



**Testimony of Elizabeth Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director  
In support of LD 993  
An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine**

Good morning, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the joint standing committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Eliza Townsend, pleased to speak to you in support of LD 993, *An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine*. I live in Leeds and serve as the Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC's mission is to foster the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,600 members in Maine and own 100,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education. We have completed three verified carbon offset projects.

Today we are all living with the impacts of climate change in the form of drought, extreme temperatures, forest fires, frequent severe weather events, and property damage. Climate change is intertwined with its twin, biodiversity loss. The ramifications are staggering. For example, in January, the state apiarist stated that climate change is a factor in the loss of significant populations of honeybees in Maine. How will we grow crops without pollinators?

Maine's 17.5 million acres of forest can help us address these threats. Forests clean the air we breathe and the water we drink. They take carbon pollution out of the atmosphere and could hold even more. They provide habitat for plants, birds, and animals, including Maine's most iconic species and some of the nation's most prized sport fish. Maine's forest is critical to the future of eastern forest birds, whose populations have dropped by 17% since 1970, and boreal birds, whose populations have declined by 33%. Because they are large and intact, our forests allow species to move and to adapt to climate change. Of course, they support an estimated 30,000 jobs in the forest products sector and contribute upwards of \$9 billion to our economy through both forest products and outdoor recreation.

Thus, while 90% of Maine's forests are privately owned, their current and future health is of tremendous interest to all of us. Yet many complex dynamics threaten the forest: invasive insects and disease; drought and increased frequency of forest fires; development pressures; changing markets for wood, a shorter harvest season, and multiple pressures that make logging — the foundation of the forest products industry — unprofitable. That's why we strongly support this legislation.



At least 15 other states have similar advisory entities, including neighboring New Hampshire. My colleague, Dave Publicover, has served on that board for over 20 years, and I am sharing with you his letter, in which he outlines the benefits the board has had. I draw your attention to this:

*. . . . [P]erhaps the most important unofficial function of the Board is serving as a place for mutual education and understanding between diverse interests in a non-confrontational setting. Unfortunately, Maine currently has no such forum. Too often, debates over major forest policy issues, from the clearcutting referendum to outcome-based forestry to management of state lands, have taken place at a distance. Opposing parties present their viewpoints before legislative committees or in the media, with little opportunity for face-to-face discussion. The proposed Forest Advisory Board can provide this type of opportunity.*

Pulling together people with different expertise and points of view to tackle complicated issues is a time-honored strategy. Examples that come to mind include the Maine Climate Council, the Landowners and Sportsmen's Relations Advisory Board, and the Maine Public Drinking Water Commission. The board proposed in LD 993 would have less authority than the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council, the Marine Resources Advisory Council, or the Maine Agricultural Water Management Board.

We are at a **pivotal** moment for the future of our planet. If we take action now, we may head off the worst effects of climate change and the collapse of nature. Recognizing the full panoply of values of Maine's forest is a very modest step in that direction, but an important one. We ask you to support LD 993.

To the committee:

My name is David Publicover. I am Senior Staff Scientist and Assistant Director of Research with the Appalachian Mountain Club based in Gorham, NH where I have worked since 1992. Throughout my career I have been actively engaged in a wide range of forest policy and management issues, primarily in Maine and New Hampshire. I am submitting this statement as a supplement to the testimony of Eliza Townsend in support of LD 993 that would establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board.

I have been a member of the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board for over 20 years. As stated on the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands web site, "*Authorized under RSA 227-1:5, the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board (FAB) advises the Division of Forests and Lands on 'factors affecting the use, ownership, and management of forest resources.' The mission of the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board is to advocate implementation of the recommendations of the New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan, to coordinate forest policy development, facilitate dialogue between diverse interests, to assure opportunities for public participation in forest policy development, and to advise the State Forester in the development of state programs and policies.*"

As with the proposed legislation, the NHFAB represents diverse interests including state and federal agencies, UNH, NGOs, foresters, loggers, landowners and the timber industry. However, unlike LD 1549, the authorizing legislation in New Hampshire does not specify the Board's membership or specific terms, which are left to the discretion of the director of the Division of Forests and Lands. While this has worked well, I believe the more defined membership set forth in LD 993 is appropriate and will ensure that all interests are represented on the Board.

The most important function of the Board has been assisting the Division in the development of the 10-year state Forest Action Plan. Most recently the Board held multiple meetings over nine months of 2020 to refine the draft plan before it went out for public comment. We reviewed multiple iterations of the plan. The diversity of the Board ensured that the text, background information, and recommendations were vetted from a range of perspectives. There were disagreements and we had extensive discussions about how to present certain issues such as climate change. However, these discussions always remained collegial and respectful. In the end we gained a better understanding of each other's viewpoints and concerns, and the document was the better for it.

The Board serves other functions as well, including considering legislation of relevance to the division or the broader forest community, providing guidance on state land management, and providing a source of information on emerging or relevant issues. It also serves as an opportunity for public input; though not common (Board meetings are open to the public but not required to be publicly noticed), on occasion members of the public have come before the Board to present their concerns about particular issues.

However, perhaps the most important unofficial function of the Board is serving as a place for mutual education and understanding between diverse interests in a non-confrontational setting. Unfortunately, Maine currently has no such forum. Too often, debates over major forest policy issues, from the clearcutting referendum to outcome-based forestry to management of state lands, have taken place at a distance. Opposing parties present their viewpoints before legislative committees or in the media, with little opportunity for face-to-face discussion. The proposed Forest Advisory Board can provide this type of opportunity. It can also provide an opportunity for less prominent or well-organized voices, such as loggers or indigenous communities, a better opportunity to have their perspectives heard.

In my experience, the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board has provided a valuable forum for more reasoned debate about issues important to the forestry community in the state, and has helped build more respectful relationships among stakeholders. I believe a similar board in Maine would provide the same benefit, and I support the passage of LD 993.

Sincerely,



David Publicover, D.F.