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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

Testimony of Senator Richard A. Bennett
In Support of LD 993,
"An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine"
20 March 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to cosponsor LD 993, An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine.

This bill creates the Maine Forest Advisory Board to advise the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Bureau of Forestry. The Board will consist of 21 individuals, each having a unique interest in how Maine maintains our forests. The Board will be tasked with advising the bureau on conditions and trends in the forests, facilitating dialogue among diverse interests, and promoting cooperation among state agencies, among other duties.

On another bill relating to our forests, more than 55 years ago, Senator Horace Hildreth (Cumberland) (June 13, 1967) said the following on the floor of the Maine Senate:

"You must realize, that within four hours' drive from here live nearly forty million people, who each year have more and more spare time, who each year are earning more and more money, and who each year are looking for places to go. Now, where are they going to go? If they are interested in the outdoors, they are going to be interested in coming to Maine... Don't you think it would make some sense for the State of Maine for once to look ahead to what our problem is going to be and to try and do something about it?"

Engaging in ongoing dialogue on one of Maine's most critical and important assets is proactive, prudent, and practical. After all, Maine's 17.5 million acres of forest absorb 60% of the state's annual greenhouse gas emissions and support the forest products and recreational sector. We cannot take these benefits for granted.

I believe the formation of this Board will allow for a better means of mediating issues relating to the Maine forests, which I hope results in fewer issues coming before the Legislature. In my career as a businessman and in my service as a state legislator, I have always found that promoting dialogue and finding common ground is the best way to solve problems. Too often when the issues reach the level of the Legislature, differences become battlelines, and resolution becomes difficult.

Forestry Advisory Boards like this one work well in 15 other states. I believe the creation of this board in Maine, the most forested state in our nation, will help foster thoughtful conversation and constructive compromise. Thank you.