

**Testimony of Amanda E. Beal, Commissioner
Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

**Before the Joint Standing Committees on
Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry**

**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”**

Hearing Date: March 3, 2023

Good morning, Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Sachs and Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Amanda Beal, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am here today to testify in support of LD 258, the Governor’s Biennial Budget proposal for State fiscal years 2024 and 2025. This testimony addresses each item and proceeds sequentially from pages A-59 through A-104.

This budget advances the Governor’s guiding belief that to build a stronger, more prosperous state where opportunity is available to all, then we must invest in the infrastructure that supports the people of Maine, our greatest asset.

That is why this budget proposal strengthens the very things that Maine people rely on every day to succeed, building on the strong success of the currently enacted budget and the last legislative session to tackle Maine’s greatest challenges.

We have governed cautiously and in a fiscally prudent way over the past four years, making sure that – even in the hardest of times during the pandemic – we lived within our means. This budget proposal continues that practice.

We look forward to the discussions over the next several months as we outline each initiative and impact of the proposed investments.

DACF is charged with promoting and advancing Maine’s agricultural resources; protecting and enhancing nearly 18 million acres of forestland; managing more than 700,000 acres of state parks and public lands; and administering numerous science-based programs focused on resource management, land use planning, and conservation. The impact of our work is also quite extensive and supports a large part of our overall natural resource-based economy, as our agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation sectors combined to contribute more than \$20 billion to our state’s economy annually and support approximately 140,000 jobs.

Our Department staff oversee and carry out a wide range of duties, from protecting the food we eat, preventing and fighting wildfires, mapping the ocean floor, keeping our parks and public lands

pristine and accessible, ensuring wise land utilization and conservation, and providing regulatory oversight and technical assistance to forest and farmland owners and managers. We take collective pride in our efforts to provide excellent customer service through our hundreds of activities and programs, which are carried out by 747 employees, where 437 are year-round positions and the remaining are seasonal positions.

In the past year, our Department has continued to see high demand for our services, both straining resources while also reinforcing the need for the time, talent, and expertise of our staff. Maine's State Parks continue to see strong demand, with approximately 3.3 million visitors in 2022. Meanwhile, our Maine Forest Rangers are still responding to an increased number of wildfires. Over the last five years, on average, we have seen approximately 688 wildfires annually, burning 533 acres per year. In the work of the Land Use Planning Commission, building permit applications continue to exceed pre-pandemic levels by approximately 25%. And our Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources staff continue to respond to increased food insecurity across our state, impacted by inflation and soon to be further exacerbated as COVID-era SNAP benefits are set to end this week. Additionally, we have seen a significant increase in consumer interest in accessing Maine-grown food at the same time that producers are navigating input supply disruptions, increased costs, and food system bottlenecks. These are just some examples of how the Department has been navigating complex and extraordinary issues on a daily basis.

As we now move toward reviewing specific DACF Biennial Budget initiatives for FY 24/25, there are a few overarching aspects that it may be helpful to note before moving into discussing specifics:

- All of the initiatives listed reflect the fundamental needs of the Department. Many are tied to the health and safety of either state employees or the public, while others have direct ties to economic impact, whether it be resolving inspector bottlenecks that inhibit business growth or ensuring that our State Parks provide a safe, enjoyable setting for those who visit them and keep people coming back year after year.
- Of the 93 initiatives and eleven language items you will be asked to vote on in this budget, 27 initiatives and most language pieces are generally housekeeping in nature. These items include reallocating positions between accounts, funding reclasses approved in the Supplemental budget, and establishing capital allocation in the current biennium for many Other Special Revenue accounts.

Hopefully, these introductory comments provide helpful background information as you consider the following initiatives.

Animal Welfare Fund

The baseline budget for Animal Welfare Fund may be found on **page A-60**. This program ensures the humane and proper treatment of animals. Staff are responsible for investigating animal cruelty, abuse, and neglect complaints, training animal control officers while also inspecting and licensing boarding and breeding kennels, animal shelters, pet shops, and research facilities. It is also responsible for the "Help Fix ME" spay/neuter program for feral cats as well as dogs and cats owned by low-income residents of Maine and administers the statewide dog-licensing program in cooperation with municipalities, including the successful online licensing program.

The **first** initiative on page A-60 provides funding for increased rates from Central Fleet Management (CFM) due to increased fuel and vehicle purchase prices. This initiative is the first of several you will see throughout our budget for increased CFM rates.

The **second** initiative continues and makes permanent one Public Service Manager I position funded by Other Special Revenue Funds to manage critical animal welfare response planning and deployment. The legislature approved the limited period position in PL 2021 c. 398 per the recommendation of the Committee to Review Maine Animal Cruelty Investigations. This initiative is a combined allocation of \$117,659 in FY24 and \$123,832 in FY25.

Bureau of Agriculture

The baseline budget request for the Bureau of Agriculture is on **page A-61**. This program is responsible for animal and plant health, farm and consumer quality assurance, and agricultural product marketing. It also helps to promote rural educational events and seeks to develop the public understanding of Maine agriculture's importance to the state's economy, the vitality of rural communities, and Maine's quality of life. This program includes the Divisions of Agricultural Resource Development, Animal and Plant Health, and Quality Assurance.

