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***Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry***

***RE: LD 1227 - An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation***

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1227 - An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation.** We appreciate Representative Pluecker's efforts to bring this idea forward and support the amended version he has introduced.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

LD 1227 and the accompanying amendment requires the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), in collaboration with other state agencies and interested parties, to develop a plan to implement a dual-use energy pilot program. The amendment provides more flexibility by authorizing the department, in coordination with the Governor's Energy Office, to get started with the pilot if they are ready to but maintains a report back to the legislature in February 2025. Importantly, the amendment also focuses on agricultural dual use projects, increases the possible size of the pilot program, and sets up the opportunity for DACF to accept funding from any source to develop or implement this effort.

The Nature Conservancy's top priorities, in Maine and across the world, are conserving lands and waters and tackling climate change. These goals are tightly intertwined—conserving natural places helps draw down carbon from the atmosphere and provides space for wildlife to move and adapt as temperatures warm, while the rapid deployment of clean, renewable energy mitigates the cause of climate change that is impacting natural and human communities alike. There is an inherently virtuous cycle between clean energy deployment and natural resource conservation.

At the same time, clean energy projects require substantial space to build and can bump into important natural resources. Maintaining the virtuous relationship between clean energy and natural resources requires being intentional about where new

projects are located. TNC believes that with the right policy frameworks in place, Maine and the region can build the clean energy we need in a way that is compatible with our natural and working lands.

LD 856 represents an important step toward achieving this goal. We appreciate the work of Rep. Pluecker, the GEO, DACF, and partner organizations like Maine Farmland Trust in crafting this thoughtful legislation that builds on the work of the Agricultural Solar Stakeholder Group and is consistent with Maine's Climate Action Plan, which recommends that the State should, "Develop policies by 2022 to ensure renewable energy project siting is streamlined and transparent while seeking to minimize impacts on natural and working lands and engaging key stakeholders."

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on LD 1227. I'm happy to answer questions at any time.