

**Testimony by Matt Markot  
Executive Director, Loon Echo Land Trust  
In Support of LD 1156  
April 27, 2023**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Matt Markot and I am the Executive Director of Loon Echo Land Trust. I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today in strong support of the Maine Trails Bond (LD 1156).

Loon Echo Land Trust works to conserve land in the northern Sebago Lake region, in the towns of Bridgton, Casco, Denmark, Naples, Harrison, Sebago, and Raymond. Since 1987, we have worked with communities, businesses, and organizations to protect more than 8,500 acres of land through conservation easements, land purchases, and land donations.

We have more than 30 miles of trails on our protected lands, providing opportunities for tens of thousands of people annually to walk through forests, along rivers and streams, and up to stunning vistas at places like Pleasant Mountain and Hacker's Hill. In addition, our conservation lands host trails for motorized sports like snowmobiling and ATVing.

As you consider this bill, please recognize that trails build themselves, and they're not self-maintaining. Trails are like any infrastructure. They require resources of time and money. That's why the Maine Trails Bond is so important.

We have developed some amazing trails in our area that bring value to the lives of Maine people and visitors every day. Last summer, we celebrated the grand opening of a new accessible trail at Pondicherry Park in Bridgton. This project has helped rejuvenate a centrally located park, helping countless people connect easily with the natural world. The project also connects the downtown with stores, schools, and neighborhoods, thus serving as part of our community's transportation infrastructure.

This project built on the success of the first accessible trail that we built at Peabody-Fitch Woods in Bridgton in 2020. The process of developing these trails has been transformative for our organization, and the community. We've built new relationships with organizations like Maine Adaptive Sports and are eager to move forward with more trail projects that reduce barriers to outdoor experiences and offer transportation alternatives for people in the communities we serve.

Raising funds for projects like these is not easy, and the needs are large, which is why this bill presents such an exciting opportunity. Along with five other land trusts in our region, we recently commissioned an assessment of our collective trails systems (over 100 miles in Western Maine), and the low-end cost estimates for deferred maintenance projects alone exceed \$1 million.

The Maine Trails Bond would be a reliable source of state funding that could leverage other resources, including volunteer labor, private funding, and federal funds, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund and small grants provided by the Recreational Trails Program.

Let me close by repeating my earlier message: Trails don't just happen. They require planning, stewardship, and investment.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the Maine Trails Bond. I hope that you will pass this measure so that it can be considered by the people of Maine at the ballot box. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.