The **first initiative** on page A-61 provides funding in the General Fund for \$94,058 in FY24 and \$117,109 in FY25 and increases the allocation in Other Special Revenue Funds by \$11,767 in FY24 and \$14,552 in FY25 for increased Central Fleet Management (CFM) rates, as mentioned in the previous program.

The next initiative at the top of page A-62 provides an annual appropriation of \$1,000,000 for PFAS expenditures in the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. BAFRR anticipates a continued need to assist PFAS-impacted farms for the foreseeable future. Assistance will continue to include robust and ongoing testing of on-farm media (water, soils, muscle tissue, vegetative tissue, milk, etc.), installation and maintenance of water filtration systems, farm viability financial support (paying for clean feed, equipment and inputs necessary to grow PFAS-safe crops, upgrades to existing on-farm buildings), livestock serum and muscle sampling, and more.

The following two initiatives on page A-62 are related to the VISTA Ending Hunger program. These initiatives will transfer and reallocate one Volunteer Services Coordinator position and the existing funding for the program from the DACF Administration to the Bureau of Agriculture program and establish a baseline allocation in the Other Special Revenue Funds account. You will see corresponding decreases in the DACF Administration program on pages A-68 and A-70. This program began as a pilot, which draws in over \$500,000 in federal funds to support the ongoing work of 25 VISTA members working across the state to address hunger in Maine, and provide capacity to implement the state's Roadmap to End Hunger in Maine by 2030. The success of this pilot program has resulted in an ongoing stream of revenue; this program long-term is best housed in the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources.

The next initiative continues one limited-period Planning and Research Associate II position previously continued in Public Law 2021, chapter 29. This position works with The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and will end on June 7, 2025. Food administered through these programs has increased by nearly

250% over the past few years, so this additional position will continue to be critical to meet program needs. This role is essential to ensure the efficient and consistent distribution of approximately 6,000 CSFP boxes to over 8,000 seniors across the state each month and helps facilitate critical partnerships with USDA and state stakeholders who assist in making TEFAP and CSFP successful.

The next initiative on page A-62 establishes one Consumer Protection Inspector position in the General Fund due to increased demand to inspect legal recreational cannabis products and shops. This initiative provides a total appropriation of \$100,887 in FY24 and \$105,890 in FY25. Since legalizing recreational cannabis, Quality Assurance has processed an estimated 2,400 retail licensing applications, many of which require annual calibration certification.

The first initiative on page A-63 establishes one Consumer Protection Inspector position in the General Fund due to increased demand for food safety inspections. There is an increase in retail food businesses requiring inspection of cannabis-related products. This initiative provides a total appropriation of \$100,887 in FY24 and \$105,890 in FY25.

The next initiative provides a one-time appropriation of \$1,500,000 in FY24 to upgrade our severely outdated Cony Road facility. Proposed upgrades to the “west wing” of the 60-year-old building include original window replacement, additional insulation measures, energy-efficient LED lighting, asbestos floor tile remediation, and restroom modifications for ADA compliance. The modifications will also improve office, storage, and training space functionality.

The third initiative on page A-63 provides a one-time appropriation of \$1,500,000 in FY24 to replace our very fragile database used by Quality Assurance and Regulation for licensing and inspection that does not meet current regulatory needs. The system will accommodate new licensing and inspections, generate renewal applications and licenses, and track complaints and administrative actions for over 7,000 businesses, streamlining processes to improve efficiency and accuracy for the public and staff. The current system cannot access historical information in usable form, and reporting capabilities are severely limited. This initiative includes an ongoing appropriation of \$150,000 for hosting and maintenance costs for the new system.

The next initiative on page A-63 establishes one Consumer Protection Inspector position funded 50% by the General Fund and 50% by the Federal Expenditures Fund. Maine meat and poultry facilities requiring state inspection continue to set records, with nearly 1,380,000 lbs. of red meat processed in the last year. This is a 50% increase over the past four years. Given this ongoing demand for local meat and poultry, some Maine livestock and poultry producers continue to wait months, if not longer, for an appointment to have their animals harvested and processed at facilities in Maine. These processing bottlenecks have hindered growth in this sector; however, recent federal grants have provided key financial support to businesses seeking state inspection, and the recent Agriculture Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) offers necessary funding for several local processors to expand capacity to meet sustained increased demand. The Cooperative Interstate Shipment program also continues to grow market share for participating processors, with three processors recently asking for more days of state inspection services. This position will provide needed state inspection services to meet increasing demand and reduce wait times for livestock producers.

The next initiative provides an appropriation of \$400,000 each year of the biennium for the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) to increase annual funding for each of the 16 Districts from \$25,000 to \$50,000. District Funding has been flat for over a decade and has not kept pace with increasing costs. The increased funding will allow SWCD to work cooperatively with DACF to provide continued critical technical assistance to farms and producers for soil and water conservation purposes.

The last initiative provides an appropriation of \$50,000 each year of the biennium to supplement the cost of the annual surveys for Pale Cyst Nematode, a pest that threatens crops such as potatoes and tomatoes.

At the top of page A-64, the first initiative allocates \$250,000 in Other Special Revenue Funds to establish a baseline allocation in this account to administer the Agricultural Development Fund. The Fund will support the Agricultural Development Grant (ADG), which is an annual grant program DACF has historically offered that helps provide cost-share grants to conduct market promotion, market research and development, value-added processing, and new technology demonstration projects. The ADG is very popular, and applicant demand has always exceeded the available funding. This request will provide an allocation to allow the Agricultural Development Fund to continue to support the vital and impactful grant program with existing funds.

