



***Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources***

***RE: LD 2141 – An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program***

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments on behalf of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT) in support of LD 2141. We would also like to offer some ideas for your committee to consider as you review this bill.

LD 2141 represents a creative opportunity to provide consistent, dedicated funding for two critical existing funds: the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program. Both of these programs enjoy broad support but face a perpetual challenge in accessing consistent sources of funding to carry out their important work. The bill directs a portion of unredeemed bottle deposits – a consistent and sustainable source of revenue for these programs that is currently directed back to industry. We believe that it is reasonable to direct a portion of these funds instead to programs that benefit the public through supporting a clean and healthy environment.

Funds in the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund can be used for identifying water quality threats, taking action with in-lake phosphorus reduction treatments, improving stormwater infrastructure and replacing failing culverts, and more. According to a survey of Maine people conducted by a bipartisan polling team commissioned by TNC in January 2023, 52% of people consider the pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams an extremely or very serious problem.

We also support additional funds being allocated to the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program. Agriculture is an important traditional industry in our state and we have all heard stories about the challenges both well-established and new farmers face. These challenges make it difficult for farmland to remain viable as working farmland, especially with all the various development pressures. Having a source of funding to support keeping farmland available to farmers is valuable to our state.

It is worth noting that the original bill had another \$2 million dedicated to a different purpose. It is our understanding that it was removed from the bill because that account was anticipating support from another fiscal vehicle. Rather than removing that additional allocation, we would like to propose that the committee consider dedicating that funding to another related purpose, like the Land for Maine's Future program or the Municipal Stream Crossing Fund. Both of these funds are priorities for our organizations, in need of additional and consistent funding, and provide enormous public benefits. We would be happy to discuss these programs in more detail at the work session if that would be of service.

MCHT and TNC encourage the committee to consider amending the bill to include other funding programs and support LD 2141.

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*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.*

*The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together.*