

Testimony Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

In Support of LD1048

Good morning.

My name is Bob Burr and I live in the Town of Mercer. I have been a private forest landowner in Maine for over 50 years, and part of the American Tree Farm system for more than 40 years. While I am now retired, I made my living in the wood products industry in Maine. I was invited to be part of the stakeholder group which was a result of the resolve for LD 1407 in 2021; a talented group that represented a broad cross section of individuals who were directly or indirectly involved in timber harvests. The group was charged with understanding the complexities of municipal ordinances regarding timber harvests, particularly as they relate to current state laws and guidelines. As part of the process, we reviewed a number of municipal ordinances from across the state. Some of these ordinances were written with the input of foresters or the Maine Forest Service (MFS), but many were not. To say that the language and intent varied widely is an understatement.

In Maine, we have a love-hate relationship with municipal ordinances and state mandates. We don't want any ordinances or mandates that tell us what we can do on our land until our neighbor does something we don't like. The recommendations the stakeholders group made to the MFS sought to find the balance between local control and a more consistent use of language in municipal ordinances, as well as ensuring the input of citizens, trained foresters and the Maine Forest Service, and preserving the rights of forestland owners across the entire state. The stakeholders recommendations recognize the importance of having one set of definitions and a clear process for timber harvests that are fair to citizens, municipalities, landowners, foresters, and others involved in any step of a timber harvest. What is not fair to any of these parties is a hodgepodge of arbitrary local rules, confusing forestry terms, and a lack of clarity.

As the title suggests, the language in the act clarifies the authority of municipalities to regulate timber harvesting. It does not pre-empt municipal authority but lays out the use of standard forestry definitions, the process requirements to adopt or amend a timber harvesting ordinance, and the timetable to do so. It also provides for the notification of the MFS so that all ordinances are consistent with current laws and directs the MFS to maintain a list of timber harvesting ordinances for anyone to access.

I urge you to look favorably on LD 1048. Its passage would clarify the language of timber harvest ordinances and provide a base level of uniformity across the state which would benefit land owners, loggers, and ensure that municipalities could successfully enforce their ordinances. Over fifty years ago, the legislature enacted a state wide shore land zoning act that provided clear definitions to protect our valuable water bodies. If this act is enacted it would have a similar unifying and clarifying effect.

Finally let me say what a talented and dedicated group the state has in the Maine Forest Service. They are an outstanding group of intelligent and hardworking individuals who look after the health of our forests and the people who use them.

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to offer my thoughts.