The following three initiatives address a revenue shortfall in the Milk Commission by transferring a percentage of three positions funded in the Milk Commission program to the General Fund. Declining revenue in the Milk Commission program, coupled with increased expenses, has continued to deplete the cash balance in the OSR account for the past five years. Reallocating the positions to the General Fund will allow the Milk Commission program to meet expenses. You will see the corresponding decrease for these three initiatives in the Milk Commission program on page A-91.

The final initiative on page A-64 transfers and reallocates the cost of one Entomology Technician from the Federal Expenditures Fund to Other Special Revenue Funds to realign the position with the appropriate funding source. The initiative also increases the technician's biweekly work hours from 48 to 80 hours to the necessary capacity for the apiary program.

The first initiative, on page A-65, transfers and reallocates three positions and related All Other costs from the Board of Pesticides Control program, Other Special Revenue Funds, to the Bureau of Agriculture program, General Fund. These positions were established in Public Law 2021, chapter 673, and remain vacant due to insufficient funds in the Other Special Revenue Funds account. You will see a corresponding decrease in the Board of Pesticides Control program on page A-102 and a request for associated technology costs for these positions on page A-71.

The next initiative on page A-65 establishes one seasonal Entomology Technician position in the Federal Expenditures Fund and provides funding for related All Other costs. This position will eliminate the need for contracted labor for the Cooperative Agriculture Pest Survey (CAPS) program. This provides a combined allocation of \$42,458 in FY24 and \$44,716 in FY25.

The final initiative in this program, on page A-65, provides a one-time allocation of \$1,500,000 in FY24 to fund grants for durable greenhouse structures and associated siting and installation costs to schools, community centers, and other eligible public entities for shared educational uses and

to enhance community-based opportunities for food production. The accompanying language is found in **Part DD**.

Certified Seed Fund

The baseline budget request for the Certified Seed Fund is on **page A-66**. The program ensures the high quality of seed potatoes by conducting field and shipping point inspections in Maine for regulated diseases, and also certifies seed oats and barley, and issues phytosanitary certificates for agricultural and forest products destined for export to other countries.

The **only initiative** in this program provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

DACF Administration

The baseline request for DACF Administration is at the top of **page A-67**. This program provides leadership, oversight, and operational direction for the Department. This program is responsible for the centralized budget for the Office of Information Technology, Natural Resources Service Center, and the Attorney General's Office.

The **first initiative** on **page A-67** provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative on **page A-67** is the **first of six** initiatives in this program, providing funding for the associated technology costs for positions referenced in other programs in DACF. I will discuss this position later in my testimony for the Maine Land Use Planning Commission program on **page A-89**.

The last initiative on **page A-67** provides funding for the submitted reclassification of a Public Service Manager I position to a Public Service Manager II. This position is partially funded in this program, and the other portion is located in the Land for Maine's Future program on **page A-82**.

The first initiative at the top of **page A-68** continues and makes permanent one Public Service Coordinator I position previously continued in Public Law 2021, chapter 398. This position coordinates DACF's ongoing work to implement the state climate action plan, supports conservation and soil health activities, and engages with key department stakeholder groups and organizations.

The next initiative continues and makes permanent one Volunteer Services Coordinator position previously continued in Public Law 2021, chapter 398. This position supports Maine's Ending Hunger by 2030 initiative. This initiative provides a total allocation of \$106,654 in FY24 and \$108,718 in FY25.

The next initiative continues and makes permanent one Agency GIS/Technology Coordinator position previously established by financial order. This position is a department-wide resource supporting Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and related core technology for programs to streamline critical processes and program needs. This initiative provides a total allocation of \$114,178 in FY24 and \$116,239 in FY25.

The next initiative on page A-68 establishes one Public Service Coordinator I position to ensure the Department complies with OSHA requirements by coordinating annual staff training, inspecting safety equipment, and reviewing accident/incident tracking. The position will also implement safety plans, standardize policies across the Department, and manage safety training and certifications. This initiative provides an appropriation of \$3,292 in each year of the biennium and a total allocation of \$114,733 in FY24 and \$120,971 in FY25.

The last initiative transfers the previously mentioned Volunteer Services Coordinator position and associated funding for Maine's Ending Hunger by 2030 initiative from this program to the Bureau of Agriculture. This initiative corresponds to one mentioned earlier in the Bureau.

The next initiative at the top of page A-69 increases allocation by \$29,949 each year of the biennium for additional costs of printing various publications available for purchase through the Department.

The next initiative on page A-69 increases allocation by \$41,731 in FY24 and \$69,050 in FY25 for increasing costs of financial, accounting, and human resource management services provided by the Department of Administrative and Financial Services through the Natural Resources Service Center.

The next initiative on page A-69 provides an appropriation of \$63,052 in FY24 and \$82,569 in FY25 for increased expenses for services provided by the Attorney General's Office.

The next initiative on page A-69 provides funding for increased service rates by the Office of Information Technology for current services provided to DACF. This initiative provides an appropriation of \$447,453 in FY24 and \$454,886 in FY25 and an allocation of \$79,514 in FY24 and \$80,834 in FY25.

