



Committee on Housing & Economic Development  
% Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

February 27, 2025

**RE: LD 161, Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Convene a Stakeholder Group Tasked with a Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of the State Subdivision Laws**

Dear Sen. Curry, Rep. Gere, and Members of the Housing & Economic Development Committee:

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 testimony in support of LD 161, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Convene a Stakeholder Group Tasked with a Comprehensive Overhaul and Modernization of the State Subdivision Laws*.

Maine Audubon recognizes the incredible importance of land use law for creating thriving communities, and for conserving valuable habitats and natural resources. We also recognize the importance of reevaluating existing statutes when they no longer adequately address the issues for which they were developed.

Maine Audubon participated in a policy group discussion that convened in response to the passage of LD 2003, *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions* by the 130th Legislature to review current subdivision laws, the housing crunch, and the needs of today’s municipalities. As a group, we determined there were lots of places where existing subdivision laws could be changed and improved to encourage more multi-purpose town centers and residential areas, allow higher density housing in growth areas, and also better protect the precious waters, farms, forests, wildlife, and habitat that support all life and contribute to local economies in Maine. However, the group agreed that creating a formal stakeholder group with various interests and perspectives to evaluate and modernize the state subdivision statutes, such as proposed in LD 161, Maine can provide better support for municipalities, landowners, and homeowners in their quest for a brighter future. This concept was brought forward in the 131st, was enacted and supported, but failed to progress through its final phase. We thank Rep. Ducharme for his leadership in bringing this important effort back.



As written, the bill tasks a stakeholder group with submitting a report that includes recommendations for a comprehensive overhaul and modernization of subdivision laws that:

- Promotes development in growth areas;
- Reduces development pressure in rural areas;
- Protects public health, safety and welfare;
- Advances state goals to produce affordable housing; and
- Streamlines the development review process.

At a minimum, the stakeholder group must include representation from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW), and Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF); county registry of deeds; municipal government; regional planning agencies; real estate development industries; large landowners; and members appointed by legislative leadership. DACF is required to submit the group's report to the legislature by December 3, 2025. Based on DACF's findings and recommendations, legislative committees are then authorized to report out bills in the 132nd Legislature's second session.

**Subdivision statutes are out of date and are in need of updating.** However, we offer three opportunities to enhance this bill:

1. Ensure the group considers the "conservation of water quality, natural resources, and recreational access" in their report;
2. Expand the group to include representation from conservation and community-based planning organizations; and
3. Direct the newly-established Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA), which is tasked with assisting municipalities in long-term planning, to convene the group.

Maine Audubon has been fighting to protect Maine wildlife and habitat for nearly two centuries, and both the climate and biodiversity crises may be our most difficult battles yet. **Habitat loss to development is the leading cause of species endangerment.** As Maine endures a rapidly changing climate and increasing development pressure, balancing the needs of wildlife and human communities is paramount.

**Maine Audubon respectfully encourages the Committee to support this bill with the suggested changes.** We stand ready to offer our expertise to the group once convened.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesca Gundrum".

Francesca "Ches" Gundrum  
Director of Advocacy