



Testimony in Support of 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"

February 28, 2023

Brent West, Executive Director

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pleucker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Brent West. I am the executive director of the High Peaks Alliance whose mission is to ensure and enhance access and recreational opportunities in Maine's High Peaks region. I am testifying in support of LD 258.

I have come today to express my gratitude and support for the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL). Their role in our region has grown tremendously over the last two decades. When I grew up in New Portland, I would stand outside the local dowel mill waiting for the bus. I still remember when that mill closed. I rode the school bus with the children of the people who walked into that mill for the last time. After the mill closed, the elementary school was close to follow. Forest products are still a large part of our economy in the region, but we look to our future and outdoor recreation gives us hope. The issue is complicated by the fact that as the mills closed, the land was sold to investment groups. The local connection to the land in too many instances has been cut off. As Maine faces a demographic cliff, the land transfers accelerate. These changes have led to a large increase in the need for the Bureau of Parks and Lands.

The Androscoggin Valleys Council of Government's 2023-2028 development strategy states; "Our shared vision for western Maine is a place of sustained quality and natural beauty, where an abundance of clean lakes, river valleys, mountains, farmland, forests, and trails frame our communities and offer an exceptional residential and business environment." This document

outlines the top four strengths of this region as recreation, love of the region, forest products, and tourism.

BPL has taken on a significant amount of responsibility for this vision. Since I was a child, some of the most beloved places in our region have been conserved, which requires increased management. The Maine people have shown their support over and over again since we voted to acquire the Bigelow Preserve up to the most recent LMF bond vote. Maine people want access and trails. Unfortunately, BPL doesn't have the support or capacity to respond to our regional goals. They are blessed to have many passionate employees that realize the value of public service, but landowners and the public are asking more of them. Please give them the resources they need. They fund operations through forestry which needs foresters. They have taken on the large task of coordination between landowners and clubs on trail access issues. These issues used to be dealt with locally. 70% of Mainers participate in outdoor recreation and 41% of housing in our region is recreational or seasonal. We have money to continue to promote these places, but we don't have adequate funds to care for them.

Please support the Bureau of Parks and Lands budget needs.

Thank you,

Brent West
Executive Director
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