



**APPALACHIAN
MOUNTAIN CLUB**
SINCE 1878

**Testimony of Eliza Townsend
In Support of LD 14
An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Access to State Parks
February 11, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Agriculture Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Eliza Townsend. I live in Leeds and serve as 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 is a member of the Wabanaki Coalition, and we recognize that the state of Maine and our parks are located in unceded Wabanaki territory. We want the people who have lived in relationship to this land for 10,000 years or more to continue to enjoy access to their traditional territory.

We bring to your attention the troubling economic status of Wabanaki members, as laid out in the December 2022 report produced by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Our Wabanaki neighbors suffer disproportionately from lower per-capita incomes, higher child poverty rates, and higher unemployment rates when compared to Maine as a whole.

LD 14 represents a modest step to acknowledge our indigenous neighbors' inherent right to access their homelands, offer respite and recreation, and address economic challenges, and we support it.

I do want to emphasize the importance of our state park system. Our extraordinary parks are gems, oases of beauty and relaxation in our too-busy world. They are diverse, ranging from the remote Allagash Wilderness Waterway to the popular beach parks of Crescent, Popham, and Reid. They welcome over 3 million visitors each year, contributing an estimated \$100 million to the state economy in the process, much of that in rural Maine.

For far too long the parks have been asked to do this without adequate investment and staff. We are delighted with the investments from the American Rescue Plan Act, and the staff restored through cooperation of the Mills Administration and the legislature. Nevertheless, the parks have never been adequately resourced for staffing and regular maintenance, much less invested in. Please approach our state parks as precious assets worthy of investment and as



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resources that have the potential to contribute even more to our economy and overall well-being.

That said, we do urge you to vote LD 14 Ought to Pass.