

Friends of Parks & Lands

Building Support for Maine State Parks & Public Lands

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TESTIMONY

In support of MDACF Bureau of Parks and Lands provisions within LD 2212, Governor's proposed FY 2026-2027 Supplemental Budget.

And urging that LD 2212 be amended to include funding for LD 761 State Historic Sites

Senators Rotundo and Talbot Ross, Representatives Gattine and Pluecker, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committees:

My name is Alan Stearns. I am one of several people actively working to form the all-volunteer Friends of Parks & Lands, for the primary purpose of building legislative and congressional support for Maine State Parks and Maine Public Lands, all at the Bureau of Parks & Lands (BPL). We are a volunteer group in formation, with incorporation and other governance steps happening very soon.

As volunteers, we are stepping to the plate because of our recognition that the financial resources of BPL are stretched to a breaking point, with consequences. Record growth in the use of state parks requires resources. So too, new trails and treasured public lands require resources. We note many concerning trends affecting the Bureau regarding timber markets, inflation, work force, and climate change. We plan to work with the legislature over the long term to ensure the BPL remains a strong guardian of visitor experiences to Maine's most iconic mountains, lakes, beaches, trails, and forests.

The good news is that the Governor's proposed supplemental budget includes several provisions and appropriations which provide short-term fixes for some BPL issues. Our testimony today is in support of all of the provisions related to BPL.

We note especially the appropriation of \$2.25 million for Public Reserved Lands, responding to declining timber market values. Historically, BPL's timber revenues have largely funded all expenses that keep more than 600,000 acres of public reserved lands free, open, and cherished for hunters, hikers, anglers, campers, bikes, ATVs, and more. While we can hope that timber market forces reverse themselves, we know that this one-time \$2 million fix is merely a

short-term fix. We have offered to work with the Bureau to bring longer term analysis and longer term budget approaches to the next Governor and the next Legislature.

So, too, the next Governor and the next Legislature will need to address significant issues within the Parks personnel structure. Recruitment and retention of Parks employees continues to be a severe problem.

While we support the Governor's proposed budget, we note with concern the lack of funding for State Historic Sites or funding for LD 761. LD 761 is now on the Appropriations table, after unanimous votes in the ACF Committee and on the floor last year. Earlier this year, a bipartisan list of 26 legislators wrote to the Governor, urging funding. Those legislators are:

1. Nicole Grohoski, Senator, District 7 – Fort George & Battery Gosselin
2. Nina Milliken, Representative, District 16 – Fort George & Battery Gosselin
3. Stacy Guerin, Senator, District 4 – Katahdin Iron Works
4. Marianne Moore, Senator, District 6 – Fort O'Brien
5. Glenn "Chip" Curry, Senator, District 11 – Fort Knox
6. Pinny Beebe-Center, Senator, District 12 – Fort Saint George
7. Cameron Reny, Senator, Senator, District 13 – Colonial Pemaquid/Fort William Henry, Fort Edgecomb, Fort Island (Fort Webber), Whaleback Shell Midden
8. Craig Hickman, Senator, District 14 – Colburn House
9. Mattie Daughtry, Senate President, District 23 – Eagle Island, Mere Point
10. Denise Tepler, District 24 – Fort Baldwin/Popham Colony/Fort Popham
11. Joseph Rafferty, Senator, District 34 – Storer Garrison
12. Mark Lawrence, Senator, District 35 – Fort McClary
13. Lucien Daigle, Representative, District 1 – Fort Kent
14. Tracy Quint, Representative, District 8 – Bible Point
15. Will Tuell, Representative, District 10 – Fort O'Brien
16. Reagan Paul, Representative, District 37 – Fort Knox
17. Ann Matlack, Representative, District 43 – Fort Saint George
18. Lydia Crafts, Representative, District 46 – Colonial Pemaquid/Fort William Henry, Whaleback Shell Midden
19. Holly Stover, Representative, District 48 – Fort Edgecomb, Fort Island (Fort Webber)
20. Allison Hepler, Representative, District 49 – Fort Baldwin/Popham Colony/Fort Popham
21. Michael Lemelin, Representative, District 53 – Coburn House
22. Flavia DeBrito, Representative, District 64 – Fort Halifax
23. Cheryl Golek, Representative, District 99 – Eagle Island
24. Dan Ankeles, Representative, District 100 – Mere Point
25. Walter Runte, Representative, District 146 – Storer Garrison
26. Kristi Mathieson, Representative, District 151 – Fort McClary

Today we ask that both Committee amendments and Executive change packages be used to provide much needed capital funds for BPL's State Historic Sites. **The Maine Legislature has**

the opportunity to use this year’s one-time budget surplus for crucial long-term investments in State Historic Sites.

The Bureau last year gave you a list of more than \$30M in compelling needs at State Historic Sites and National Register sites within State Parks. LD 761 recommends \$18M in funding to start. Today, below, we highlight six State Historic Sites that illustrate priorities totalling just over \$16M. As noted below, **three of these State Historic Sites are closed due to lack of resources for capital investment, and also listed by Maine Preservation among Maine’s Most Endangered Historic Places, including two sites that are important for this year’s 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.** Finally, there is the risk that competitive federal funds will not be awarded if we can’t find the required 50% match for those federal funds.

State Historic Sites (selected)	Town	Funding Need: BPL 2025 testimony	Notes	More notes
Fort George	Castine	\$400,000	<p>Revolutionary War and more.</p> <p>Partially-functionally closed.</p> <p>Maine’s Most Endangered Historic Places (2022)</p> <p>NPS National Heritage Area (2023)</p> <p>Heavy use for tourism, town recreation, schools, Boy Scouts, more.</p>	Need match for possible competitive federal 50/50 grant. The Town of Castine plans a large event for the 250th Anniversary of the Penobscot Expedition in 2029.
Colburn House (Benedict Arnold Expedition)	Pittston	\$1,500,000	<p>CLOSED.</p> <p>Revolutionary War</p> <p>Maine’s Most Endangered Historic Places (2023)</p>	Widely regarded as one of the greatest military marches in history.
Colonial Pemaquid/ Fort William Henry	Bristol	\$5,100,000	High value/ high priority	
Fort Baldwin / Fort Popham	Phippsburg	\$3,325,000	High value/ high priority	
Eagle Island (Admiral Peary)	Harpwell	\$3,614,400	<p>CLOSED.</p> <p>Maine’s Most Endangered Historic Places (2024).</p>	In addition to polar exploration, Admiral Peary was the first to prove that Greenland is an island.
Fort McClary / Fort William	Kittery	\$2,335,000	Revolutionary War and more.	