The next initiative on page A-69 provides funding for increased technology provided by the Office of Information Technology. This initiative provides an appropriation of \$354,440 in each year of the biennium and an allocation of \$62,985 each year.

The last initiative provides an appropriation of \$50,000 annually to continue connecting additional Maine State Parks and Historic Sites to the state's network.

The first initiative at the top of page A-70 also relates to the transfer of the Ending Hunger by 2030 program. This initiative transfers the total All Other appropriation from the DACF Administration to the Bureau of Agriculture. The corresponding initiative was mentioned earlier on page A-62.

The final five initiatives all fund technology costs associated with positions mentioned in each program budget.

Division of Forest Protection

The baseline budget request for the Division of Forest Protection is on page A-72. This program provides forest fire and forest resource protection to Maine's 18 million acres of forest land. The Division protects landowners through wildfire readiness, prevention, detection, suppression, and natural resources law enforcement.

The **first initiative** on page A-72 provides an appropriation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative provides an appropriation of \$25,326 each year of the biennium for annual health screenings for Forest Rangers due to exposure to hazardous chemicals.

The next initiative provides an appropriation of \$20,000 each year of the biennium for annual training required for all pilots.

The first initiative at the top of page A-73 provides an appropriation of \$85,657 each year of the biennium for increased insurance rates for aircraft coverage. Risk Management purchases commercial insurance for this coverage and passes the cost to the agency.

The next initiative on page A-73 provides an appropriation of \$3,904 each year of the biennium for increased insurance rates for a recent property revaluation.

The next initiative provides an appropriation of \$5,011 in FY24 and \$12,433 in FY25 for dispatch services provided by the Department of Public Safety.

The fourth initiative provides an appropriation of \$175,000 each year of the biennium to fund All Other aircraft maintenance.

The fifth initiative provides an appropriation of \$200,000 in FY24 and \$125,000 in FY25 for repairs to Forest Protection facilities.

The final two initiatives provide an appropriation to fund reclasses approved by the Bureau of Human Resources for four Ranger Pilots and one Ranger Pilot Supervisor. The reclasses were approved in the FY23 Supplemental Budget, and this initiative will fund the ongoing portion.

The first initiative at the top of page A-74 provides an appropriation to fund a reclass approved by the Bureau of Human Resources for one Office Associate II position to a Forest Service Mobilization Coordinator. This reclass was also approved in the FY23 Supplemental Budget, and this request will fund the ongoing portion.

The next initiative provides an appropriation in both years of the biennium to fund a proposed reorganization of one Office Associate II position to a District Forest Ranger position to align work functions with the appropriate classification.

The next initiative provides an appropriation in both years to increase the weeks of one seasonal Laborer II position from 32 to 52 weeks providing added capacity for fire preparedness, quick-fire response, and assisting with fuel truck operations for air missions.

The final initiative for this program on page A-74 provides an appropriation to fund another reclass approved by the Bureau of Human Resources for one Forest Fire Prevention Specialist position to change the range for this position. This reclass was also approved in the FY23 Supplemental Budget, and this initiative will fund the ongoing portion of this reclass.

Emergency Food Assistance Program

The baseline budget request for the Emergency Food Assistance Program is on page A-75. This program supports the emergency food assistance program administered by the Department. There are **no new** initiatives for this program.

Farmers Drought Relief Grant Program

The baseline budget request for the already established Farmers Drought Relief Grant Program is on page A-76. This program was established to assist Maine farmers facing the adverse effects of drought conditions. The program will provide grants to support the installation of irrigation systems to alleviate the risk of crop losses due to insufficient rainfall and drought conditions. The source of irrigation water must be sustainable, environmentally sound, and affordable.

There is one initiative for this program on page A-76, providing a one-time allocation of \$2,000,000 in FY24 and an ongoing appropriation of \$300,000 in FY25. There is also corresponding language in Part CC.

Forest Resource Management

The baseline budget request for Forest Resource Management is on page A-77. This program preserves the overall health of Maine's forest resources by protecting forest, shade, and ornamental tree resources of the state from significant insect and disease damage and providing pest management and damage prevention. The program conducts an inventory of Maine's forest resources on a five-year cycle. Technical assistance, scientific and economic information, and educational services to Maine's family forest owners, the forest industry, landowners, and the public are also provided by this program.

The **first initiative** on page A-77 provides an appropriation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative provides funding to increase the weeks of six Entomology Technician positions from 51 to 52, establishing these positions as year-round to fulfill program needs and provide staff with benefit continuity.

The first initiative at the top of page A-78 provides an appropriation to fund reclasses approved by the Bureau of Human Resources for 13 Forester I positions to Forester II positions. These reclasses were also approved in the FY23 Supplemental Budget, and this initiative will fund the ongoing portion.

The next initiative provides a one-time appropriation of \$58,000 in FY24 to replace two ATVs, two snowmobiles, and two trailers for Forest Policy and Management to facilitate access to remote timber harvest permit sites for compliance inspections and investigations. The current equipment is no longer safe or dependable, and repair costs are high.

The final initiative on page A-78 provides a one-time appropriation of \$12,000 in FY24 to purchase an ATV to survey forested land for damage symptoms from regional forest pests such as spruce budworm and emerald ash borer and to access forest inventory plots in remote areas.

