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Testimony of Karla Black  
Deputy Executive Director  
Maine Woodland Owners

In Favor of  
LD 2191

“An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events”

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Karla Black, I am the Deputy Executive Director of Maine Woodland Owners speaking today in favor of LD 2191, “An Act to Provide Relief to Small Businesses Affected by Severe Weather-related Events.”

This bill establishes the Small Business Weather Emergency Relief Program to provide relief payments to small businesses affected by severe weather-related events. The storms that hit Maine in December 2023 and January 2024 were some of the worst storms our state has seen. The impact of the storms across the state was devastating and they severely affected our infrastructure statewide necessitating a need for a fund like this.

Among those impacted by the storms were small landowners who are now grappling with washed out roads, destroyed bridges, collapsed culverts and other damage to what is generally, for most landowners’, their income-producing property. We are testifying in support of today’s bill to ask that small landowners not be left behind when it comes to making funding available for storm-related damage.

There is no definition in the bill for a “small business.” Including woodland landowners in this fund is entirely appropriate. Many landowners in Maine have their property enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Law program which requires that they maintain their property as productive woodlands. The conditions of the program require that the landowners manage their property primarily for the production of commercial forest products. Land managed for timber harvesting directly benefits the wood products industry in Maine when landowners sell their wood to our lumber yards and mills. The Tree Growth program is not limited to timber harvesting however, it also permits the sale of non-timber commercial products such as Christmas trees and maple syrup.

We have surveyed our membership and have found that they have sustained significant damage to their woodland properties across the state. The responses indicate that woodland owners have sustained severe weather-related damage to infrastructure including roads, bridges, and culverts. Moreover, there are thousands of miles of ATV and snowmobile trails in Maine and most of them run through private forested property. Damage sustained by these designated ATV and snowmobile trails on woodland owners' properties could have a significant economic impact for the state. The need for financial assistance for woodland owners to recover and rebuild from these weather-related losses is great.

I would encourage you to amend the bill to add a definition of "small business" that specifically includes woodland owners or to otherwise make clear to the Department of Economic and Community Development, which will be conducting the rulemaking, that woodland owners should be included in the Small Business Weather Emergency Relief Program. We are certainly not asking that woodland owners be given funding priority, just that they be included in the mix.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.