



Testimony of Eliza Townsend

In support of LD 1285, *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director, Appalachian Mountain Club, pleased to speak in support of LD 1285.

AMC is the nation's oldest conservation, recreation and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,600 members in Maine and own 100,000 acres of forestland in Piscataquis County which we manage for multiple use, including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

For more than 30 years, the Land for Maine's Future program has contributed to the economic, physical, mental, and social well-being of Maine people by conserving more than 600,000 acres of land. Across the state, LMF has improved access to recreation for both residents and visitors, supported local economies, prevented the conversion of working farmlands, and maintained critical waterfront access for those who earn their living from the ocean. In keeping land undeveloped, it has ensured the continued "ecosystem services" provided by open space, that is, the cleaning of our air and water that we too often take for granted.

Further, LMF has helped Maine mitigate and adapt to climate change. Among the most valuable ways in which it has done so is through the conservation of working forests. Maine's forests absorb 60% of our carbon pollution annually and could do more. Large and intact, they provide critical habitat for a variety of species, allowing them to move and survive in the face of warming temperatures. By preventing the conversion of working forests, LMF has supported an \$8.1 billion industry while protecting habitat and drawing down considerable federal funding through the Forest Legacy program.

We must not rest. The world faces a crisis of biodiversity loss, evidenced by a 69% drop in wildlife populations worldwide since 1970, including a 40% drop in insect populations. Here in North America, we have lost 3 billion birds, and eastern forest birds and boreal birds—both found in Maine—are among the hardest hit. That's one reason that both the state of Maine and the federal government have endorsed a goal of saving 30% of our land by 2030.

Maine's forest is of global importance and has an outsized role to play in addressing both climate change and biodiversity loss. It sits at the heart of the largest, most intact temperate forest in the world, and harbors at least 139 rare plants and animals, 21 of them globally rare. The Northern Maine Forest Block is the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the continental United States. We should do all that we can to ensure its future, particularly in the face of the dynamics buffeting the forest products industry.

Fortunately, Congress included an appropriation of \$700 million for the Forest Legacy program in the Inflation Reduction Act. However, Forest Legacy requires a 25% match, which LMF can help meet.

Last session the legislature generously appropriated \$40 million to Land for Maine's Future, to be spent over 4 years. Given the ongoing development pressures Maine is experiencing, including in remote



places, and given the fact that land transactions can take years to negotiate, we support passage of LD 1285 as amended to assure future funding for land conservation.