



Natural Resources Council of Maine
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**Testimony in Support of LD 993,
An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine
March 20, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Melanie Sturm, the Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 993.

Given the importance of Maine forests to Maine's economy and the people of Maine, and the growing importance of forestlands in the future, we believe the time has come to increase stakeholder input regarding forest policy in Maine, as called for by this legislation.

As you know, Maine is the most heavily forested state in the nation and we have long relied on our forestlands for a broad range of uses and values, including timber, jobs, recreation, wildlife habitat, and inspiration. We are also learning just how important our forests are for storing and sequestering carbon and protecting biodiversity. Invasive species, pests and disease, climate change, and wildfires are significant and worsening threats to Maine's woods and the fish and wildlife that occupy our forests and the waterways within forested areas. As seen globally, we may gradually lose the biodiversity of Maine's woods if we don't take measures to protect what's there.

The makeup of people, businesses, and landowners who interact with Maine's forests is changing along with the biological and environmental elements. While a relatively small handful of timberland owners once owned most of the 10.5-million-acre North Woods, that landscape it is now divided among hundreds of landowners with divergent goals, management plans, and objectives. Timber Investment Management Organizations and Real Estate Investment Trusts own significant tracts of Maine's North Woods, making decisions based on shorter term time horizons to satisfy shareholder interests. This can potentially be at odds with other values of the land that Maine people, visitors, and wildlife depend on.

Changing ownership, shifting timber industry economics, accelerating climate change, and increased development pressures on land are creating a new context for forest policies in Maine. With these changes in mind, we believe LD 993 could serve as a valuable tool for building understanding regarding forest management that could lead to better outcomes for Maine's natural resources, businesses, and people while ensuring all sides have a seat at the table.

This is a modest bill. Similar Forest Advisory Boards exist in more than a dozen states with less forestland than Maine, including New Hampshire and Connecticut. In these other states, Forest Advisory Boards have served an important role in helping depoliticize complex issues regarding the stewardship

of public and private forestlands. Bringing diverse interests together to deliberate multi-faceted issues and work toward common goals would be a benefit in Maine and an improvement over existing processes.

Given the critical importance of Maine's forests to the future of our state, we support creation of a Maine Forest Advisory Board as proposed by LD 993. This Board would create a forum for evaluating forest resource issues through collaboration. Much like the Advisory Boards for the Departments of Inland Fish and Wildlife and Marine Resources, a Forest Advisory Board would provide a forum for a wide range of forest resource interests to share perspectives, develop policy recommendations, facilitate interagency information sharing, and ensure public participation.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 993. Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.