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Weyerhaeuser Testimony in Opposition to LD 993 “An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine”

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Chris Fife. I live in Winslow and am the Public Affairs Manager for Weyerhaeuser. I am also a licensed Maine Forester. I am speaking today in opposition to LD 993.

Weyerhaeuser owns and sustainably manages over 840,000 acres of timberland in Maine. Our timberlands are third party certified to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standards and support healthy wildlife habitat, clean water, and the capture and storage of carbon, while providing abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation. We are proud to be part of the forest industry supply chain in Maine which contributes over \$8 billion annually to Maine’s economy.

LD 993 is fundamentally flawed in two ways. First, the bill assumes that there is a problem with forest policy in the state that necessitates creation of a legislatively appointed board to advise the Bureau of Forestry. Secondly, the bill identifies certain organizations and elevates them as “stakeholders” regarding forest policy in Maine, marginalizing the legislative process open to all citizens to propose changes to forest policy.

A few excerpts from the Maine Forest Action Plan of 2022 rebuff these assumptions:

“About 8.3 million acres statewide are certified as well managed by independent auditors of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and American Tree Farm System (ATFS) - nearly 50 percent of Maine’s working forest. Nearly all of Maine’s larger forest holdings are certified to one or more standards (usually SFI or FSC).” “Many loggers are trained by or are certified by the Northeast Master Logger Certification Program, the Qualified Logging Professional Program, and/or the Certified Logging Professional Program, which commit to protecting public values.”

“Forestry legislation, or the lack thereof, is an indirect, but important indicator of public confidence in forest management. In the mid- to late 1990’s, Maine’s legislature considered dozens of forestry related bills, and the people voted on three forestry referenda.” “The legislative action on forestry demonstrated that the social license to practice forestry was at risk.” “In the late 1990’s, the Legislature enacted several bills to address the situation, most notably creating an annualized forest inventory and analysis program; strengthening the enforcement of the state’s forest practice rules; and endorsing outcome-based forest policy. Since that time, there has been little legislative activity focused on forest practices.”

The Forest Action Plan also notes that “The practice of forestry is a science. Laws that regulate forestry activities do not necessarily promote the use of science-based forest management.”

Weyerhaeuser employs professional foresters, wildlife biologists, soil scientists, hydrologists, biomatricians, and mapping professionals to develop and implement complex forest management plans. We also engage with scientists from the University of Maine and other institutions to ensure that we are relying on sound science in our forest management. Creation of a Forest Advisory Board focused on policy development and implementation is likely to divert resources and attention from the implementation of science-based forest management.

In addition to the legislative process, there are numerous opportunities for stakeholder input to the bureau. A few examples are:

- All agency rulemaking is subject to public comment.
- Project Canopy Leadership Team - an advisory body made up of members representing state government, private industry, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and tree boards, provides advice to the State Forester on program direction and effectiveness.
- WoodsWise - The State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee: This group usually meets annually, with representation from various state and federal agencies, woodland owners, private forestry consultants, SAF, and soil and water conservation districts.

Finally, the bill tasks the Forest Advisory Board with advising the bureau on conditions and trends in the forests of the State. However, the bureau already provides regular reports on these very topics. Forest Operations Notifications, annual landowner and wood processor reports and the forest inventory provide MFS with a wealth of information about the condition of Maine’s forests and the ways in which the forest resource is used. The bureau also provides regular reports on pests and disease and impact from significant weather events.

Weyerhaeuser is committed to continued collaboration with researchers, recreational user groups, conservation organizations, state and federal agencies, local communities, and others to maintain and enhance the economic and ecological health of our forest. Establishment of the Maine Forest Advisory Board envisioned in LD 992 will politicize this process and polarize interests making collaboration and finding common ground much more difficult.

Weyerhaeuser respectfully urges this Committee to vote “ought not to pass” on LD 992.

Sincerely,

Chris Fife