



STATE OF MAINE  
 DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
 BUREAU OF PARKS AND LANDS  
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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
 CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

**NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 988**

*A Resolve Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Conduct an  
 Accessibility Study of All Maine State Parks and Historic Sites and to  
 Develop a Plan to Remove Access Barriers*

**March 20, 2023**

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Andy Cutko, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) neither for nor against LD 988, a Resolve Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Conduct an Accessibility Study of All Maine State Parks and Historic Sites and to Develop a Plan to Remove Access Barriers.

The Bureau of Parks and Lands places a priority on the accessibility of State Parks and Historic Sites, and our website features a table identifying accessibility features at our most visited State Parks and Historic Sites. The last comprehensive accessibility assessment of Maine State Parks was conducted in 1996, and although many of the components of that study remain relevant, others could certainly stand to be updated. As a result, we agree with the overall intent behind the bill. However, I encourage the Committee to consider the following factors as you review the bill's implications.

First, the Bureau is implementing numerous accessibility improvements as part of our \$50 million investment in State Parks funded through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan (MJRP). Most MJRP funds for bathroom facilities, parking lots, and administrative offices have accessibility components. Notable examples of accessibility projects include beach mats installed last summer at Popham Beach State Park and Crescent Beach State Park and planned improvements to the design and construction of a new access path at the summit of Mount Battie in Camden Hills State Park. More generally, all of our MJRP projects must meet current State standards for accessibility, including signs for the vision-impaired, parking accommodations, and accessible walkways. Our MJRP funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024. The Committee should consider waiting until these improvements are completed before compelling a study of additional needs. As proposed, the December 2023 deadline would give us only a handful of months to conduct a study that could serve as a benchmark for years to come.

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Second, the Bureau is taking an ‘all hands on deck’ approach to investing the MJRP funds before the December 31, 2024, deadline. We have weekly meetings with up to a dozen staff discussing current projects and challenges and coordinating between management and field teams. Because of our current staffing commitments, we suggest that if such a study were conducted on the proposed timeline, it would need to be done by an independent consultant, which could require a fiscal note on this bill.

In conclusion, the Department is committed to accessibility improvements and is actively designing and implementing them across the state. The assessment envisioned by this bill is welcome, but we have significant reservations about the timing of such a study and BPL staff’s capacity to do the work on the timeline proposed.

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