

Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology % Legislative Information Office 100 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333

March 4, 2025

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RE: LD 444, An Act to Lower Energy Costs by Repealing the Law Setting Out the State's Goals for Consumption of Electricity from Renewable Resources

Dear Chair Lawrence, Chair Sachs, and Members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee:

My name is Ania Wright and I am Maine Audubon's Policy Advocate. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation nonprofit – 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 opposition of LD 444, *An Act to Lower Energy Costs by Repealing the Law Setting Out the State's Goals for Consumption of Electricity from Renewable Resources*.

To protect wildlife and their habitat, Maine Audubon is committed to reducing the need for energy powered by fossil fuels, the largest contributor to climate change. Maine Audubon supports and promotes policies that facilitate production of clean and sustainable energy. Maine's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) is such a policy, and Maine Audubon has been a longtime supporter.

The Maine RPS was first introduced in 1999 and is important for several reasons, all of which contribute to broader issues of environmental sustainability, energy security, public health, and economic growth. Firstly, and perhaps of greatest importance to Maine Audubon, the RPS promotes the reduction of emissions from fossil fuels. Climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels is the most significant threat to Maine wildlife and habitat¹. For example:

• Eight new wildlife species were added to the Maine State List of Endangered and Threatened Species in 2023, many of which are additions driven in full or part by

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¹ More information on climate change impacts to Maine biodiversity can be found in the Scientific Assessment of Climate Change and Its Effects in Maine - 2024 Update Report by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Maine Climate Council. <u>STS 2024 digital.pdf</u>.



climate change. New species are the Saltmarsh Sparrow, Bicknell's Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, Marginated Tiger Beetle, Cliff and Bank Swallows, the Tricolored Bat, and Ashton's Cuckoo Bumblebee.

- A quarter of Maine's at-risk butterflies are threatened by climate change.
- Climate warming is expected to facilitate the establishment and spread of more invasive species in the Northeast, and Maine's biodiverse river shores and floodplains are particularly vulnerable. Examples in Maine include Common and Glossy Buckthorn (see below) and Green Crabs, which flourish in warmer winters and are a significant contributor to the decline in native soft-shell clam populations. River shores and floodplains are particularly vulnerable to the proliferation of invasive plants. Compounded by sprawling impervious development, increasing climate-associated flood severity can exacerbate the downstream colonization of aggressive exotic plants such as Japanese Knotweed.
- Due to climate change, Maine birds are on the move, expanding or shifting their ranges. Two-thirds of short-distance migrants and one-third of long distance migrants are projected to decrease. The Boreal Chickadee is already moving north, and Bicknell's Thrush, which nest in high-elevation forests, are especially vulnerable because such forests are limited in their ability to move upslope.
- Many of Maine's insects, foundational to most ecosystem food webs, will respond to climate change by altering their flight periods, causing a mismatch between flowering and pollination and predator and prey.
- Changes in precipitation and hydrology, especially of ephemeral or vernal pools, are likely impacting the state's amphibians. Hydroperiod of vernal pools is particularly important, as drought and high temperatures can cause pools to dry. Along with changes in seasonal emergence, highly variable late winter and spring freeze-thaw events are negatively impacting regional amphibians.

By transitioning to clean energy sources, the state can significantly lower its carbon footprint and protect its natural landscapes, wildlife, and air quality.

The RPS also can and will continue to have positive impacts on the economy. The financial benefits of Maine's Renewable Portfolio Standard have been far-reaching, contributing to job creation, investment, cost savings, and economic diversification. These benefits not only support the state's renewable energy transition but also position Maine as a leader in clean energy development.

Furthermore, by investing in renewable energy, Maine can continue to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels which are subject to geopolitical tensions, and cost volatility from policies such as



tariffs. Maine is a largely rural state, and many of its renewable energy resources, like wind and solar, are often located in rural areas. Developing these resources can provide new economic opportunities for these communities, through jobs and revenue from renewable energy projects.

Ultimately, the RPS is a fundamental policy tool for creating a cleaner, more sustainable, and more resilient energy future that will protect Maine people, wildlife, and the environment.

Sincerely,

Ania Wright Policy Advocate