

April 10, 2023

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

***RE: LD 1441 - An Act to Enhance State Oversight of Water Use and Water Resources***

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 1441 - An Act to Enhance State Oversight of Water Use and Water Resources.**

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 1441 would enact two recommendations from the Commission To Study the Role of Water as a Resource in the State of Maine by making changes to both the Water Resources Planning Committee and the Maine Agricultural Water Management Board. In both cases, the changes would result in collecting and compiling new and existing data and focusing on ensuring the Legislature and the public has easy access to information about water in Maine.

My former colleague Rob Wood served on the Commission which met five times between September and December 2022. TNC voted in favor of all five recommendations from the Commission. I currently represent TNC on the Water Resources Planning Committee in the seat designated for "a member of the public with expertise in the environment and conservation". Given our involvement in both of those entities, TNC supports LD 1441.

According to survey of Maine voters TNC commissioned in January 2023 with FM3 Research (Democratic Polling Firm) and New Bridge Strategy (Republican Polling Firm), nearly all Mainers say that clean water, natural areas, and wildlife are important to their quality of life. Voters also indicated strong support (89% strong or somewhat support) for increasing funding to protect sources of drinking water in Maine. Clearly water is a treasured resources for Maine people, and efforts to consolidate information, monitor, and collect data will help us ensure the best decisions are made regarding this resource. We hope the committee will consult with the Department and the Maine Geological Survey to ensure the changes are not duplicating existing efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of LD 1441.