

Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
c/o Office of Fiscal and Program Review
5 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 27, 2025

RE: LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Dear Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Gattine, Sen. Talbot Ross, Rep. Pluecker, and Members of the AFA and ACF Committees:

My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon’s Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on LD 210, specifically, the proposed budget initiatives and language related to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF).

Maine Audubon offers our support for several of the proposed budget initiatives and language related to DACF¹ in order to support the agency in fulfilling its responsibility to protect and restore Maine’s forests and natural resources, enhance outdoor recreation, and much more. As a core natural resource agency, DACF is tasked with the conservation of land that is essential to Maine people, Maine’s natural resource economy, and Maine’s beloved wildlife. Additionally, the urgency of acting on both the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis demands a lot from this Department – and changes in land use due to development pressure demands even more. **Areas that are of particular interest to our organization are: Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program; Land Management and Planning program updates; Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) updates; and support for recreational trails and the state park system.**

Maine Audubon enthusiastically supports staffing updates to the LMF program (LAND FOR MAINE’S FUTURE Z162, p. A-84). LMF is Maine’s most successful land conservation program, responsible for protecting more than 600,000 acres of working farms, forests, and waterfronts, miles and miles of recreational trails, and critical wildlife habitat – in all of Maine’s 16 counties. Every dollar spent by the LMF program must be matched, doubling its impact. Maine has experienced unprecedented development pressure since the pandemic, putting farmland and wildlife habitat at risk, limiting waterfront access, and making it harder to enjoy the places we love. Habitat loss to development is the leading cause of species endangerment. We need LMF fully funded and fully staffed in order to reach our state’s conservation goals. Unfortunately, we understand that this beloved program requires resources to adequately support existing and novel endeavors.

¹ Budget proposals related to the DACF can be found [2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget – Part A, A-57–105](#).

Maine Audubon is an avid LMF supporter – this program has provided essential infrastructure that helps preserve Maine’s unique character and supports our natural resource-based economy.

Within the Land Management and Planning program (LAND MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING Z239, p. A-87-88), we offer our support for proposals to support culvert replacement and upsizing to protect access for the public and protect natural resources. Last winter’s storms revealed just how important it is for us to build and maintain public infrastructure that works with, not against, free-flowing – and sometimes fast-moving – water. When roads, bridges, stormwater systems, and culverts catastrophically fail – as we saw too many times in too many places this winter – it’s bad for fish, wildlife, budgets, and public safety. Investing in Maine’s stream crossing infrastructure like larger, upgraded culverts will have significant benefits for Maine wildlife and habitat because surveys show that most existing culverts pose some kind of barrier for fish and wildlife. It is not enough for us to build back what we had – *we must build back and build new smarter*. Undersized culverts put roads at increased risk of washout, creating serious safety and financial hazards. The cost of fixing a washed out road can be many times greater than the cost of upgrading a culvert to prevent a washout. We appreciate DACF simultaneously tending to the repair and replacement of damaged culverts *and* embracing a forward-looking approach to upgrading this infrastructure, which will help us save money all while protecting public safety and increasing resiliency.

Additionally, the LUPC – the zoning and planning authority for Maine’s 10.4 million acres of unorganized territory (UT) – should be adequately staffed (MAINE LAND USE PLANNING COMMISSION Z236, p. A-93-94). Covering nearly half of Maine’s land area, these places include some of the state’s most ecologically significant forests, lakes, and remote wildlands. LUPC staff work diligently to support and encourage Maine’s natural resource-based economy and strong environmental protections and appropriate residential, recreational, commercial, and industrial land uses. This work is uniquely challenging and we commend LUPC staff for their work and support proposals for the Commission outlined in LD 210.

Maine Audubon offers our support for positions within the Parks-General Operations program PARKS - GENERAL OPERATIONS Z221, p. A-100-102), which are key to DACF’s work to maintain our state park system in addition to a wide range of outdoor and educational experiences. We know that state parks and trails are invaluable assets that support our access to the outdoors. They help people connect with the beauty of Maine and in turn, help encourage them to hopefully want to protect it. Additionally, well-kept and thoughtfully-designed trail systems can simultaneously help us protect healthy ecosystems. Staff tasked with guiding the management and enhancement of our state parks, trail systems, and beyond are key to protecting this outdoor recreation sector.

Supporting the proposed budget initiatives and language in DACF’s budget will allow the agency to do their best work. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca “Ches” Gundrum
Director of Advocacy