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Dear Sen. Rotundo and Rep. Gattine,

Thank you for your work with the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. I'm writing to voice my support of funding for Land for Maine's Future (LMF).

In 2006, my husband and I chose to purchase a home and spend significant time in the Bethel/Rumford area due to its large tracts of undeveloped land as well as its access to a plethora of outdoor recreation in beautiful, natural surroundings. Our choice was further validated by our experiences with strong community support and involvement around protecting these lands for the benefit of area residents.

In 2018, we were early supporters of the Bethel Community Forest (BCF). From its beginning the project has had extensive community input and backing. Bethel Community Forest has grown from its initial 980 acres to its current 1,510 acres and is located a mere two miles from downtown Bethel. The BCF was the result of significant funding from the LMF program, US Forest Service and local philanthropic organizations. A local nonprofit, Inland Woods + Trails has built a variety of hiking and mountain biking trails on the land which has boosted recreational tourism for the area. In keeping with interests expressed by the community, the forest is open to traditional recreation uses such hunting and snowmobiling.

The town-based conservation success of BCF provided the catalyst of what could be accomplished down the road in Rumford. Last year, in 2025, Rumford Community Forest, officially opened. Again, LMF was instrumental in securing the necessary funding.

These community forests stemmed from the area residents' support for land conservation married with their desires for outdoor recreation and economic drivers. Maintaining strong, reliable funding for LMF is essential to projects like these that have been immensely popular with local communities.

I strongly advocate for continued funding for LMF to ensure its meaningful impact for generations to come.