



Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and members of the Taxation Committee, my name is Jeff Romano, testifying for Maine Coast Heritage Trust in opposition to LD 438 and LD 1795.

The two bills before you will have little to no impact on Maine Coast Heritage Trust. However, it is difficult to remain silent when support for proposals like this are so often pitched as solutions to address the misperception of vast swaths of conserved lands coming off the tax rolls. Especially when these proposals surface from parts of Maine with little to no tax-exempt land trust land, which is almost always the case.

Before addressing the issue of land trust tax exemption, it is first important to capture the public benefits that Maine's land trusts provide in response to the expressed wishes of people, families, and communities across the state. In 2024, we conducted a survey of the state's 80+ land trusts. On the 2.9 million acres that land trusts have conserved, Maine people and visitors have access to the following recreational amenities, in most cases free of charge:

- Hiking Trails 2,159 miles
- Biking Trails 1,211 miles
- ATV Trails 685 miles
- Snowmobile Trails 1,087 miles
- Hunting 2.76 million acres = more than 94% of the total
- Beaches 239 sites
- Boat Launches 232 sites

In other words, land trusts are conserving land that supports outdoor activities that bolster Maine's tourism sector and make the state a better place to live, work, and raise a family. These organizations are also actively supporting natural resource-based industries that form the cornerstone of the state's rural economy. For example, land trusts have conserved more than 40,000 acres of productive farmland, over 2.5 million acres of working forestlands feeding local mills, and more than five dozen waterfront access sites used by commercial fishermen.

This data is just a small part of what Maine's land trusts do. On their own, these facts support the property tax exemption eligibility for land trusts as charitable and benevolent organizations under the law. Yet, when one looks more closely at land

trusts in Maine, a different story emerges. More than 92.5% of all land trust conserved lands in Maine have remained on the tax rolls. In addition, the land trust makes a payment in lieu of taxes on nearly 70% of the remaining 215,000 acres. Maine land trusts in 2024 contributed more than \$1.5 million in taxes and payments to local government.

While most land trust conserved lands remain on the tax rolls by choice, for some organizations and for some communities, property tax exemption works. Please vote against LD 438 and LD 1795.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust seeks to advance the conservation of lands and waters in Maine to ensure ecological wellbeing and foster thriving communities. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres, including over 160 places open for traditional outdoor recreation.