



Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

January 31, 2024

RE: LD 2168, Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 355: Coastal Sand Dune Rules, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Environmental Protection

Dear Sen. Brenner, Rep. Gramlich, and Members of the ENR Committee:

My name is Laura Minich Zitske and I am Maine Audubon's Coastal Birds Project Director. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine’s wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 2168, *Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 355: Coastal Sand Dune Rules, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Environmental Protection.*

Our organization offers our support for the proposed updates to the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) outdated coastal sand dune system maps. Earlier mapping efforts by the Maine Geological Survey were focused largely on the southern half and more developed areas of the state, and new technology has enabled more accurate mapping of our coastlines. We applaud DEP for embracing a science-based and rigorous approach to including the Maine Geological Survey's updates for their coastal sand dune system maps.

Coastal sand dune systems are sand and gravel deposits that provide invaluable ecosystem services and economic benefits. This resource acts as a buffer between oceanic forces and our coastal communities – protecting buildings and infrastructure from waves and flooding. The DEP has the responsibility and regulatory authority under the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) to protect these vulnerable areas regardless of maps. Therefore, it is essential to note that *these updated maps do not change the regulatory jurisdiction of the Department*, they simply clarify where these areas are.

Maine's coastlines are under threat; the Gulf of Maine is warming faster than 99 percent of the world's oceans and sea levels are rising. Sea levels along Maine's coast have risen approximately 0.1 inches a year in the last few decades. As Maine's sea level rises, coastal communities and ecosystems are seeing increased frequency of flooding, inundation of coastal lowlands with saltwater, erosion, and loss of dry beaches, saltmarshes, sand dunes, and other habitats. Closest to Maine Audubon's mission, sand dunes contain critical wildlife habitat. Endangered Least Terns and Piping Plovers rely on sandy beaches and



sand dunes on Maine's coast to nest and rear their young. Functional sand dunes are essential for a healthy beach, and the future of our beach-nesting species rely on them.

For the future of both our wildlife and human communities, it is imperative that the work of Maine's natural resource agencies is guided by the best available science. We now have that from the Maine Geological Survey, and it is our responsibility to use it in order to protect our valuable coastlines and coastal communities.

We hope you join us in supporting LD 2168. Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura Zitske".

Laura Minich Zitske
Coastal Birds Project Director