Fund to Address Food Insecurity/Provide Nutrition Incentives

The baseline budget request for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity/Provide Nutrition Incentives is on page A-79. This program provides incentives to federal participants to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables at existing retail markets, including retail stores and farmers' markets, and supports outreach for and administration of programs that offer nutrition incentives to participants of federal food and nutrition assistance programs.

There is **one initiative** for this program on **page A-79**, providing a one-time appropriation of \$600,000 each year of the biennium to capitalize the Fund, allowing the Department to provide incentives to federal food and nutrition assistance programs. These funds will be matched with federal funding.

Geology and Resource Information

The baseline budget request for Geology and Resource Information is on page A-80. This program includes the Maine Geological Survey, Floodplain Management, and Municipal Planning Assistance. The Maine Geological Survey focuses on groundwater (the source of drinking water for more than 50% of the state's citizens), aquifer analysis, coastal geology, including coastal hazards, and mapping the geologic framework of the state. Furthering the mission of hazard mitigation, Floodplain Management carries out the objectives of the National Flood Insurance Program under the Federal Emergency Management Agency by assisting municipalities and individuals with assessments of flood risks and protection options. The Municipal Planning Assistance Program implements specific elements of the Growth Management Act, including providing municipal technical assistance and emphasizing climate adaptation. It acts as the State liaison with regional planning organizations. It also coordinates across State programs to ensure growth and economic development while balancing the use and protection of the state's natural resources.

The **only initiative** in this program is on page A-80 providing an appropriation for increased CFM rates.

Harness Racing Commission

The baseline budget request for the Harness Racing Commission is found on **page A-81**. This program provides oversight, support, and promotion for Maine's harness racing industry to ensure the integrity of live racing and wagering at facilities in Maine.

The **first initiative** on page A-81 reorganizes one seasonal State Racing Steward position into two intermittent State Racing Steward positions to provide better coverage for the Harness Racing season. The seasonal position is currently vacant.

The next initiative is related to one previously discussed on page A-64. The initiative moves the headcount from one of the positions transferred and reallocated earlier. The position is currently

split-funded between the Harness Racing Commission and the Milk Commission, and when the funding for the Milk Commission was reallocated between Other Special Revenue Funds and the General Fund, the headcount shifted to the Harness Racing Commission in alignment with current budgeting practices.

The final initiative in this program increases the allocation by \$5,384,425 in FY24 and \$5,378,343 in FY25 to reflect changes approved in the December 2022 Revenue Forecasting Committee report for projected increases in gambling revenue.

Land for Maine's Future

The baseline budget request for the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Program is on page A-82. This program coordinates and finances the acquisition of land and easements for conservation, water access, outdoor recreation, wildlife and fish habitat, farmland, and working waterfront conservation.

The **first initiative** on page A-82 provides an appropriation of \$15,000 each year to maintain an online grant application and public-facing management tool. The new application is shared between LMF and Parks. You will see a similar increase for this system in Parks General Operations on page A-100.

The other initiative in this program provides an appropriation for the proposed reorganization of one Public Service Manager I position to a Public Service Manager II position. This position is split-funded between LMF and DACF Administration. The first half of this initiative was discussed on page A-67.

Land for Maine's Future – Community Conservation Projects

The baseline budget request for the LMF – Community Conservation Projects is on page A-83. This program coordinates and finances the acquisition of lands and easements for community conservation projects with \$40 million received from unappropriated General Fund surplus in fiscal year 2021.

The **only initiative** for this program is on page A-83 and provides an appropriation for a proposed reorganization of one limited-period Paralegal Assistant position to a Secretary Specialist position. The program has tried to fill the position three times but has been unsuccessful. The proposed change will broaden the candidate pool.

Land Management and Planning

The baseline budget request for Land Management and Planning is on page A-84. This program manages the state's public lands and performs sustainable timber management under the principles of multiple-use, and is Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified.

The **first initiative** on page A-84 provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative provides funding to increase one seasonal Park Ranger position from 26 to 52 weeks to keep up with growing recreational demands on Public Lands in the winter and shoulder seasons in the eastern region.

The **next initiative** on page A-84 provides capital allocation of \$3,000,000 each year of the biennium for construction materials, improvements to bridges and roads, and other improvements to recreational trails and sites used by the public.

The final initiative in this program increases allocation by \$52,443 each year of the biennium to cover increased travel and legal costs associated with the Federal Forest Legacy Program grant.

Maine Conservation Corps

The baseline budget request for the Maine Conservation Corps is on page A-86. This program provides job skills training while supporting and preserving Maine's natural resources and encouraging youth volunteerism, and it is closely aligned with the national AmeriCorps program.

The **first initiative** on page A-86 provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The other initiative in this program increases allocation for an increase in the federal grant award received from AmeriCorps.

Maine Farms for the Future Program

The baseline budget request for the Maine Farms for the Future Program is on **page A-87**. This program provides technical assistance and grants to farmers for developing business plans and implementing those plans in a two-phase process. There are **no new** initiatives for this program.

Maine Forestry Operations Cleanup and Response Fund

The baseline budget request for the Maine Forestry Operations Cleanup and Response Fund is on **page A-87**. This program collects permit fees, fines from civil penalties, and other fees to offset expenses incurred by the Bureau of Forestry to mitigate and remediate damages or potential damages to the waters of the state created by forest practices violations. This is a revolving fund, and the balance is limited to \$20,000. There are **no new** initiatives for this program.

