



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 1162

An Act to Protect the Environment by Funding Ash Tree Management

April 3, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Morten Moesswilde. I am the Acting Division Director of Forest Policy and Management at the Maine Forest Service (MFS), and I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), as neither for nor against LD 1162, *An Act to Protect the Environment by Funding Ash Tree Management*.

This bill would provide ongoing funding for municipalities to respond to the consequences of the Emerald Ash Borer invasion in Maine. Emerald Ash borer, or "EAB," is a deadly invasive insect that quickly kills the ash trees it infests. EAB was first detected in Maine in the spring of 2018. As of February 2023, there are confirmed infestations in six of the state's 16 counties. Within our native forests, the ash component is 2% of the hardwood forest. However, in our downtowns, neighborhoods, and along town roads, that inventory often rises to 25%, as ash was a widespread replacement for elm in the wake of Dutch elm disease.

As EAB spreads in the state, the demands for technical, educational, and financial assistance from MFS have increased significantly. In response, our staff has:

- Presented dozens of community workshops on EAB,
- Held regular updates and planning calls with municipal tree managers,
- Assisted and supported tree inventory in 22 communities,
- Provided support for rural forest management planning for community woodlands in 26 communities,
- Provided grants for the development of two community tree nurseries to replace street and shade trees lost to age, invasive diseases, and insect outbreaks with tree species that are not susceptible to prevalent or emerging diseases or pests, and
- Trained municipal road crew members on pest and safety considerations when dealing with ash.

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

Maine can learn from the responses of other states to this pest. It has been shown that money invested early, before or immediately after detecting EAB infestation, for tree protection and ash replacement can prevent catastrophic damage and ultimately save money. Unfortunately, many municipalities lack the awareness of or the means to address this growing problem.

As the EAB infestation continues to grow in both scope and severity, towns, landowners, land trusts, and state agencies are all faced with difficult questions on how to approach EAB preparedness and management with limited resources. They face diverse public opinions on pesticide use and tough decisions regarding which ash trees to remove proactively and when. Towns must be prepared to address tree removal safety protocols, response costs, and planning for replacement with the next generation of street and shade trees. As EAB populations grow exponentially over time, the need for assistance and expenses borne by municipalities and their taxpayers will also grow.

Recent costs incurred by one municipality in response to EAB show an average of \$350/tree for protective treatments with pesticide (re-treatments expected every 2-4 years), removal costs of \$1,000/tree, and planting costs of \$500/tree. Two cities with rapidly developing EAB populations have each spent more than \$50,000 in a single year on ash tree removal. A third municipality has spent around \$50,000 in a year of treatments and removals combined.

MFS' long-standing Project Canopy program is well-versed in assisting towns and other organizations in tree care and maintenance. The program provides an annual grant assisting municipalities, schools, and eligible organizations in conducting tree planting and maintenance, along with relevant planning for the urban and community forest. The program has supported the development of management plans for ash treatment, removal, and replanting in several Maine communities. Over the past three years, the total grant amount available ranged from \$100,000 to \$175,000; this meets most needs for planting but is insufficient to meet tree removal needs. This program could be enhanced by LD 1162.

Currently, the Project Canopy Program Manager oversees a contracted outreach coordinator and leverages on-the-ground support from District Foresters and a network of municipal employees and volunteers to administer the existing grant program. If funding significantly increases as proposed by LD 1162, it would require additional staff for grant monitoring and community support in order to responsibly administer more funds.

Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.