



Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director

In support of LD 1969

An Act to Expand the Use of Funds to Support Land Conservation

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Agriculture Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Eliza Townsend Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC is the nation's oldest conservation, recreation and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,600 members in Maine and own 100,000 acres of forestland in Piscataquis County which we manage for multiple use, including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

Mainers love the Land for Maine's Future program. Over the past three decades, whenever they have been given the opportunity, they have voted for LMF by strong margins. And no wonder. This program has conserved access to the outdoors for a wide range of recreation and has conserved working lands in the form of farms, forests and access for commercial harvesters of seafood. LMF's work supports the very essence of Maine.

LMF also plays a vital role in addressing two of the most important issues facing our planet today: climate change and biodiversity loss. By conserving forests, soils, and vegetation, we can absorb and hold more carbon. By conserving a wide variety of habitats, preferably large blocks of intact habitat, we can assist species to thrive in the face of warming temperatures.

The Land for Maine's Future program is effective, well-loved, and much needed. We would be wise, then, to ensure that it has the resources needed to meet the demand for land conservation and recreational access. Earlier this session we supported LD 1285, to assure additional future funding for LMF. Today we are pleased to support LD 1969 to consolidate all LMF funds into a trust fund, preventing the lapse of unspent monies and allowing interest to accrue to the LMF program. This trust will also be able to accept private donations.

Finally, LD 1969 establishes a subprogram to support investments in recreation opportunities on permanently conserved lands as well as to support wildlife habitat protection. Both are much needed. The interest in outdoor recreation sparked by the global pandemic has not subsided, and virtually all managers of land open to the public are struggling to meet that demand. Wildlife habitat protection is an urgent need at a time when wildlife populations have dropped at alarming rates. Maine is home to a wide variety of rare plants and animals, 21 of them globally rare, as well as the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the continental United States, and we can help stem biodiversity loss by conserving that habitat.

We strongly support the Land for Maine's Future program, and efforts to strengthen it, including LD 1969.