

**Testimony of Nancy McBrady, Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry**

**Before the Joint Standing Committees on  
Appropriations and Financial Affairs and  
Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry**

**LD 209 “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund  
and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and To Change Certain  
Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the  
Fiscal Year June 30, 2025”**

**Hearing Date: January 21, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Talbot Ross, Representatives Gattine and Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Nancy McBrady, and I am a Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am here today to testify in support of LD 209, the Governor’s Supplemental Budget proposal for State fiscal year 2025.

DACF is charged with promoting and advancing Maine’s agricultural resources, protecting and enhancing nearly 18 million acres of forestland, managing more than 700,000 acres of state parks and public lands, and administering numerous science-based programs focused on resource management, land use planning, and conservation. The impact of our work is also quite extensive and supports a large part of our overall natural resource-based economy, as our agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation sectors combined contribute more than \$19 billion to our state’s economy annually and support approximately 140,000 jobs. DACF’s work is carried out statewide by our 778 year-round and seasonal staff, who oversee and fulfill a wide range of duties daily through our four Bureaus and 110 diverse programs.

Today, I will present DACF’s supplemental budget request. This testimony addresses budget items and proceeds sequentially from pages A-4 through A-6. Our request includes 14 initiatives and five language pieces. Seven of those are approved position reclassifications, and three are adjustments due to the December Revenue Forecast.

I will address the remaining four initiatives and five language pieces in more detail. The first initiative is for our **Animal Welfare Program**. This program develops and implements policies and programs to effectively address animal cruelty complaints, inspects and licenses animal shelters, pet stores, kennels, and animal research facilities, and coordinates with municipalities that administer the dog license program. The program develops and implements training for municipal animal control officers and also administers the "Help Fix ME" spay/neuter program for low-income dog and cat owners.

Our request found on page A-4 provides one-time funding in FY25 for extraordinary costs associated with animal welfare seizures that the Department has been unable to absorb. Although

the program does keep funds in reserve for seizure events, we had several cases (the first stemming from January 2022) that ultimately accumulated \$1.4M in animal housing and medical care costs. The Department received \$650,000 in FY 23 toward these expenses; however, the last case was only resolved in mid-2024 after a slow-moving appellate process. This initiative has accompanying language in **Part T**, which transfers funding from the General Fund to Animal Welfare's Other Special Revenue account.

The second funding request is for the **Division of Forest Protection**

This program provides forest fire and forest resource protection to Maine's 18 million acres of forest land. The Division protects landowners through wildfire readiness, prevention, detection, suppression, and natural resources law enforcement.

This **initiative** on page **A-5** provides funding for equipment installation in vehicles, including radios. Forest Protection will replace 18 vehicles in FY25, and the cost to fully equip these law enforcement vehicles has increased by \$1,000 per vehicle.

The **second initiative** on page **A-5** provides funding for increased insurance premiums. This increase is due to increasing the liability limit from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 coverage for our Huey helicopters to meet industry standards.

The next funding request is for the **Forest Resource Management** program. This program provides and preserves the overall health of Maine's forest resources by protecting forest, shade, and ornamental tree resources from significant insect and disease damage and providing pest management and damage prevention. The program conducts an inventory of Maine's forest resources on a five-year cycle. Technical assistance, scientific and economic information, and educational services to Maine's family forest owners, the forest industry, landowners, and the public are also provided by this program.

The **initiative** on page **A-5** provides funding for a robust Spruce Budworm response to protect the critical forest resource. The accompanying language is in **Part U**.

As background, Spruce Budworm is a native forest insect to the boreal and Acadian Forest regions of the U.S. and Canada. It is widely cited as the most damaging native forest pest in the region. In the last century, Maine experienced three Spruce Budworm population outbreaks. The last, between 1967 to 1993, covered 136 million acres across Maine and eastern Canada, killing seven million acres of trees. In the Northeast, Maine has the most forest at risk from a spruce budworm outbreak. More than 5 million acres, or nearly 30 percent of Maine's forestland, is dominated by spruce budworm-preferred trees.

In 2024, 3,500 acres of spruce/fir forest in Northwestern Maine was mapped with visible damage from Spruce Budworm caterpillars. Based on experience, an uncontrolled outbreak would result in a large proportion of standing fir (roughly 4 out of 5) and a lesser extent of spruce (more than 1 in 4) dying. These funds, in addition to recently allocated federal resources, will support commercial forest landowners in affected areas in undergoing an "early intervention strategy" (EIS) for managing spruce budworm, including the use of narrow-spectrum insecticides.

## LANGUAGE

**Part G** on **page 4** and **Part H** on **pages 4-5** authorizes the State Controller to carry forward remaining funds in the All Other and Capital Expenditure line categories at the end of this fiscal year that were appropriated to replace the feed, seed, and fertilizer and the licensing and inspection databases and are still needed to complete the project. At present, we have completed the RFP process and are in contract negotiations with the vendor.

**Part I** on **page 5** authorizes the State Controller to carry forward the remaining funds in the Capital Expenditures line category at the end of this fiscal year to continue working on the upgrade at the Cony Road facility in Augusta. This facility houses our Metrology Laboratory and our Emergency Food Assistance Program. We are in the final stages of completing the bid package and will begin the RFP process to complete this much-needed work.

**Part T** on **pages 11-12** relates to the animal seizure initiative for the **Animal Welfare** program discussed earlier in my testimony.

**Part U** on **page 12** relates to the Spruce Budworm initiative for the **Forest Resource Management** program discussed earlier in my testimony.

This concludes my presentation on our 2025 Supplemental Budget. The DACF team and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.