



Maine Coast Heritage Trust

A Statewide Land Conservation Organization

Testimony on LD 1881

An Act Regarding Compensation Fees and Related Conservation Efforts to Protect Soils and Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat from Solar and Wind Energy Development and High-impact Electric Transmission Lines Under the Site Location of Development Laws

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust in support of LD 1881.

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 five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres in Maine.

LD 1881 is the product of a five-month series of meetings that began in November 2022 that included representatives from state agencies, conservation groups, and the solar energy industry. The participants discussed potential impacts of renewable energy development on wildlife habitat and agricultural lands, examined requirements under current law to compensate for those impacts, and slowly pieced together the bill language that is before the committee today.

Stakeholders met eight times between early November to late March. Although there was not consensus on every section of the final bill, significant portions of LD 1881 reflect recommendations made by all parties, including representatives from the solar industry. MCHT is especially supportive of the bill's proposed creation of a "conservation fund" in Section 2. Under the current law, the only process available to compensate for impacts to wildlife habitat can lead to less-than-ideal outcomes. This new fund will provide a better path for developers to ensure compensation outcomes provide the public with appropriate conservation benefits.

Renewable energy siting decisions include multiple trade-offs, and it is difficult to craft legislation to make all sides happy. However, LD 1881 successfully balances the competing goals of renewable energy development, wildlife habitat protection, and agricultural land conservation. By design, many of the bill's specific requirements will be determined through rulemaking after additional feedback from the various stakeholders. Once fully implemented, LD 1881 will position Maine in a better place to support renewable energy in ways that are consistent with other important land use values.