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**Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 1976, Resolve, Chapter 379: Compensation for Impacts to Wildlife Habitat from Solar Energy Development**

Honorable Representative Doudera, Senator Tepler, and distinguished members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, I am Bill Pluecker and I represent the towns of Warren, Hope and Union, House District 44.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Chapter 379, which addresses compensation for impacts from solar energy development. I must express my concern that these proposed rules significantly weaken the legislative intent of LD1881, particularly regarding the protection of uninhabited habitat blocks and large wildlife areas.

When the Legislature passed LD1881, we sought to protect Maine's vital ecosystem connectivity while allowing for responsible renewable energy development. However, Chapter 379 as currently written falls short of this goal in several concerning ways:

First, the exclusion of northern and eastern Maine from aspects of these rules is particularly troubling. As Director Rob Wood of the Bureau of Land Resources rightly pointed out, defining large habitat blocks in those regions based on proximity to certain roads would "take out a whole lot of area that the Department and the Board have determined is extremely valuable for habitat connectivity." This exclusion undermines our ability to determine effective compensation in these ecologically significant regions.

Second, the proposed compensation structure inadequately values the ecological importance of large, undeveloped habitat blocks. These areas provide crucial

corridors for wildlife movement, biodiversity preservation, and ecosystem resilience – values not properly reflected in the current fee structure.

Third, by creating geographic carve-outs, the rules create inconsistent protections across our state. Habitat connectivity doesn't recognize administrative boundaries; it requires a comprehensive, statewide approach to be effective.

Despite these serious concerns, I must caution against further weakening of these rules. Chapter 379 already represents a significant departure from the Legislature's intent, and any additional dilution would render the protections virtually meaningless. As BEP chair Susan Lessard noted, "the level at which we're struggling with it will be reflected in the Legislature when it goes back."

I urge this Committee to recognize that while these rules fall short of the Legislature's original vision, they represent an absolute minimum standard that cannot be compromised further. Maine's ecological future depends on maintaining contiguous wildlife corridors while moving toward renewable energy goals.

I expect that taking on the monumental task of this complicated set of rules so late in the session will prove quite a challenge for this committee. Without knowing the situation of the committee in regards to your carry-over bill list, I would respectfully suggest that the committee carry this bill over to next session in order to keep working on it in the interim.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Pluecker