

Luke Sekera-Flanders
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Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Luke Sekera-Flanders, I am a resident of the Bangor area. Growing up as a student in environmental science programs and as an enjoyer of the area's tremendous natural beauty, I learned a great deal about the ecological importance of wetlands. With over a quarter of the territory known as Maine is covered in wetlands, it is impossible to ignore and difficult to overstate their significance to Maine's identity and economy. Healthy wetland ecosystems have cascading positive effects for all life that comprise and surround them. Wetland vegetation filters surface and groundwater, contributing to our vital supply of fresh drinking water. Wetlands are home to a variety of endangered wildlife species and are vital to a healthy food system. With Maine having recognized a constitutional right to food, maintaining and restoring natural foodways is a responsibility we must always keep in mind when considering the impacts of industrial development and pollution on the environment. We have a responsibility to protect and maintain these vital ecosystems for future generations, and to consider the burdens we pass along to them.

This bill is also necessary because of the unique environmental burdens that landfills create. In May of 2023, I was present when Juniper Ridge Landfill caught fire. We had learned on social media that a glow on the horizon was visible from the Penobscot Nation Reservation, and were among the first media on site. The ash from that fire covered my body and vehicle. Years on, the community has not received a satisfactory explanation of what happened and how such emergencies will be prevented in the future. With the risk of lithium-ion battery fires and other dangers that can put carcinogens into the air, water and soil, we must put care and resources toward ensuring that these risks are kept away from vital ecosystems and waterways.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Luke Sekera-Flanders