Maine Healthy Soils Fund

The baseline budget request for the already established Maine Healthy Soils Fund is on page A-88. This program was created to improve the health, yield, and profitability of the state's diverse agricultural soils and commodities by expanding the use of best practices among farmers and farmland owners in Maine.

The **one** initiative for this program on **page A-88** provides a one-time allocation of \$3,000,000 in FY24 and an appropriation of \$500,000 in FY25. There is also related language for this initiative in **Part BB**.

Maine Land Use Planning Commission

The baseline budget request for the Maine Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) is on page A-89. This program serves as the planning and zoning board for the 425 unorganized townships, 27 plantations, seven organized towns, and over 300 unorganized coastal islands, which cover 10.4 million acres – about half the state.

The **first initiative** on page A-89 provides an appropriation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative provides an appropriation to establish one Environmental Specialist III position to staff a new Land Use Planning Commission Enforcement Unit and provides funding for related All Other costs. This initiative provides a combined appropriation of \$93,776 in FY24 and \$98,803 in FY25. Increased permitting activity continues post-pandemic, creating an increasing backlog of enforcement investigations.

The next initiative provides an appropriation to increase the hours of one Senior Planner from 60 to 80 hours biweekly. LUPC has a backlog of policy and planning projects, including solar energy facility development standards, short-term rental rules, and dark sky standards. Increasing the position hours will benefit recruitment and retention issues with this part-time position.

The final initiative for this program provides an appropriation to cover the increased cost for statewide property leases supplied through the Department of Administrative and Financial Service's Division of Leased Space.

Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program

The baseline budget request for the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program is on page A-90. This program provides funding to protect Maine's productive and economically significant agricultural lands. There are **no new** initiatives for this program.

Milk Commission

The baseline budget request for the Milk Commission may be found on page A-91. This program sets the minimum wholesale and retail price of milk. The Commission staff manages daily operations, conducts audits of dairy product processors to ensure proper payment to farmers, and conducts studies required by statute to establish retail milk prices.

The **first three initiatives** on page A-91 address a revenue shortfall in the Milk Commission and were discussed earlier in my testimony in the Bureau of Agriculture and Harness Racing programs. These three initiatives move a portion of three positions funded in the Milk Commission program to the General Fund. The initiatives decrease allocation and correspond to increased general fund appropriations mentioned earlier when you saw the first portion of these highlighted on page A-64.

The **fourth initiative** increases allocation in Other Special Revenue Funds All Other by \$4,946,570 in FY24 and \$9,835,101 in FY25 to recognize revenue changes approved by the Revenue Forecasting Committee in December 2022 for projected increases in the milk tier program.

Natural Areas Program

The baseline budget request for the Natural Areas Program is on page A-93. This program collects, maintains, and disseminates field-based inventory information on habitats of statewide significance to guide natural resource management and acquisition. In addition to tracking the status and trends of at-risk species and habitats, this program also serves as the central repository for information on the identification and management of Maine's terrestrial invasive plants. The program works proactively with developers to avoid and minimize impacts on Maine's unique natural areas, potentially heading off costly conflicts and delays.

The **first** initiative on page A-93 provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative provides an appropriation of \$50,000 each year of the biennium for increased costs to support invasive species field operations.

The next initiative at the top of page A-94 transfers and reallocates one Biologist II position from 50% Federal Expenditures Fund and 50% Other Special Revenue Funds to 100% General Fund.

The next initiative provides an appropriation for the approved reclassification of a vacant Biologist I position to a Biologist II position.

The next initiative provides an appropriation for the submitted reclassification of a Public Service Manager I to a Public Service Manager II position.

The next initiative allocates the approved reclassification of a vacant Biologist I position to a Biologist II position.

The final initiative in this program increases allocation by \$150,000 each year of the biennium for increased operational expenses related to ongoing projects.

Off-Road Recreational Vehicles Program

The baseline budget request for the Off-Road Recreational Vehicles Program is on page A-96. This program plans, develops, and maintains snowmobile and ATV trails directly and through grants-in-aid to clubs and municipalities; manages approximately 300 miles of state-owned or leased multi-use rail trails; purchases, builds, and maintains state-owned public boat launch sites; is responsible for marking navigational hazards in selected lakes; and provides grants and technical assistance to municipalities and others in developing and maintaining locally owned boat launch sites. Studies have shown that these recreational activities have a positive economic impact on Maine's economy, including the 2020 University of Maine study, which found that snowmobiling alone contributed \$600 million annually.

The **first initiative** for this program on page A-96 provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative provides an allocation of \$1,000,000 each year of the biennium to construct new and renovate existing recreational boating facilities.

The next initiative allocates \$205,277 each year to provide grants to support public boating facilities.

The next initiative provides an allocation of \$20,000 annually to replace aging ATVs.

The final initiative on page A-96 increases allocation by \$39,072 each year for increased operational expenses in the Snowmobile Trail Fund.

The next initiative at the top of page A-97 provides an allocation of \$20,000 each year of the biennium to replace two snowmobiles.

The final initiative in this program decreases allocation in Other Special Revenue Funds All Other by \$380,422 in FY24 and \$378,424 in FY25 to recognize revenue changes approved by the Revenue Forecasting Committee in December 2022 for projected decreases in gas tax revenue.

