



COUNTY OF WASHINGTON
P.O. Box 297, County Courthouse
Machias, Maine 04654
(207) 255-3127
manager@washingtoncountymaine.com

Commissioners:

David C. Burns, Chairman
John B. Crowley, Sr., Commissioner
William Howard, Commissioner

County Manager:

Renée Gray
Administrative Assistant:
Carla J. R. Manchester

Testimony of WC Commissioner David Burns in support of **LD 183:**
“An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50 percent of Any County”

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. I am a former member of the Maine State Senate and currently the Chair of the Washington County Commissioners. I am providing this testimony on behalf of our Commissioners John Crowley, William “Billy” Howard and myself. Thank you for considering our input on this important issue.

Though I did not serve on your Committee during my eight years in the Legislature, I did have the privilege of serving with several of your members, both in the House and the Senate. It’s valuable for our State to have their continued service and experience serving in this Body.

As Washington County Commissioners, we believe that **LD 183** provides a common sense approach to governing how much land is put into Public lands in our 16 Counties. As we are sure all of you are, we understand the need for and value the natural resources and beauty we are famous for here in Maine, and especially so in our Washington County. Our “rock bound coasts”, forest, conservation lands and parks are important to our citizens as well as the thousands who travel here annually to enjoy them. These resources provide vital industries and employment as well.

We also understand the need to keep a proper balance between Public lands and private ownership here in Washington County and throughout our State. This is necessary to provide economic stability and limit the amount of land exempt from property taxes. This is especially true in our rural counties such as Washington County. Like several other counties, our 2025 budget required a nearly **21% increase**, which places more financial burden on our citizens. Many of our families, especially our seniors, already struggle to meet the demands of property taxes on top of the inflationary climate of late drastically increasing the cost of living. As others will testify to you, in 2021, Public Lands in our State comprised about **15%** (three million acres) of Maine. The vast majority of those 3 million acres was located in CD II, in five rural counties. At that time approximately **30%** of our land in Washington County was Public land. Maine’s Climate Action Plan in 2024 calls for **30%** (up from 15%) of Maine’s land to be Public under federal, state or local control by 2030. Most of that goal would have to be achieved, again in CD II, in the most rural counties.

The proposed cap in **LD 183** would limit the amount of land to be placed into Public land in any county to no more than **50%**. This would help to protect our Counties’ tax base and our overall economic stability. The cap would also prevent excessive bureaucratic control and preserve one of our most cherished rights, private property rights! **LD 183** also provides a mechanism for the State, a county or a municipality, whose citizens desire to exceed the “**50% cap**” to petition the Legislature to exceed the cap, from which a 2/3 approval of this Body would allow exceeding the limits.

We respectfully urge this Committee to support **LD 183** by unanimously voting Ought to Pass.

Sincerely,

Commissioner David Burns
Commissioner John Crowley
Commissioner William Howard

Washington County Commissioners

“The Sunrise County – where the sun first shines!”