

**Testimony in Support of LD 2212, An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

**Before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**Luke Frankel, Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director**

**February 27, 2026**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment, now and for future generations. On behalf of our nearly 20,000 members and supporters, I am here to testify in support of LD 2212, and in particular, the initiative to provide one-time funding for public lands.

Our public lands play a key role in supporting people, the economy, and biodiversity. At its core, public land exists to ensure that all people have access to special places for enjoyment. In Maine, this includes iconic places such as Tumbledown Mountain, the Bigelow Range, Lily Bay State Park along Moosehead Lake, Camden Hills, Cobscook Bay, Bradbury Mountain, and Aroostook State Park, to name a few.

These places, along with many others, are critical elements in the mosaic of landownership across the state that supports our \$3.4 billion outdoor recreation economy.<sup>1</sup> While private land remains the dominant form of ownership across Maine at approximately 94%,<sup>2</sup> public lands play an outsized role in supporting our outdoor economy by providing the infrastructure for amenities-based recreation (e.g., long-term camping and RVs), programming for those new to the outdoors, and staffing and resources to accommodate large group sizes. This was recently acknowledged in the report back on the study of public access to private land that was commissioned by the Legislature last year. The Working Group formed through that study

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation et al. (2025). *Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap*. [[https://www.trailblazerroadmap.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/25-MOB-Roadmap-0123\\_DIGITAL-OUT-1.pdf?pid=460](https://www.trailblazerroadmap.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/25-MOB-Roadmap-0123_DIGITAL-OUT-1.pdf?pid=460)].

<sup>2</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. (2026). *Accessing Private Land*. [<https://www.maine.gov/IFW/hunting-trapping/accessing-private-land/index.html>].

“emphasized that public lands play a vital role in Maine’s outdoor recreation system by relieving pressure on private lands and ensuring permanent access to some of the state’s most significant natural areas.”<sup>3</sup>

In addition to recreation, public lands also help support Maine’s \$8.3 billion forest products economy and maintain our diverse range of natural ecosystems.<sup>4</sup> The Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) manages the state’s public lands to support a variety of uses that include forestry and natural resource protection, in addition to recreation. BPL’s working forests help to employ contractors and provide raw materials to mills, while their network of Ecological Reserves also helps to conserve a diverse representation of native ecosystem types.

Despite the critical functions they perform, today our public lands face significant challenges. Increased demand since the COVID-19 pandemic, aging infrastructure, and volatile timber markets have all placed enormous strain in recent years. Although the need is likely much larger, the \$2.25 million currently proposed within the Supplemental Budget provides a much-needed lifeline for our public lands. For this reason, we strongly encourage that this level of funding or greater remains in the final budget proposal.

To close, I’d like to highlight another funding priority for our organization that is currently not reflected in this draft of the Supplemental Budget, and that is the urgent need to fund the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program. As many of you know, this program is central to land conservation in Maine and is essentially out of funding. As a result, we would support any effort that provides funding to the program, including a direct allocation through the budget process.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>3</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife and Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. (2026). *Report Back on Resolve S.P. 538 - L.D. 1308*.

[[https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/FINAL\\_Public%20Access%20to%20Private%20Land%20Legislative%20Rep\\_2026.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/FINAL_Public%20Access%20to%20Private%20Land%20Legislative%20Rep_2026.pdf)].

<sup>4</sup> Maine Forest Products Council. (2025). *2024 Statewide Economic Contribution of Maine’s Forest Products Sector*. [<https://maineforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2024-Economic-Report-FINAL-for-printing-AK.pdf>].