



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Companies represented
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Huber Resources
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Testimony in Opposition to LD 993 “An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine”

March 20, 2023

Patrick Strauch, Executive Director

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am Patrick Strauch from Exeter, Maine, and the Executive Director of the Maine Forest Products Council (MFPC). I represent Maine's forest product industry, which contributes more than \$8 billion to the state's economy, and creates more than 33,500 direct and indirect jobs.

Before I get started, the Council would like to make the same offer here as we made to the IF&W committee. In order to support your knowledge of our industry, we would like to offer a tour after the legislative session to Maine's working forests to see firsthand the many facets of land stewardship. In the past these tours have been insightful for legislators and an important way to experience the collaborative opportunities used between government and forest industry leaders.

Now, to get to the business at hand, I am here today to testify in strong opposition to LD 993, “An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine” because, should it pass, this bill would shift the oversight of Maine's forest resources away from the scientists and highly qualified professionals within the Bureau of Forestry to a politically appointed board. As drafted, critical forest policies that determine how private landowners manage their land could be decided by as few as six members, as an affirmative vote of the majority of members present can decide any measure brought before the board and a quorum is defined as only 11 members. This approach is fraught with inequities for the regulated landowner community.

The Council appreciates the sponsor's interest in Maine's private forestlands, but the fact is that these are private resources, and the State has no authority to assume management as suggested in LD 993. We respect the authority of the legislative and the executive bodies of Maine government and will assist in any endeavor designed to promote collaborative solutions to identified policy issues. There are no other examples of natural resource boards or commissions that have been granted authority by the legislative body; all are authorized and administered by the executive branch.

Even without this legislation, statewide commissions are commonly formed on an ad hoc basis to discuss and explore specific forestry-related concerns with good results. There is no need to establish one with a permanent charter and budget. There have been many ongoing collaborative efforts that have yielded significant results. A few examples include:

- Maine Climate Council
- Forest Opportunity Roadmap project, FOR/Maine (MFPC is a founding member)
- Maine Spruce Budworm Taskforce
- Cooperative Forestry Research Unit
- Fisheries Improvement Network (FIN)

- Sustainable Forestry Initiative – Maine Implementation Committee
- State Forest Stewardship Coordination Committee
- Outcome Based Forestry Panel
- Keeping Maine’s Forest

As a result of these collaborations, many of which are ongoing, Maine’s forests are managed in a healthy and sustainable way with a diverse assembly of partners.

Pre-European settlement, Maine’s landscape was 92% forested. Today, with 17.5 million acres of forestland, Maine is 89% forested. Of that acreage, only 352,400 acres of forestland are harvested annually, according to the USDA. Harvested acres are regenerated and, as a result, Maine is growing far more trees each year than are being removed, allowing for both carbon sequestration and long-term carbon storage in the form of long-lived timber products.

According to research by the University of Maine, our managed forest currently captures 75% of the state’s annual fossil fuel emissions, with 60% captured by the forest and 15% captured in forest products. These forest products are becoming increasingly important alternatives to carbon-intensive materials such as concrete, steel and plastic, and they rely on local and sustainable forestry.

It is also worth noting that Maine’s private landowners, who own 94% of the state’s forestland, are leading the nation in third-party certified sustainable forestry with 8.3 million acres of forestland certified by nationally recognized programs. To achieve certification, landowners must adhere to forest practices that are environmentally sound, economically viable and socially responsible. It is also worth noting that even though some acreage has changed hands in recent years, the number of certified acres has not decreased, showing the ongoing commitment of private landowners to practice sustainable forestry.

Upon reviewing the presentation by Sally Stockwell from Audubon and David Publicover from AMC, I see no compelling case for alarm. The changes in age class distribution of trees have been occurring for ages as the industry modernized and fewer old growth stands remain. But this is offset in the long run by the sale of forestland to environmental non-governmental organizations and federal ownerships where ecological reserves have rapidly increased. We have a healthy brook trout population and long-term studies of bird populations in Maine have been positive.

The lack of good information in the 1990’s drove Maine to build a stronger forest monitoring system. We currently monitor harvest activity using FIA data annually, and this data is already presented to the legislature annually in the Measures of Growth report. Commercial forestlands are not operating as the “wild west” and wildlife biologists, foresters, forest engineers in partnership with loggers and NGO’s are progressively discussing and managing the private forest resource responsibly with an eye to the next generation.

The council views the proposed creation of the Forest Advisory Council as prescribed by LD 993 as a bureaucratic and politicizing mechanism not matched in structure by any natural resource agency. Certainly, Maine’s farming community is not subjected to such a heavy handed oversight by the legislative body other than the legislative committee of jurisdiction. For these reasons, the Maine Forest Products Council urges an ‘ought not to pass’ vote on LD 993.

Thank you for your consideration.