



# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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## Testimony in support of LD 183:

### ***An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50% of Any County***

***February 6, 2025***

***Good Afternoon Senator Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.*** I am Representative Billy Bob Faulkingham and I represent House District 12. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of LD 183: ***"An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50 Percent of Any County."***

Maine has long been known for its vast and scenic natural landscapes and its residents have a deep connection to our state's natural beauty. I should know. Schoodic Point on Acadia National Park is located in Winter Harbor, the town I live in. However, as the state government and federal agencies continue to expand public land holdings, we must consider the economic and social consequences of this trend. LD 183 provides a necessary safeguard against excessive government land acquisitions that can hinder economic development, erode private property rights, and shift an increasing burden onto taxpayers. After their most recent land acquisition the Park now holds nearly 50% of the land area of my town.

### **Protecting Economic Growth and Local Tax Bases**

Publicly owned land is not subject to local property taxes, (1) which means that as the government acquires more land; the tax burden is shifted onto remaining private property owners. This has particularly harsh consequences in rural counties, where landownership is a key driver of economic activity. This is because private land supports working forests, farms, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries that create jobs and sustain local economies.

**A cap on publicly owned land at 50% per county** ensures that Maine maintains a balance between conservation goals and economic vitality. Without such a cap, some counties could see an erosion of their tax base, leading to higher property taxes, reduced public services, and a decreased ability to attract investment and new residents.

1) <https://www.maine.gov/revenue/taxes/tax-relief-credits-programs/property-tax-relief-programs/property-tax-exemptions>

## **Preventing Overreach and Bureaucratic Expansion**

Government ownership of excessive land tracts often leads to inefficient land management, restrictive regulations, and limited public access. Unlike private landowners who have a direct incentive to responsibly manage their resources, state and federal agencies frequently impose restrictive policies that limit commercial use, recreational opportunities, and responsible forestry practices. (2)

By setting a reasonable limit on government land holdings, LD 183 ensures that Maine's land remains productive, accessible, and beneficial to the people of Maine rather than being subjected to excessive bureaucratic control.

## **Maintaining a Healthy Balance Between Conservation and Property Rights**

Maine already has a variety of conservation programs, land trusts, and protected areas that serve environmental and recreational interests. Private conservation efforts have historically proven more effective and financially sustainable than government-driven initiatives. (3) LD 183 does not diminish the importance of preserving Maine's natural beauty; rather, it seeks to maintain an appropriate balance between conservation and the economic and social needs of Maine's residents.

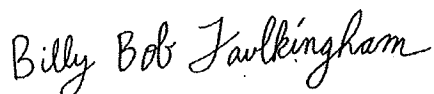
Excessive government land ownership can also discourage responsible land stewardship. Private landowners have demonstrated the ability to balance conservation with economic activity, ensuring that Maine's forests, wetlands, and farmlands remain viable for generations. Placing an upper limit on public ownership ensures that land continues to be managed effectively and productively.

## **Conclusion**

**LD 183** is a commonsense approach to maintaining a fair and sustainable balance between public and private land ownership in Maine. By capping publicly owned land at 50% per county, this bill will help protect local economies, prevent bureaucratic overreach, and preserve the integrity of Maine's private property rights.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to support LD 183 and advance this critical measure. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,



Rep. Billy Bob Faulkingham  
House Republican Leader

2) <https://cei.org/blog/property-rights-are-the-key-to-protecting-land/>

3) <https://reason.org/policy-study/conservation-through-private-i/>