



**APPALACHIAN  
MOUNTAIN CLUB**  
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**Testimony of  
Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director  
In opposition to LD 183  
*An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50 Percent of Any County***

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the ACF Committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC is a people-oriented conservation nonprofit representing 90,000 members from Maine to Virginia. Our mission is the protection, understanding, and enjoyment of the outdoors. We have 6,200 members in Maine and own 114,000 acres of forestland in Piscataquis County managed for multiple use, including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and outdoor education. We pay property taxes on all of our land.

AMC opposes LD 183, *An Act to Cap Publicly Owned Land Area at No More than 50 Percent of Any County*. Not only is the bill not needed, but it runs counter to both the consensus bipartisan recommendations of Maine's updated Climate Action Plan and the broad bipartisan support for the Maine Trails Bond.

Land conservation is one of the least expensive strategies to help slow and adapt to climate change, which threatens our safety and economic well-being. For example, lack of snow threatens the snowmobile season in northern Maine for the second year, hurting local businesses.

The trails bond question outperformed all other bond questions on last fall's ballot, demonstrating Maine voters' love for the outdoors and desire for access to it. Again, land conservation is critical to meeting that demand.

Piscataquis is the county with the highest percentage of conserved land at 44%. That includes such beloved places as Baxter State Park, Lily Bay and Peaks-Kenny State Parks, Mt. Kineo, and the Nahmakanta, Seboeis, and Telos Public Reserved Lands. Further, it holds the Moosehead Region Conservation Easement, which overlaps in part with AMC's ownership.

These lands are an economic driver, attracting visitors from great distances to enjoy scenic beauty, recreation, wildlife viewing, fishing, and hunting. They are part of Maine's \$3.4 billion outdoor recreation economy. Much of the land is harvested, contributing to Maine's \$8.5 billion forest products economy.

AMC owns 114,000 acres, of which 2/3rds would appear to be covered by this bill's definition. There we harvest 9,000 cords of wood per year using local crews that employ 45, with the timber shipped to 10 local mills. Our lodges employ 11 people year-round and an additional 28 seasonal employees, making AMC the 5<sup>th</sup> largest employer in Greenville. We pay \$200,000 in



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property taxes. Our land is open to the public free of charge—including 300 miles of gravel biking roads, 90 miles of groomed Nordic ski trails, 52 miles of snowmobile trails and 40 miles of hiking and snowshoe trails. We allow hunting and are working to restore access to 30,000 acres which had been closed to the public for two decades while in *private* ownership.

Demand for recreation access has soared in recent years, even as more and more land is developed and gated off. Lands that fall under the definition in LD 183 are the *only* properties where access is guaranteed.

LD 183 seeks to address an issue that does not exist. It's broad definition of "publicly owned land" has the potential to harm counties rather than benefit them. If passed, it could undermine working forests, working farmlands, guide businesses, and Mainers' access to recreation.

We ask you to vote Ought Not to Pass.