



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

JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL  
COMMISSIONER

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

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 1285**

*An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*

**April 10, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Judy East, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in favor of LD 1285, *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*.

This bill provides ongoing funding for the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program within DACF. LMF is the State of Maine's primary funding vehicle for conserving land for its natural and recreational value. The program was established in 1987 when Maine citizens voted to fund \$35 million to purchase lands of statewide importance.

LMF has garnered broad-based support ever since. LMF respects landowner rights by acquiring land from willing sellers, pursues a mission defined by the public, provides a tangible return to everyone who cherishes Maine's landscape (from hunter and hiker to snowmobiler and bird watcher), and leverages both federal and private funding for state priority purchases.

In the State's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, Strategy E (Protect Maine's Environment and Working Lands and Waters) calls for an increase by 2030 in the total acreage of conserved lands to 30% through the voluntary, focused purchase of land and working forest or farm conservation easements. Strategy E also calls upon LMF to revise scoring criteria to incorporate climate mitigation and resiliency goals, which the program has accomplished.

LMF's current funding is being spent down, as directed, and is on track to be depleted by 2025. At the end of 2022, LMF had expended \$17.9 million of the \$40 million appropriated by the 130<sup>th</sup> legislature for program funding. Current rounds of LMF funding have already received requests that, with associated set-asides for stewardship and other essential expenses, exceed \$7.22 million. And using the last round of working lands applications as a reasonable guide, the program is also likely to see applications in the fall of 2023 exceed \$7 million. Based on these projections, the pace at which these funds will be expended supports establishing ongoing funding for this worthwhile program.

HARLOW BUILDING  
18 ELKINS LANE  
AUGUSTA, MAINE



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

If the number of acres projected by LMF based on pending applications in 2023 is realized, conserved acreage will increase by about 50,000 acres. That number could increase to about 79,000 acres with potential fall 2023 applications. Even if the higher estimate is conserved, that will contribute only 1% more toward *Maine Won't Wait* Strategy E's 30% target of total conserved lands in Maine. More funding will undoubtedly be necessary to help LMF continue to accomplish this and other important conservation goals.

Given the continued strong interest in LMF's programs, the significant development pressure facing farmland, forests, and working waterfronts, the rising costs of land, and the importance of sequestering carbon, DACF supports the ongoing appropriation established by LD 1285. Since LMF projects often span multiple fiscal years, we recommend language establishing the appropriation as a general fund non-lapsing account or as an annual transfer to LMF's non-lapsing Other Special Revenue account. The Department also recommends the two limited-term full-time positions previously funded to enable the efficient administration of these funds be established as permanent positions. Both the LMF program and BPL, one of the designated state agencies (DSA) that manages state lands, need ongoing resources to support the administration of these funds properly. BPL's role as the DSA requires the bureau to assume perpetual stewardship and monitoring responsibilities for all LMF projects it sponsors, regardless of ownership. These obligations include thousands of acres protected by the State and by land trust partners across Maine.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.