



STATE OF MAINE

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 1156

An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development, and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation

April 27, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Andy Cutko, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL). I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) as neither for nor against LD 1156, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation.

BPL stewards some of the most iconic, scenic, and sought-after walking, hiking, and biking trails in the eastern United States, including trail systems like Tumbledown Mountain, Mount Battie, Old Speck, Bradbury Mountain, and the Cutler Coast. With more than 400 miles of non-motorized trails, our Bureau maintains trail networks in every Maine county, ranging from short, ADA-accessible footpaths along the coast to challenging mountain biking trails to rugged and remote trails suitable for multi-day backpacking adventures. By all accounts, however, the growth in recreational use we experienced during the pandemic has been sustained, and many of our hiking trails are at risk of being 'loved to death.'

BPL also administers the state's ATV and Snowmobile Programs, which add millions of dollars to the state's outdoor economy. These programs manage nearly 650 miles of motorized trails on BPL lands, and working with private clubs across the state, we support roughly 6,000 miles of ATV trails and 13,000 miles of snowmobile trails on private lands. ATV and snowmobile registrations, like recreational uses of all types, have surged over the last several years; ATV registrations climbed 20% in the previous decade, and snowmobile registrations grew by 9%. The recent ATV Task Force estimated the funding needs at \$4.5 million per year, more than twice the amount available, and the shortfall for the snowmobile program is more than \$3 million

dollars per year. In some cases, trails need to be closed to limit damage or mitigate safety hazards. In recent years the Bureau has either temporarily or permanently closed over 700 miles of ATV trails because of insufficient funding to maintain them.

Maine's motorized and non-motorized trails are the lifeblood of our recreational economy. In many locations, however, these trails suffer from heavy use, resulting in environmental damage (through erosion and sedimentation), dangerous footing, insufficient parking, and inadequate signage and safety. Three years ago, the Maine Conservation Corps assessed approximately 400 miles of non-motorized trails on BPL lands, identifying obvious trail maintenance and improvement needs. The assessment revealed more than 3,900 locations of erosion, water issues, and failing structural elements. The necessary funding to address our Bureau's needs is estimated at \$20 million; this estimate is just for BPL lands and does not include construction costs for new trails. It is important to note that in addition to funding to administer the program, BPL would greatly benefit from one full-time trail planner.

In summary, the funding identified in this bill would fill a vital role in supporting the state's diverse and expansive recreational trail system, and it would complement BPL's many existing efforts in this area. Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.