferred to the Baxter State Park Authority in 1985. This transfer to the Baxter State Park Authority was the result of common threads between Baxter State Park’s Scientific Forest Management Area and the Austin Cary Lot: both are managed primarily for sustainable forestry pursuant to deed restrictions.

Unlike the Scientific Forest Management Area in the north Maine woods, the Austin Cary Lot is dominated by a forest typical of mid-coast Maine and is bisected by the tidal water and wetlands of Long Marsh (Figure 2). It is neighbored by similarly forested coastal areas, residences, a business, and the Harpswell Community School. Both the Austin Cary Lot’s geographic distance from the Park and the significant differences in the conditions of the Scientific Forest Management Area and the Austin Cary Lot (including their ecology, land use

history, operational logistics, and public uses of the respective properties), have continually presented management challenges for Baxter State Park. Baxter State Park has long recognized that another entity may be better positioned to manage the Austin Cary Lot.

Like many lands managed by the Bureau of Parks and Lands, the Austin Cary Lot is subject to Article IX, Section 23 of Maine's Constitution, which requires 2/3 legislative approval to convey the Austin Cary Lot, and to the Designated Lands Act. Passage of LD 1724 would allow—but not require—the Baxter State Park Authority to transfer ownership of the Austin Cary Lot to an interested party. The conveyance would be subject to deed restrictions that will require that the Austin Cary Lot continue to be used primarily for sustainable forestry or wildlife management, while allowing for compatible educational, scientific, and recreational uses. These are the purposes envisioned for the property by former Governor Baxter¹ and the property's former owners, who aimed to serve the interest of the people of Maine in conserving the property. The Park supports the proposed amendment to LD 1724, which clarifies that such a transaction would be in the purview of Baxter State Park, a state agency independent from the Bureau of Parks and Lands.

Transferring ownership of the Austin Cary Lot represents an opportunity to provide this unique property with the tailored and consistent management it requires. The interest of the people of Maine, as manifested in publicly beneficial uses of the property, would be protected by the deed restrictions required by LD 1724. It could be further enhanced by additional land conservation in Cumberland County resulting from the proceeds of a sale, and the Park also supports the proposed amendment to LD 1724, which specifies that such proceeds would be committed to the Public Reserved Lands Acquisition Fund of the Bureau of Parks and Lands for this purpose. (Pursuant to Article IX, Section 23 of the Maine Constitution and the Designated Lands Act, any proceeds received from the sale of the Austin Cary Lot must be used to acquire real estate in the same county for the same purposes.) The Harpswell community also stands to benefit from more effective collaborative opportunities under new management of the Austin Cary Lot.

Please vote LD 1724 out of committee as ought to pass. And thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ Whitcomb, Howard R. and Friends of Baxter State Park, "Governor Baxter's Magnificent Obsession: A Documentary History of Baxter State Park 1931 - 2006" (2008). Governor Percival Proctor Baxter Documents. 2. http://digitalmaine.com/baxter_docs/2

A map of the state of Maine, showing its geographical features, major cities, and transportation routes. The state is outlined in a thick purple line. Major cities are labeled with black dots and names: Quebec, Thetford Mines, Saint Georges, Millinocket, Lincoln, Bangor, Augusta, Lewiston, Brunswick, Portland, Sanford, Rochester, Dover, Portsmouth, Concord, Manchester, and White Mountains. The map also shows the Atlantic Ocean to the east and south. A red rectangle highlights the location of Baxter State Park in the northern part of the state. A red line points from the text 'Austin Cary Lot' to a small red dot on the coast near Portland. A scale bar at the bottom indicates distances of 0, 25, 50, and 100 miles. A compass rose is located in the bottom right corner. The map includes various geographical features such as mountains, rivers, and lakes. The text 'Baxter State Park' is written in red above the red rectangle. The text 'Austin Cary Lot' is written in red below the red dot. The map also shows the locations of several national parks and forests, including the Adirondack National Park and the White Mountains National Forest.

The Austin Cary Lot, Harpswell, Maine

This figure is an aerial photograph of a large, irregularly shaped land parcel in Harpswell, Maine, outlined in yellow. The parcel is predominantly forested with dense green trees. A winding road or path runs through the center of the parcel. In the lower right corner of the parcel, there is a small cluster of buildings, including a purple-roofed structure. To the right of the parcel, there is a body of water. An inset map in the top right corner shows the location of the parcel within the state of Maine, with a green square indicating the specific area shown in the main image. The inset map includes labels for 'Maine', 'Harpswell', 'Cundy's Harbor', and 'Meadowbrook'. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates distances in yards (0, 100, 200, 400).

