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

IN SUPPORT OF LD 1817

*An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the  
Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program*

May 10, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Nancy McBrady, Deputy Commissioner in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am speaking today in support of LD 1817, *An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program*.

This bill establishes a program to provide outdoor education to serve Maine students. The outdoors is part of our state's DNA. Many of us were fortunate to obtain outdoor literacy through our childhood experiences – hiking, camping, swimming, hunting, fishing, and exploring with our families and friends. More broadly speaking, the goal of the Outdoor School for All aligns well with the Department's mission and allows us to instill the importance of our natural resource industries in Maine and to plant seeds for future generations of farmers, foresters, fishermen, and others working outdoors and/or as stewards of our natural resources.

Unfortunately, many children in Maine lack opportunities to enjoy and learn about the outdoors, either because of their home circumstances, lack of access and transportation, or the lack of suitable school or community-based programs. LD 1817 takes an important step to address this deficiency. As outlined in the bill, the Department's role would be to administer funds and convene and manage an ongoing advisory committee. While we appreciate the intent, we request that the committee consider the following amendments:

- While DACF recognizes that the current budgetary asks by the University of Maine should be a priority for consideration if funding is allocated as proposed in LD 1817, we would recommend that it go directly to the University rather than creating a new program account to be administered by DACF. Similarly, if funds were to flow directly to the University for this program, we believe it would be best for the University to also

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convene the ongoing advisory committee rather than DACF, which will help streamline the administrative responsibilities

- Should the legislature ultimately decide to assign the funds and administrative oversight to the Department, we would request a change in the report-back date to March 1, 2024, for adequate response time, as funding would not become available until 90 days after adjournment

In summary, while this is not in the Governor's proposed budget, this is an exciting initiative, and the Department would welcome the opportunity to be appropriately engaged. I would gladly answer any questions at this time or during the work session.