



**Testimony in Support of LD 1312, An Act to Provide a Source of Revenue for School Construction and for the Land for Maine's Future Trust Fund
Before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs**

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Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 20,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am writing today in support of LD 1312, An Act to Provide a Source of Revenue for School Construction and for the Land for Maine's Future Trust Fund.

Since I am representing an environmental advocacy organization, I will focus on the portion of the bill that pertains to the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program for my testimony.

NRCM has long supported LMF and has advocated for its continued funding through the years when the well has run dry. We once again find ourselves in the position of an LMF program in need of funding. It is absolutely critical that we come together as a state to find additional revenue streams for this proven and essential program.

The threats and pressures facing our natural and working lands here in Maine have only grown in recent years, so the need for community-driven land conservation has never been greater. The slow erosion of Maine's longstanding tradition of public access to private land, changes in land ownership, growing development pressure across the state, and climate change are all challenging Maine's iconic landscapes in unique ways.

As a program, LMF is uniquely positioned to help address many of these challenges simultaneously across the state. By ensuring public access to Maine's most popular outdoor recreational areas, LMF helps alleviate concerns over loss of access by providing options when a need arises in a community. By protecting working forests, farms, and waterfronts, LMF helps guarantee that Maine's heritage industries endure for future generations. By expanding the overall portfolio of conserved lands, LMF helps us meet our climate goal of conserving 30% of the land and water in Maine by 2030. LMF accomplishes all of this while ensuring that the program benefits as many Mainers as possible by carefully balancing the needs of urban and rural communities.

In addition to addressing these challenges, there are many reasons why allocating funding toward LMF is a good investment for Maine. A few of these reasons include:

1. **LMF incentivizes private land conservation** – As a result of the program's one-to-one match requirement, every dollar put toward land conservation projects from LMF is matched by a dollar from the applicant, multiplying the overall impact of the money spent by the program and saving taxpayer dollars.
2. **LMF is a community-driven program** – LMF responds to the needs of communities, ensuring that projects only happen where and when they are wanted and that they are tailored to fit local needs.
3. **Land conservation is the most cost-effective way to protect our natural resources** – Conserving our land, water, and natural ecosystems today before they become degraded in the future saves money in the long run as restoring them after the fact is often more expensive.

To ensure that future generations can enjoy the same places that make Maine so special today, it is paramount that we continue to have a thriving LMF program. We believe that LMF, because of its widespread benefit to the people of Maine and positive impact to the local economies around the state, is uniquely positioned to be the beneficiary of investment proceeds from the Maine Budget Stabilization Fund when it is full.

For this reason, we strongly encourage the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1312. Thank you for your time and consideration.