Parks – General Operations

The baseline budget request for Parks–General Operations is on page A-98. This program manages approximately 100,000 acres, including 48 state parks and historic sites. Parks staff service over three million visitors each year and offer many public service activities such as the Take It Outside (TIO) program, an initiative to bring kids and their families into the outdoors for recreation year-round. This program also provides recreational opportunities and the construction and management of fire-safe public campsites in the West Branch Penobscot River Corridor.

The **first initiative** on page A-98 provides both an appropriation and an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The following six initiatives provide a total appropriation of \$606,636 each year of the biennium to cover increased operational costs for Maine State Parks and Historic Sites locations across the state. Fuel, electricity, septic pumping, uniform, and cleaning supply costs have increased significantly over the last several years.

The next initiative on page A-98 provides an appropriation to fund reclasses approved by the Bureau of Human Resources, increasing the pay range of two Public Service Manager II positions. These reclasses were also approved in the FY23 Supplemental Budget, and this initiative will fund the ongoing portion.

The next initiative provides an appropriation to fund another reclass approved by the Bureau of Human Resources for one Park Manager II position to a Park Manager III position. The reclass was also approved in the FY23 Supplemental Budget, and this initiative will fund the ongoing portion.

The first initiative at the top of page A-100 provides an allocation in the Federal Expenditures Fund to maintain an online grant application and public-facing management tool. This is the

second half of the initiative mentioned on page A-82 for a system shared with the Land for Maine's Future program.

The next initiative provides an appropriation to cover the increased cost for statewide property leases offered through the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Division of Leased Space.

The third initiative provides an allocation of \$430,000 each year of the biennium for the maintenance of infrastructure and capital improvements at State Park facilities.

The next initiative provides an allocation for the maintenance of infrastructure and capital improvements in the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

The next initiative provides an appropriation to purchase new equipment and replace aging capital equipment in State Parks.

The sixth initiative provides an appropriation for increased credit card fee expenses resulting from increased visitor usage.

The next initiative provides an allocation for increased InforME expenses and credit card fee expenses resulting from the higher volume of campground reservations and corresponding increased revenue.

The final initiative for this program can be found at the top of page A-101. This initiative reduces All Other allocation in the Allagash Wilderness Waterway account to comply with Title 12, section 1889, stating that only capital expenditures are permissible in this account.

Pesticides Control-Board of

The baseline budget request for the Board of Pesticides Control is on page A-102. This program was established to protect public health and safety and the public interest in the soil, water, forests, wildlife, agricultural and other resources of the state by assuring scientific and proper use of chemical pesticides.

The **first initiative** on page A-102 provides an allocation for increased CFM rates.

The next initiative allocates \$295,759 in FY24 and \$305,540 in FY25 for increased information technology system costs related to the pesticides licensing system.

The final initiative in this program transfers and reallocates three positions and related All Other costs from the Board of Pesticides Control program, Other Special Revenue Funds to the Bureau of Agriculture program, General Fund. This is the final portion of the initiative first seen on page A-65 and also on page A-71 for related technology costs.

Statewide Hunger Relief Program

The baseline budget request for Statewide Hunger Relief is on page A-103. This program was established by Public Law 2019, chapter 514, and provides funds to contract with a nonprofit

organization allowing that organization to engage in statewide hunger relief services, including, but not limited to, the purchase of food from Maine food producers and processors, to provide grants to local hunger relief programs, and to pay the operational and distribution expenses of the organization. There are **no new** initiatives in this program.

Submerged Lands and Island Registry

The baseline budget request for Submerged Lands and Island Registry is on page **A-104**. This program administers 2.3 million acres of submerged lands and 1,333 coastal islands that belong to the State. There are **no new** initiatives in this program.

LANGUAGE

Part T on **pages 24-25** clarifies and codifies the Forest Protection Division's carrying authority for this account. The carrying authority was originally granted in Public Law 1979, chapter 164, and has been exercised since that time.

Part U on **page 25** clarifies that activities undertaken by the State of Maine Animal Response Team may include providing adequate care for animals in state custody as the result of an investigation leading to seizure and holding of animals until any corresponding court action is completed.

Part V on **page 25** changes the Deputy Director position from serving at the pleasure of the Commissioner to a classified, confidential position. The proposed change will be consistent with other positions at this level within the Department and provide better stability for the continuity of operations and retention of institutional knowledge amongst administration changes.

Part W on **page 26** clarifies that with the Governor's approval, the Commissioner has the authority to accept gifts identified as services or other assets not readily identified as personal or real property.

Part X on **page 26** authorizes unrestricted funds in the Land for Maine's Future Fund to be used for administrative costs and consulting services.

Part Y on **page 27** changes the reimbursement rate for the Land for Maine's Future Board to align with the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) rates, as it is exceedingly outdated.

Part Z on **page 27** revises the definition of the Director of the survey to be consistent with changes made to the requirements for the Maine Geological Survey in Public Law 2021, chapter 398, which removed the requirement that the Director of the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning be the Director of the survey.

Part AA on **page 28** authorizes a transfer in each year of the biennium of all funds in excess of \$200,000 from unencumbered balance forward in the Personal Services line category, and all funds in excess of \$300,000 from unencumbered balance forward in the All Other line category in the Division of Forest Protection, General Fund account to the Capital Expenditures line category within the same account to carry out the mission of the Division of Forest Protection.

