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

IN SUPPORT OF LD 1678

Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Study and Report on Soil Carbon Sequestration Incentive Programs

April 26, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Craig Lapine, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in support of LD 1678, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Study and Report on Soil Carbon Sequestration Incentive Programs*.

Members of this Committee, including the sponsors and cosponsors of this bill, have shown remarkable leadership with respect to the issue of enhancing the health of Maine soils. We recognize that on this Committee, there is deep insight into and appreciation for the economic and ecological importance of soil health and the special roles that farmers and foresters have in stewarding, and benefitting from, that health. We are grateful that the Legislature approved funding for the Maine Healthy Soils Program, and we are excited about the work underway to implement the program that will carry out this important work.

The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, submitted a report on soil carbon incentives to this Committee in September 2022. That report summarized the current scientific literature on soil carbon sequestration in northern climates and suggested various programmatic activities the State could undertake to enhance soil carbon management. Protection of coastal and inland wetlands, forests, and prime farmland is essential to maintain soil carbon, and all four bureaus of the Department are working towards this goal.

The current Resolve would focus specifically on soil carbon incentives as a mechanism and is, in essence, a subset of work already in progress in the Department. In order to shape our Healthy Soils

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Program, our staff have been collaborating with our federal agency partners and investigating successful soil health promotion strategies developed by other individual states and nations. The federal government is making significant investments in natural resource programs that will benefit soil health and carbon sequestration. These programs are evolving rapidly, and we will need to be agile in responding and collaborating to take advantage of these unprecedented opportunities.

You will see that work reflected in our Healthy Soils Program design over this summer and in conjunction with federal investments in healthy soils, which will roll out at the beginning of the federal fiscal year in October. Given this timing, we suggest that this bill be carried over to the next session.

Thank you for considering this information. I am happy to answer questions now or at a work session.