

March 12, 2025

Testimony in Support of LD 226 and LD 735

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and fellow members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Chris Buchanan and I am from Searsport. I am a carpenter, a parent of two small children, and a founding volunteer with the Campaign to Protect Sears Island.

I am speaking in support of the part of LD 735 that reinstates the protections of the sand dune on Sears Island, and in favor of LD 226. While I appreciate the intention behind the rest of LD 735, I am concerned it may have unintended consequences. Although I could speak for an hour on why all of the island should be conserved I'll start with the primary reason: conservation is the cheapest, most effective way to mitigate climate change and prevent species extinction, and Sears Island is not needed now or in the future for offshore wind infrastructure or port development.

Potential benefits of building a port in Searsport can all be actualized with far less collateral damage on Mack Point. Even the DOT and Port Authority have acknowledged Mack Point's suitability for a 100-acre offshore wind port in the past. However, they have repeatedly released biased, misinformed reports like Moffatt and Nichols and the Alternatives Analysis, pledged allegiance to a rectangular shaped footprint that maximizes potential environmental impacts and inflates costs on Mack Point for absolutely no reason, and fail to account for substantial costs on Sears Island or perform accurate or adequate environmental assessments. Their consultant didn't find vernal pools in the development area, but significant ones are there. Their consultant did a lobster count in December, when they move offshore. A FOAA request uncovered that in the nearly \$6 million the state has invested in this current proposal, less than \$9500 was spent on environmental studies. That is .06%, and I believe that speaks volumes to the bias for development of the Island in this administration. Especially considering how significant Sears Island is as an undeveloped coastal habitat with mature and biodiverse ecosystems and 5 miles of shoreline. That is outrageous. And unfortunately, many of the conservation organizations based here in Augusta, along with the Maine Labor Climate Council, simply followed the leader with no critical analysis or independent research whatsoever. They are bellowing a crisis narrative that is in fact very hollow.

Sears Island helps regulate the water temperatures in the Penobscot Bay estuary, as well as providing nursery and food for soft-shell clams, cod, alewives, and salmon. The state in collaboration with the Penobscot Nation and several conservation groups has invested over \$600 million in restoring native fish runs in the Penobscot River. I would think they'd want to invest a little more in understanding the impacts of cutting and bulldozing up to 1/3 of the Island. The birds know how unique and abundant it is, which we know because people actually spend time watching them.

But let's not kid ourselves that keeping Sears Island on the cutting block is going to avert climate catastrophe, or enable us to meet the goals in Maine Won't Wait. Although it might be nice if Maine played a key role in the development of offshore wind along the eastern seaboard because it would bolster the University, that is not the only way, or arguably the best way, for offshore wind to advance. Several industry leaders, including Diamond CEO Chris Wissemann, have agreed that ship has sailed, and we need to focus on how to move the research array forward. If we cared

mostly about climate, we would have had a robust competitive process, and we would not have allowed the UMaine design to dictate the sites we investigated. I am no expert but through my involvement with this I've learned that most of these new designs require half the space, with no semi-submersible barge, and have less embodied carbon by using composites instead of concrete.

If we cared mostly about climate, we would take our siting choice extremely seriously, completing a rigorous environmental impact assessment, and balancing out the very real climate impacts of our development footprint with the very wishful hopes of using our homegrown technology to compete and win against all the other ports up and down the east coast, in a global market that has already surpassed us. We would get creative about our design to maximize efficiency and minimize negative impacts, and we would use degraded or industrial land.

By conserving Sears Island and forcing this project to go to Mack Point, union jobs will be created, the research array will be built and launched (assuming the federal government maintains the lease area), Maine will achieve 3.5 GW of fossil-free power as outlined within the State's Climate Action Plan. Maine will move closer to its other Action Plan goal to conserve 30% of our natural areas, the University of Maine's turbine design may catch up with designs that are currently more competitive and efficient, negating the "need" for such a large port, Searsport's existing port at Mack Point will get a much needed boost of activity and volume while remediating outdated chemical and fossil fuel infrastructure for renewable energy, and the research array will provide us with extremely valuable information about how, or if, we want to develop offshore wind commercially.

Additionally, the benefits of conservation will materialize. With a little research, you will find that the economic benefits of conservation have been repeatedly proven to outweigh the benefits of development substantially. One study by the Boston Consulting Group for the University of Minnesota finds that, "**the economic value** imparted by biodiversity...totals over an annual \$150 trillion—more than double the world's GDP." This is an example of what is now called, "ecosystem services." Other economic benefits include tourism, fisheries protection and restoration, and a plethora of advantages by increasing the quality of life.

