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***Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry***

***RE: LD 209 - Supplemental Budget Proposal for the Department of Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry***

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of the supplemental budget proposal for the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together.

Conservation is at our core, and we are proud to be the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing over 300,000 acres. We work in tandem with our partners at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF) to both advance our conservation work and support their role in planning, conservation, management, and research. Maine's public lands, state parks, and forests are incredible assets that underpin our quality of life and economic opportunities. The Nature Conservancy supports robust funding for DACF and its many divisions and programs.

Specifically, TNC supports the following budget requests:

Forest Resource Management - Spruce Budworm Response (Z233, page A-5)

There is no doubt that there will be impacts to Maine's forests from defoliation caused by the Spruce Budworm population irruption that has begun along Maine's border with Quebec. These impacts could be significant, potentially including economic impacts to rural communities, the forest products economy, and landowners, along with impacts to carbon sequestration and storage, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Early, coordinated response efforts have proven to be the most effective means to slow and reduce defoliation, thereby lessening the economic and ecological impacts. As a landowner, forest manager, and science-based organization, we encourage funding support and public-private partnerships to address Spruce Budworm in Maine. Such collaboration will help to develop thoughtful, science-based responses to this forest stressor. Investments made now are likely to reduce the long-term costs otherwise facing Maine.

Initiatives to reclassify and provide range changes for staff positions

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is tasked with conservation and management of some of Maine's most important natural resources and lands. We fully support the programs and staff that fall within the Division of Forest Protection (Z232), Forest Resource Management (Z233), and the Maine Land Use Planning Commission (Z236) and encourage the legislature to approve the various reclassifications and range changes requested in this supplemental budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's supplemental budget proposal. I'm happy to answer questions at any time.