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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 1969**

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

**May 22, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Judy East, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning. I will be speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), in support of LD 1969, *An Act to Expand the Use of Funds to Support Land Conservation*.

The Land for Maine's Future Program is within the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning and is the State of Maine's primary funding vehicle for conserving land for its natural and recreational values. The program was established in 1987 when Maine citizens voted to fund \$35 million to purchase lands of statewide importance. In 1997, new priorities were set forth by a commission of Maine citizens. Since that time, the program has administered multiple bonds and even instances of general fund appropriations. State funding for land conservation has consistently been supported by legislators and citizens across the geographical and political spectrum.

This bill eliminates and replaces the Land for Maine's Future Fund, "LMF Fund", with the Land for Maine's Future Trust Fund, "LMF Trust Fund", and transfers the balance from the LMF Fund to the LMF Trust Fund. Once enacted, the LMF Trust Fund may be used for the Public Access to Maine Waters Fund, the Maine Working Waterfront Access Protection Fund, the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Fund, and the new funds established in this legislation (the Conservation and Recreation Fund and the Conservation Land Management Fund). The Conservation and Recreation Fund is to achieve the purposes of the former LMF Fund, and the Conservation Land Management Fund is to make capital improvements to and enhance wildlife habitat protection on permanently conserved lands. The bill amends law provisions for these funds to credit investment earnings to the non-lapsing LMF Trust Fund.

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The bill will support the long-term fiscal health of the Land for Maine's Future program by crediting investment earnings back to the fund. Land conservation transactions are complex and, in some instances, can take months or years to reach completion. The LMF Trust Fund will yield significant investment earnings over time. Reinvesting these earnings into the LMF Trust Fund is consistent with the purposes of the original bonds, private donations, and appropriations contributed to the LMF Fund and the LMF Trust Fund in the future.

The bill will also support the long-term capital improvement needs and habitat management objectives of permanently conserved lands. The conservation transactions are permanent, and these provisions recognize the need for trail maintenance, recreational facilities, stewardship, management plan creation and implementation, and habitat enhancement. Faced with increased public use, greater storm intensity associated with a changing climate, invasive species, and a host of other management challenges, we must continue to invest in conserved lands in perpetuity.

We urge the committee to support this important bill for Maine.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.