Part BB on pages 28-29 authorizes a transfer of \$3,000,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 from unappropriated surplus of the General Fund to the Maine Healthy Soils Fund, Other Special Revenue Funds account to improve the health, yield, and profitability of the state's diverse agricultural soils and commodities; protect native biological and microbiological diversity, vitality and health and increase the greenhouse gas drawdown provided by the state's agricultural soils; promote healthy soils agricultural practices based on indigenous knowledge, current understanding, and emerging soils science as determined by the Department; and promote and expand the use of healthy soils best practices among farmers and farmland owners in the state.

Part CC on page 29 authorizes a transfer of \$2,000,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 from unappropriated surplus of the General Fund to the Farmers Drought Relief Grant program, Other Special Revenue Funds account for a grant program to assist farmers in the state to overcome the adverse effects of drought conditions by providing grants in accordance with Maine revised Statutes, Title 7, section 220-A.

Part DD on pages 29-30 authorizes a transfer of \$1,500,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 from unappropriated surplus of the General Fund to the Community-based Greenhouse – Bureau of Agriculture Other Special Revenue Funds account, to allow the Department to make grants for community-based greenhouses to schools, community centers, and other eligible public entities for shared educational uses, and to enhance community-based opportunities for food production.

This concludes my presentation on our 2024-2025 Biennial Budget. I, along with my team here today, would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.

**Testimony of Behalf of the University of Maine System
Presented by Hannah Carter, Dean of University of Maine Cooperative Extension
In Support of Extension-Related Appropriations (Page A-648)
of the Governor's Proposed FY24-25 Biennial Budget (LD 258) – Feb. 28, 2023**

Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Sachs and Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry:

My name is Hannah Carter and I am Dean of University of Maine Cooperative Extension. I am also a proud County native and a product of the Extension system through my early years in 4-H and later as a summer insect and disease scout when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Maine Presque Isle. I am here today on behalf of the University of Maine System to **encourage your support of the General Fund appropriation and Special Revenue allocation that advance the statewide activities of UMaine Extension**, which you will find on Page A-648 of the Governor's biennial budget proposal.

Extension brings research, education and outreach from Maine's R1 university to homes, schools, farms, and communities in your legislative districts. Breeding more resilient potato varieties. Partnering with wild blueberry producers to improve the shelf life and quality of fresh packed berries. Providing food safety planning assistance to help new meat processors pass inspection. These are just some of **Extension's statewide activities that strengthen and grow Maine's agricultural economy and dependent rural jobs, and protect public, plant and animal health.**

Tick Laboratory & Pest Management Fund (A-648)

In 2014, the Legislature and Maine voters generously funded the construction of the University of Maine Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory (DRL) to bring Extension scientists — including students — together to do research that matters to Maine and to provide unique diagnostic and testing services that matters to Mainers. Thank you.

Today, the DRL supports aquatic animal health research necessary to the development of the state's aquaculture and biotechnology sectors; veterinary diagnostic services vital for vets, game wardens and pet owners; plant disease testing that farmers depend on for crop management; and as Mainers increasingly appreciate, testing of ticks and other insects.

Extension is generally supported within UMaine's existing budgetary resources and by other local, state and federal competitive and formula funds and our own program revenue. However, in recognition of the DRL's critical importance to our state, the 129th Legislature established a 15-cent container fee on registered pesticide products charged to consumers at the point of sale, with a large portion of the proceeds benefiting the lab. Given the complexity of administration, with the full support of the University of Maine System and

Maine retailers, the 130th Legislature and Gov. Mills repealed the fee and instead provided this more predictable source of ongoing operating resources for the DRL's ever-expanding education, outreach and research activities, including testing each year of thousands of tick samples, more than one-third of which are positive for Lyme.

There is no new initiative proposed for the DRL in the upcoming biennium.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension (A-648)

There is also no new initiative for the Extension integrated pest management (IPM) and pesticide safety education programs on Page A-648, which are funded by special revenue.

IPM is a science-based approach to pest management that reduces the use of pesticides and their impact to public and environmental health while preserving the crop being treated. Extension leverages the State's investment to attract external funding to further extend the positive impact of our proven IPM programs on Maine farms. We estimate that each year, **our IPM recommendations generate more than \$10 million in increased crop/yield and reduced pesticides costs just for Maine's potato industry and more than \$5 million on Maine's apple industry.** There are similar success stories for the state's strawberry, cranberry and sweet corn growers, and with this flat-funded allocation, we can continue this important work to grow Maine's agriculture economy.

Additionally, as reported to the ACF Committee earlier this session, the pesticide safety expert supported in part by this initiative provides regular research-based trainings to those licensed — or seeking to become licensed — in pesticide application. In 2022, in-person training included sessions at the Agricultural Trades Show in Augusta that provided credit opportunities for more than 1,400 attendees and online sessions that collectively trained 446 applicators. Topics included, but were not limited to, IPM, safety, labeling, forestry and rights-of-way, greenhouse best practices and worker protection standards.

I want to **thank you for your continued commitment to University of Maine Cooperative Extension and to Maine's public universities.** Your investment allows us to help Maine's people help themselves through education and research. It also enables us to strategically partner with many of the other organizations you've heard from today, including the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and the Maine Potato Board, all of which are equally deserving of your support and are vital to the future of Maine's agricultural-dependent economy and communities.

Thank you, and I look forward to taking your questions.