



Maine Coast Heritage Trust

A Statewide Land Conservation Organization

Testimony on LD 695 An Act to Exempt Nonprofit Land Trusts from Sales Tax

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Taxation Committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT) in support of LD 695. Joining our testimony are fifteen other land trusts from around the state.

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 four decades, we have conserved more than 150,000 acres in Maine.

MCHT works in partnership with land trusts throughout Maine including the fifteen organizations that have joined this testimony. Collectively, our state's land trust community:

- Maintains more than 1,250 miles of recreational trails for hiking, snowmobiling, mountain biking, and ATV riding;
- Provides public access to over 2.3 million acres for traditional uses, including hunting and fishing;
- Manages over 250 water access sites for recreational boating, swimming, and commercial fishing;
- Conserves more than 2.1 million acres of working forestlands and over 40,000 acres of productive farmlands; and
- Offers educational programming each year to about 30,000 students of all ages.

In addition to these highlights, Maine's land trusts partner with local governments to improve infrastructure at municipal parks, collaborate with community leaders to enhance water quality, and host a variety of events each year welcoming tens of thousands of people to enjoy the health benefits realized from time spent outdoors. And, although eligible for property tax exemption, most land trust conserved lands (nearly 95%) remain on the local tax rolls to help pay for municipal services¹.

¹ Legislature's Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee compiled land trust property tax exemption data for Study on Conserved Lands Owned by Nonprofit Organizations. Under the bipartisan leadership of Senator Paul Davis and Representative Michele Dunphy, the committee completed the study in 2018 at the request of the LePage Administration.

Despite these clear public benefits, Maine's land trusts fall outside the current list of nonprofits whose activities qualify for the state's sales tax exemption. While we support LD 695, we recommend the committee focus its attention on LD 68, a bill that would extend sales tax exemption to all nonprofits.

The change proposed in LD 68 could not be timelier as nonprofits assume a growing list of responsibilities once delivered by state, federal, and local governments. For example, amid the recent pandemic, even as some state parks and public lands shut down, land trust preserves continued to welcome Maine families. We continue to see record numbers of people exploring these wild places near their homes and across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective on LD 695.

- Kennebunkport Conservation Trust
- Blue Hill Heritage Trust
- Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust
- Midcoast Conservancy
- 7 Lakes Alliance
- Boothbay Region Land Trust
- Friends of Wilson Pond
- Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust
- Greater Lovell Land Trust
- Appalachian Trail Land Trust
- Crabtree Neck Land Trust
- Western Foothills Land Trust
- Maine Farmland Trust
- Freeport Conservation Trust
- Loon Echo Land Trust