

February 24th, 2026

**Testimony in Support of LD 1054:
Proposed Minor Amendment to Maine Conservation Easement Act**

By:

**Darren Ranco, PhD, Acting Executive Director of the Wabanaki Commission on
Land and Stewardship**

Testimony:

To the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

Members of the land conservation community (under the group called First Light) have been working with Wabanaki Nations in what is now called Maine to return land, access, and caretaking responsibility to traditional lands and resources. One small piece of this effort identified by Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT), supported by the Wabanaki Alliance and the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship, is clarifying that federally recognized Tribal governments in Maine have access to the same legal tools as land trusts and municipalities to care for Wabanaki lands including culturally important sites. These minor changes will provide more tools for the Wabanaki Nations to engage in land return, stewardship, and care throughout Wabanaki territory across the state of Maine.

This proposed amendment to the Maine Conservation Easement Act would do two things that are meant to clarify rather than change the statute:

- 1.) expand the definition of “conservation easement” to include easements that preserve the historical, architectural, archaeological or cultural aspects of a property. This is language similar to the State of California, where Tribes there have used it to expand their access and land holdings.
- 2.) expand the definition of “holder” to include federally recognized Indian tribes. This would confirm that the federally recognized Tribes can hold and manage conservation easements as part of their governmental authority, supporting Tribal Governments with another tool to care for and hold conserved lands across the state.

As an entity created by the Wabanaki Nations in what is now called Maine to coordinate efforts related to land return, cultural access, and to support repatriation efforts, the Wabanaki Commission on Land and Stewardship is proud to support Wabanaki Tribal Sovereignty through the passage of LD 1054. Kci Woliwon and Thank you!