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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

IN SUPPORT OF LD 14

An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks

February 11, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Andy Cutko, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in support of LD 14, *An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks*.

Maine State Parks and Historic Sites currently allow free day-use access to senior citizens, children under five, Maine veterans, gold star families, and military service members on active duty. Maine State Parks allow free camping to Maine Veterans who are 100% disabled. This bill would add free access to Maine State Parks and Historic Sites for members of federally recognized Indian nations, tribes, and bands.

Since September 2020, DACF and the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands have participated in the First Light Journey, a collaboration between conservation groups, tribal representatives, and public agencies focused on expanding tribal access and stewardship of Maine lands. In conversations with other state and national park systems, I've learned that similar initiatives are occurring across the country.

Because fees from State Parks go into the state's General Fund, this bill will have a fiscal impact. If we assume tribal members currently use State Parks at the same rate as Maine's population overall, we approximate the fiscal impact at 0.6% of overall State Park revenue, or \$39,344. We consider this impact minor compared to the benefit to members of federally recognized Indian nations, tribes, and bands.

Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.

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