

Maine Coast Heritage Trust

A Statewide Land Conservation Organization

Testimony on LD 1285: An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust in support of LD 1285.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust conserves and stewards Maine's coastal lands and islands for their renowned scenic beauty, ecological value, outdoor recreational opportunities, and contribution to community well-being. We provide statewide conservation leadership through our work with land trusts, coastal communities, and other partners. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres in Maine.

Two years ago, the Governor worked with legislators from both sides of the aisle to direct \$40 million into Land for Maine's Future (LMF), limiting spending to no more than \$10 million a year for four years. As we near the halfway point of this investment, the program has thus far committed more than \$17 million into the following categories:

- 3 farmland projects
- 4 working waterfront properties
- 5 working forest projects
- 25 conservation and recreation projects

Located throughout the state, these conservation properties include incredible wildlife-rich landscapes in northern Maine, popular outdoor recreational areas near our largest population centers, and countless publicly accessible open spaces in between. Next month, the Board will be looking at more than a dozen new conservation and recreation projects and will be receiving grant applications for working farms and forests in September. LMF is well on its way to fulfilling the previous legislature's goals of achieving conservation benefits for Maine people.

LD 1285 will help ensure this momentum continues and it is part of a larger plan that will take time to implement. Supporters of this bill are currently working with the Governor on a related, soon to be introduced proposal to establish the LMF Trust Fund. That bill will be creating a framework within LMF with the goal of securing more reliable, long-term funding. The LMF Trust Fund will also begin a path in which the program can look to become increasingly less dependent on support from the state's general fund, either through appropriations or bonds.

We encourage the committee to amend this bill to focus it on the biennial budget beginning in 2025, vote ought to pass, and work with the Appropriations Committee to secure the funding.

Land for Maine's Future Plan

LMF Trust Fund

Governor to introduce bill establishing LMF Trust Fund – Maine version of Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund

LMF Trust Fund Sources

- Remaining 2021 LMF funds
- Future GF appropriation (see LD 1285 below)
- Private voluntary contributions
- Compensation to meet Site Law (see LR 77 below)
- Investment income
- Exploring other sources . . .

LMF Trust Fund Expenditures

Land Acquisition Grants

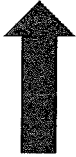
Existing LMF Priorities

- Conservation and Recreation
- Water Access
- Working Waterfront
- Farmland
- Mitigation

New LMF Priority

Land Stewardship Grants

- Land Management – new competitive grant program focused on investments in public outdoor recreational areas and wildlife habitat management



LD 1285: LMF Authorization Sen. Black

Looking to fund LMF in FY 25/26 and FY 26/27 at \$10 million/year from General Fund, effectively extending current \$40 million appropriation by \$20 million and two years. This is bridge funding for the program as we work to make LMF Trust Fund self-sustaining.

LR 77: Mitigation Rep. Landry

New wildlife habitat compensation funding program for solar, wind, and transmission corridor developers to meet existing Site Law compensation requirements related to wildlife habitat and new authority under Title 35A for compensation related to solar development of high value ag lands.