



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony in opposition to LD226, *An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections*

March 12, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and distinguished member of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Cathy Breen. I am the Director of Government Affairs at Maine Conservation Voters (MCV), a statewide non-profit organization with 13,000 members and supporters that is building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. I'm speaking in opposition to LD226, *An Act to Protect the Cultural Resources and Historical Heritage of Sears Island in Searsport by Extending Conservation Easement Protections*. MCV's opposition to this bill rests on two foundational and long-standing priorities:

1. Our commitment to targeted land conservation efforts that protect public health, natural habitats, and the clean water, air and land that support our natural resource-based economy;
2. Our commitment to tackling the climate crisis by supporting a just transition to renewable energy in Maine.

First, MCV has long championed the conservation and protection of Maine's land, water and air. MCV has worked with partners for many years in the Land for Maine's Future Coalition, a group of partners who work to protect and maintain funding in Maine's signature conservation program that began in 1987. In addition, MCV issues our annual Scorecard that reports on how legislators vote on our legislative priorities. In short, MCV is unequivocally committed to conservation in Maine, and we applaud the foresight of the parties who placed $\frac{2}{3}$ of Sears Island - 600 acres - in a conservation easement held by the Maine Coast Heritage Trust in 2009. LD735 would place the entirety of Sears Island under a conservation easement, most likely preventing commercial development.

Second, MCV works to meet the current climate crisis in various ways, including work on the Maine Climate Council and endorsement of the state's goal of 100% renewable energy by

2040¹. MCV also supports the Maine Off-Shore Wind Roadmap,² a project led by the Governor's Energy Office and informed by a 24-member advisory committee and over 80 public meetings in 2022-24. In February, 2024, the Mills administration announced its preference to use Sears Island as a base for the future development of floating off-shore wind, and MCV publicly supported that preference (I remind you that the land that was excluded from the 2009 conservation easement - 336 acres - remains in state ownership and is suitable for development of marine industries). While the Trump administration has promised no new federal support for off-shore wind in the next four years, MCV knows that developing new energy infrastructure is a long-term endeavor, and we continue to support the State of Maine's goal to grow the good jobs and clean energy that this industry promises, despite the pause in federal grants.

Turning to Sears Island, like most of us, MCV learned about the man-made sand dune that might hinder port development in the spring of 2024, after Governor Mills' announcement. In our testimony³ on the bill to address that issue in the 131st legislature, LD2266, MCV was Neither for Nor Against. But we advocated for adequate compensation if the Department of Environmental Protection were to grant a permit that eliminated one sand dune out of three on Sears Island to accommodate building off-shore wind infrastructure. As this committee knows, compensation is a normal and common strategy to balance the loss of one environmental asset with investment in another asset(s) of comparable value. So we were satisfied with the outcome of LD2266, which included \$1 million for sand dune protection all over Maine, and we encourage you to respect that outcome. MCV requests that this committee stand by its decision on LD2266 so that off-shore wind - or some other renewable energy industry - can use the property on Sears Island to help Maine reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. MCV urges you to vote Ought Not to Pass.

¹ https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MVW_2024_Book_112124.pdf, pp. 76-90

² <https://www.maine.gov/energy/initiatives/offshorewind/roadmap>

³ <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=182567>