



Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

March 13, 2025

RE: LD 593, *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*

Dear Sen. Talbot Ross, Rep. Pluecker, and Members of the ACF Committee:

My name is Francesca "Ches" Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon's Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to "conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat" by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 593, *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*

Established in 1987, the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program is Maine's most successful land conservation program. LMF is responsible for protecting more than 600,000 acres across all of Maine's 16 counties, including more than 325,000 acres of working farms, forests, and waterfronts, miles and miles of recreational trails, and critical wildlife habitat. Time and time again, LMF has demonstrated that it is worthy of our investment. This essential conservation program deserves consistent, predictable funding and we believe that this bill serves as a vehicle to help address this need.

LMF tackles the number one direct driver of species extinction: changes in land use. The program provides funding to purchase lands in fee or to secure conservation easements that ensure that the land is conserved in perpetuity. These lands are open for the public to enjoy, provide community benefits, and contribute to the local economy. Working lands under LMF, particularly working forests, strike a good balance between supporting this vital economic sector and conserving important habitat. Maine Audubon's Forestry for Maine Birds program, which is being implemented across the state, demonstrates that bird conservation can be integrated in active forest management. While LMF projects cannot stem all threats to wildlife, they provide an important part of the puzzle that ensures the full suite of Maine's wildlife and habitats are conserved into the future, providing a permanent home for wildlife, opportunities for nature-based tourism, and places for spiritual renewal.

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Without such conservation efforts, new development will creep across the landscape. Residential and commercial development, including roads and other human activity, not only destroy habitat, but can alter when, where, and how animals move between habitats. LMF and other land conservation efforts are an antidote to the unintended consequences of development and one of Maine's best bets to stem the tide of habitat loss and degradation, as well as species decline and extinction. While Maine Audubon could never advocate for a single conservation strategy, LMF employs multiple strategies and is a top priority.

Whether you're a hunter, hiker, biker, birder, power-sporter or power walker, the Land for Maine's Future program has had tremendous impacts on Mainers far and wide – with positive ripple effects that have and will continue to last for generations. **For the benefit of all Maine people and our wildlife heritage, we urge the Committee to support LD 593.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy