



Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 27, 2023

RE: LD 258, *An Act Making Unified 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, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and Members of the AFA and IFW Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on LD 258, *An Act Making Unified 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, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*, specifically, the proposed budget initiatives and language related to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Policy Advocate for Maine Audubon – the state’s oldest and largest wildlife conservation organization.

Maine Audubon supports the proposed budget initiatives and language related to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (Department, DIFW) because each is essential to the Department fulfilling its responsibility to preserve, protect, and enhance the inland fisheries and wildlife resources of the state. Items that are of particular interest to our organization are: funding to assist with updates to the Department’s headquarters; supporting several positions; and helping the Department match available federal funding to support citizen science projects, amongst other important initiatives.

With Commissioner Judy Camuso’s bold leadership, MDIFW has embraced their mission to promote the safe enjoyment of Maine’s outdoors for so many Maine people. Maine Audubon is proud to be a partner in the Department’s work to protect our state’s precious wildlife and habitat, restore endangered species, and boldly tackle some of the greatest challenges that face our state’s birds, bats, bees, and more.



To adequately fulfill their duties, the Department needs a headquarters that fully supports the breadth of their work. From storage to science needs, the Department deserves the upgrade they have detailed in LD 258. To promote cohesive planning within MDIFW and provide educational opportunities for Maine people to learn how to track wildlife, safely navigate the woods with a map and compass, rid their boats of invasive species, and more, housing the majority of the Department's programs and people in one location is a no-brainer. Additionally, it is our understanding that the Department is eager to embrace energy efficient technologies and other cost-saving building opportunities – a win-win for all.

Maine Audubon supports MDIFW's request to adjust the funding mechanism for four positions – one Private Lands Biologist, two Forester positions, one Wildlife Technician Position – and add one additional part-time Federal Aid Coordinator position. All of these existing positions help MDIFW meet their programs' demands and would add needed capacity to ensure that the Department is managing and leveraging federal funding opportunities as much as possible. As a partner in the Department's Beginning with Habitat program – a first-in-the-nation effort that consolidates and packages essential wildlife and habitat information for landowners, towns, conservation organizations, and more – we intimately understand the importance of the Private Lands Biologist in providing essential technical assistance for people and towns managing their lands for at-risk fish and wildlife.

We support aiding the Department to match federal funding that supports citizen science projects, amongst other important initiatives. For decades, MDIFW has led citizen-science projects such as the Maine Bird Atlas – a state-wide assessment of breeding and wintering birds. Without data collected from this project, we cannot effectively guide future species status assessments, understand priority species' needs, and identify and conserve high-value wildlife habitats. While some projects, like the Maine Bird Atlas, are in their final stages, there is a long list of other wildlife research opportunities that the Department could miss out on if matching support for these endeavors is not realized.

Finally, it is our understanding that in many ways, the Department has been operating with a pre-inflationary budget for some time. What we have advocated for today is largely a readjustment of their base operations so that the Department scales accordingly to the realities of our economy. Supporting the Department's proposed budget initiatives and language, as well as considering other opportunities to expand the Department's capacity, will allow DIFW to do their very best work. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesca Gundrum".

Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Policy Advocate