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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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Testimony of Senator Teresa S. Pierce introducing
LD 1969, An Act to Expand the Use of Funds to Support Land Conservation
before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Teresa Pierce, and I represent Senate District 25, encompassing Falmouth, Cumberland, North Yarmouth, Yarmouth (majority), Gray, and Long Island. Today, I am pleased to introduce LD 1969, "An Act to Expand the Use of Funds to Support Land Conservation."

Since 1987, Land for Maine's Future (LMF) has conserved more than 600,000 acres across the state. This has included iconic outdoor recreational areas such as Mount Kineo, the Cutler Coast, and Tumbledown Mountain, as well as working waterfronts, productive farmlands, and working forestlands. LMF has also played a pivotal role in supporting the acquisition of outdoors spaces and parklands in proximity to Maine's largest population centers, including popular family-friendly destinations in my district like Blackstrap Hill, Knights Pond, and Libby Hill Forest.

LD 1969 builds on LMF's 36-year record of success by making targeted changes to strengthen the program for the long term. For example, the bill directs current and future funding into a newly created LMF Trust Fund that will maintain all LMF dollars separate and apart from other state monies. Among other benefits, this change will keep all investment income in the new LMF Trust Fund, making it available to expand the reach of the program.

The creation of the LMF Trust Fund is also an initial step in a process to identify and secure future dedicated revenues. Traditionally supported through bond issues, the program was most recently funded through a direct appropriation of \$40 million in 2021. In the future, the goal is to find new sources of money, that reduce the need for future bonds or appropriations. For example, LD 1881, a bill in this committee, would allow Maine DEP to direct compensation dollars associated with solar, wind, and transmission projects into the LMF Trust Fund. Supporters of this bill will be exploring other similar opportunities in the months ahead.

Lastly, LD 1969 adds a new component to the LMF program: the Conservation Land Management Fund. With this change, the Legislature will have the authority to invest future funds towards improving recreational infrastructure and wildlife habitat management on Maine's existing conservation lands. As conserved acres in the state grow, it will become increasingly important that those entities managing our public places have the resources necessary to ensure maximum benefit to Mainers enjoying these lands and the wildlife inhabiting them.

I urge this committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1969. I am happy to answer any questions to the best of my ability, although I am happy to defer to others that follow me for more detailed questions.