



New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association

500 Southborough Dr. Suite 204

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IN SUPPORT TO

LD 735 “ An Act to Protect Sand Dunes on Sears Island and to Establish Criteria for Legislation Regarding Land Development ”

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudara, and members of the Committee on Environment & Natural Resources, my name is Jerry Leeman and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA) as well as a commercial fisherman of over 25 years. I am here today to support LD 735, “An Act to Protect Sand Dunes on Sears Island and to Establish Criteria for legislation Regarding Land Development.”

Introduction

NEFSA officially launched in May of 2023 to advocate for fishermen from all different fisheries with the goal of protecting and preserving their heritage and the communities they support. Currently with 800 active members, NEFSA is the fastest growing fishing Association in New England. NEFSA's mission statement reads, “NEFSA is an alliance of the wild harvesters of the waters off of New England, dedicated to educating the public about how best to manage our seafood resources through sound science and best practices at conservation used by fishermen, with a view toward economic well-being, ecosystem sustainability and US food security.”

The 132nd Maine Legislature's initiative through Legislative Document LD 735, introduced on February 25, 2025, seeks to address a critical environmental concern: the protection of sand dunes on Sears Island. This Act not only aims to safeguard these vital ecosystems but also establishes criteria for future land development legislation, ensuring that conservation efforts harmonize with economic and developmental pursuits. With increasing pressures on natural resources, it is imperative that we explore the significance of sand dunes and the necessity for robust legislative measures to protect them.

The Importance of Sand Dunes

Sand dunes are dynamic and essential components of coastal ecosystems. They serve as natural barriers protecting inland areas from storm surges and erosion while providing habitat for various species of flora and fauna. On Sears Island, these dunes play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity and supporting local wildlife. Additionally, they contribute to the aesthetic and recreational value of the area, promoting tourism and the outdoor economy.

These resources have great scenic beauty and unique characteristic, unsurpassed recreational, cultural, historical and environmental value and future benefits to the citizens of the State of Maine. Sears Island is home to several species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and plant life. The west side of the island has a shallow shoal supporting meadows of eelgrass and other nursery habitats which play a crucial role in the fish and shellfish populations of Penobscot Bay. Significantly altering the sacred terrain of Sears Island would severely threaten all of those species.

Archeological records confirm that Native Americans started camping on the island over 3400 years ago, using it as a base for hunting, fishing, and resting—the primary uses of the island until Europeans arrived in the 1600's. According to the Friends of Sears Island website, In 1975, Maine Maritime Academy discovered artifacts from the historic battle between the British and 44 Massachusetts vessels—the largest American naval defeat before Pearl Harbor—in Stockton Harbor, using sonar. Many items preserved in the mud were unearthed after a subsequent archeological excavation. With that said, Sears Island is not only a wildlife sanctuary to birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and shellfish, but also an important historical site that should not be destroyed and replaced by industrial scale development. However, sand dunes are highly susceptible to

environmental changes and human activities. Development projects threaten the integrity of these fragile ecosystems. By establishing protective measures, the proposed Act seeks to counteract these threats and foster a sustainable relationship between human activity and the natural world.

Key Provisions of the Act

1. **Protective Boundaries:** The Act will define the geographical boundaries of the sand dunes and establish guidelines that limit construction and development activities in these areas.
2. **Environmental Impact Assessments:** Before any development can proceed, comprehensive environmental impact assessments must be conducted. This ensures that potential damage to the sand dunes and surrounding ecosystems is evaluated and considered in decision-making processes.
3. **Public Engagement:** The Act emphasizes the importance of involving local communities and stakeholders in discussions about land use and development. By encouraging public input, the legislation aims to create a collaborative approach to conservation.
4. **Criteria for Future Legislation:** In addition to immediate protections for Sears Island's dunes, the Act lays the groundwork for establishing criteria that guide future land development legislation throughout Maine. This sets a precedent for integrating environmental considerations into statewide planning.

Environmental and Economic Implications

Protecting sand dunes is not solely an environmental concern; it is also an economic imperative. Healthy coastal ecosystems support fisheries, tourism, and recreation – all crucial drivers of the local economy. By investing in the preservation of natural landscapes, Maine can ensure long-term economic stability and resilience.

Moreover, the establishment of ecological safeguards can enhance the state's reputation as an environmentally responsible destination. This aligns with growing consumer preferences for sustainable tourism and development practices. Over time, the proactive measures outlined in this Act could result in increased funding and support from both state and federal sources focused on environmental conservation.

The legislative initiative represented by LD 735 is a commendable step toward balancing the need for land development with the vital importance of environmental conservation. By protecting the sand dunes on Sears Island, Maine's 132nd Legislature can recognize the interconnectedness of ecological wellness, community health, and economic prosperity.

The New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association urges you to consider maintaining protection over the coastal sand dune systems of Sears Island. For many years locals have fought to protect one of the most beautiful, historical, wildlife sanctuaries in Maine. The destruction of such magnitude that is needed for a commercial scale, industrialized wind port would be a significant digression to beautiful Sears Island. NEFSA encourages you to vote "to pass" LD 735. It sets a precedent for future environmental policies that prioritize sustainability, community involvement, and responsible development practices. Ultimately, the success of this Act will hinge on the collaboration of lawmakers, environmentalists, businesses, and residents, united in their commitment to safeguarding Maine's treasured coastal landscapes for generations to come. All of which the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association are in support of LD 735 and the protection of our Wild resources.

Thank you,

Jerry Leeman

CEO/ Founder

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