



Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition
In support of LD 993

“An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine”
Before the Agriculture, Forestry and Conservation Committee
March 20, 2023

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Beth Ahearn and I offer testimony on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC). The EPC is a partnership of thirty-seven conservation, environmental, and public health organizations who unify around a common agenda every year. The EPC represents over 120,000 members in Maine who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that depend upon a healthy environment. LD 993, “An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine”, is one of the priority bills for our coalition this year. Thank you to Rep. O’Neil for sponsoring this priority legislation.

LD 993 aims to create a Forest Advisory Board that will support stakeholder input on forestry practices. This is an advisory board, and more than 90 advisory boards currently exist in Maine.¹ As the most forested state in the country, this advisory board makes sense. New Hampshire has had one for more than several decades, and 15 other states also benefit from having a Forest Advisory Board.

The facts are compelling: Maine’s forests are a resource of global importance. Maine’s 17.5 million acres of forest absorb 60% of the state’s annual greenhouse gas emissions², support the Pine Tree State’s \$8.1 billion forest products industry,³ and contribute to the \$2.8 billion recreational sector.⁴ Our forests also shelter 139 rare plants and animals, including 21 globally rare species, and hold the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/statutes/5/title5sec12004-l.html>

² https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/GOPIF_STS_REPORT_092320.pdf

³ <https://maineforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2019-FP-Impact-Final-to-MFPC-Revised-Nov-2021.pdf>

⁴ <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/maine>

United States.⁵ Because they are big and largely unfragmented, Maine’s forests have an outsized role to play in mitigating and adapting to climate change and in ensuring continued biodiversity, two of the most pressing issues facing the world today.

It is time to expand perspectives about Maine’s forests. They play an important role in sequestering carbon; could they play a larger role?⁶ Climate change is here, affecting our communities, our livelihoods, our daily lives, and our forests. Maine’s forests face multiple threats, including climate change, drought, and fire; insects and disease; changing ownership patterns and changing markets for wood products; conversion to development and parcelization.

We lose 10,000 acres of forest every year to development.⁷ This contributes directly to the loss of biodiversity – the variety of animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms that form ecosystems and support life on Earth. For example, North America has lost 3 billion birds since 1970,⁸ and insect populations have dropped by 40% worldwide.⁹

We need all hands on deck to keep our forests intact and healthy for years to come. A Forest Advisory Board would bring together a variety of viewpoints – loggers and biologists, commercial landowners and indigenous tribes, sportsmen and ecologists – to share information, facilitate public input, look at the forest comprehensively, and advise the Maine Forest Service on policies to keep our forests healthy, intact, and productive. This strategy could help defuse tensions among stakeholders with different viewpoints.

We urge you to support LD 993, which would enhance the future of Maine’s forest with a Forest Advisory Board.

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<https://mainemountaincollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Ecological-Values-of-the-Western-Maine-Mountains.pdf>

⁶ <https://newenglandforestry.org/2023/03/06/forest-carbon-report/>

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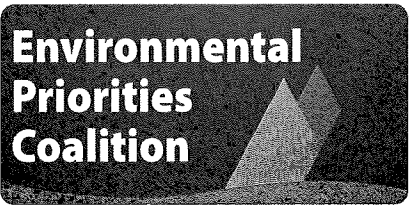
https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/MaineForestCarbonTaskForce_FinalReport.pdf

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<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back/#:~:text=An%20alarming%20new%20study%20reveals,span%20of%20a%20human%20lifetime.>

⁹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0006320718313636>



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