



**Testimony of Elizabeth Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director
In support of LD 294
An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority
February 13, 2023**

Good morning, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the joint standing committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am pleased to speak to you this morning in support of LD 294, *An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority*.

AMC is the nation's oldest conservation, recreation, and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,600 members in Maine and own 100,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

Baxter State Park is unique. Despite its name, it is not part of the state park system, but rather an independent entity which operates according to the deeds of trust established by its donor, the visionary Governor Percival Baxter. The lands within the park are designated as "under the joint supervision and control of, and shall be administered by" the Baxter State Park Authority, consisting of the Director of the Bureau of Forestry, the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Attorney General.

For the near century since Governor Baxter deeded the park to the people of Maine, the Authority has managed it with tremendous care, respectful of Governor Baxter's vision that the park remain forever wild. We can all be grateful for the foresight, determination, and stewardship that ensured that today it stands as an oasis in our too-busy, too-connected, too-developed world.

The park faces significant management challenges. Katahdin, the highest peak in Maine and the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, attracts an ever-growing number of hikers who wish to challenge themselves against it. Competition for campsites and parking spaces is intense. Too many hikers and trail runners more focused on their own achievements than on their natural surroundings have behaved disrespectfully. Though it is remote and undeveloped, the park lies within a day's drive for 70 million people, and we can anticipate that the challenges facing it will grow as fewer such opportunities to experience nature exist.

In evaluating this bill, I studied the statutes governing the park. Reviewing the Purpose section, my eye fell on the eighth paragraph, which quotes Governor Baxter: "everything in connection with the park must be left simple and natural and must remain as nearly as possible as it was when only the Indians and the animals roamed at will through these areas".

Baxter is located in the ancestral home of the Penobscot, to whom Katahdin is sacred. The Penobscot are still here. If we wish the park to remain as nearly as possible as it was when only they roamed through it, we should involve them in its management. We support LD 294 and urge you to pass it.