Tourism is a significant industry in our region. Searsport has balance, as we are home to some sizeable industry, including a chemical plant and the existing port at Mack Point, because we have Sears Island. It would harm a lot of businesses if Sears Island were developed, and it currently harms everybody to face development threats to the Island every few years because it is divisive and takes time and energy that could be much better spent.

I have already touched on the fisheries, so I will leave you with a couple facts about quality of life. Sears Island provides a higher quality of life by giving our children educational opportunities they are unlikely to find elsewhere. Left intact without traffic, lights, or noise, it provides a space to improve both physical, and mental health. The Campaign for Nature Report by National Geographic states, "A recent study estimated the economic value of protected areas based on the improved mental health of visitors to be \$6 trillion annually."

A higher quality of life attracts good businesses to town. But until we address our housing crisis, its an economic risk to build any major development, in my opinion... Especially a development

requiring tradespeople, because we have the good fortune of being completely overwhelmed with work.

So for all these reasons and more, please vote to conserve all of Sears Island. It makes sense, it is long overdue, and it is the right thing to do.

All I want to add about LD 735, is that the primary reason I was told that people were voting to overturn the sand dune protections is because we needed to clear the way to receive federal grant money for the offshore wind port. Well, we didn't receive the money. We have been turned down to the tune of around \$600 million at this point. So let's consider that a lesson learned, reinstate the dune protections, and conserve all of the Island for future generations.

I am providing a link to the powerpoint presentation I did with my colleagues for our project, Wild and Free Forever, packed with reasons and references for the conservation of the Island.

I also encourage you to visit the Campaign to Protect Sears Island website, and the Alliance for Sears Island website. The Alliance has done an amazing job through its newsletters in the past few months examining failures in the Alternatives Analysis.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,  
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Wild and Free Forever: Conservation Conversation Powerpoint  
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1hFxmUV2FHeH804qX0H5snFrDqEie5UQUQvLjtvjS-mc/edit?usp=sharing>

Campaign to Protect Sears Island  
[www.protectsearsisland.org](http://www.protectsearsisland.org)

Alliance for Sears Island  
[www.allianceforsearsisland.org](http://www.allianceforsearsisland.org)

Works cited in the Conservation Conversation powerpoint FYI:  
[Sears Island Planning Initiative Consensus Agreement](https://friendsofsearsisland.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Final-SIPI-signed-agreement-1.pdf)  
<https://friendsofsearsisland.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Final-SIPI-signed-agreement-1.pdf>

[Sears Island JUPC.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/docs/port/Sears%20Island%20JUPC%20.pdf)  
<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/ofps/docs/port/Sears%20Island%20JUPC%20.pdf>

Maine's Carbon Budget, Version 2.0

<https://crsf.umaine.edu/forest-climate-change-initiative/carbon-budget/>

The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool

<https://www.maps.tnc.org/resilientland/#/explore>

Carbon Emissions EPA

<https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle#:~:text=typical%20passenger%20vehicle%3F-A%20typical%20passenger%20vehicle%20emits%20about%204.6%20metric%20tons%20of,8%2C887%20grams%20of%20CO2.>

Moffatt & Nichols Engineering Report

<https://www.maine.gov/mdot/grants/infra/docs/2024/Sears%20Island-Maine%20Statement%20of%20Work%20Memo.pdf>

University of Vermont, Cambridge University Joint Study: Economics of Protecting Nature

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/economicsofprotectingnature>

Boston Consulting Group / University of Minnesota: 6 Reasons Why Biodiversity Conservation is Important

<https://ccaps.umn.edu/story/6-reasons-why-biodiversity-conservation-important>

The Dasgupta Review

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/dasguptareview>

Friends of Sears Island, Visitor Study, Annual Reports:

<https://friendsofsearsisland.org/resources/#education-resources>

New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association

<https://www.nefishermen.org/>

Maine Won't Wait: Climate Action Plan

<http://www.maine.gov/climateplan/>

Professor Bridie McGreavey: Communicating Care in Coastal Fisheries

<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol32/iss2/15/>

National Geographic / Campaign for Nature Report

<https://news.nationalgeographic.org/economic-benefits-of-protecting-30-of-planets-land-and-ocean-outweigh-the-costs-at-least-5-to-1/>