



Testimony of Eliza Townsend
In support of DACF's supplemental budget
March 4, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and distinguished AFA Committee members, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished ACF members, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club. AMC wishes to express strong support for the budget proposal as it pertains to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

AMC's mission is to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,200 members in Maine and own 114,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

Maine's land-based assets are essential to our economy, to the well-being of Maine residents and to addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. DACF and its component bureaus play a critical role in stewarding those assets.

Our 17.5 million acres of forest make Maine the most forested state in the nation, and that forest has an outsized role to play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. In addition to supporting the \$8.1 billion forest products industry, it houses at least 139 rare plants and animals, 21 of them globally rare. It absorbs 60% of our state's carbon pollution annually and could absorb more. Retaining a large, healthy, intact forest is of the utmost importance to our future well-being.

Maine's unspoiled beauty, over 700,000 acres of public land, 48 state parks and historic sites and hundreds of miles of recreational trails offer us the opportunity to relax, recreate and refresh our spirits. They draw visitors as well, contributing to our \$3 billion outdoor recreation economy and our \$7 billion tourism sector.

The Maine Forest Service, Bureau of Parks and Lands, Land Use Planning Commission, Maine Geological Survey, Natural Areas Program and Land for Maine's Future program each play an essential role in stewarding these vital assets. They have long carried out their legislative charge while facing the challenges of inadequate funding and staffing.

Today, like other state agencies, they are challenged to attract and retain a qualified workforce. As you know, one in six state positions is currently vacant due to noncompetitive compensation, outdated classifications, and the uncertainty of limited period positions. We applaud the administration for approving reclassifications and making positions permanent to attract the workforce needed to carry out the duties we rely on.

Please approve the proposed budget for these essential programs. We look forward to working with you in the future to fully invest in Maine's natural resources and the public employees who steward them.