March 13, 2025

Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Director of Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Maine
Kaitlyn.nuzzo@tnc.org

The Nature Conservancy
Maine

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

LD 758 – Resolve, To Update Flood Hazard Data in the Sandy River Watershed

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo, Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 758.** We appreciate Senator Black's efforts to bring this bill forward.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that both nature and people can thrive. We work in more than 70 countries, and we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners.

In the face of a changing climate that brings with it more frequent and more intense storms, Mainers need proactive and creative policies that bolster resiliency for communities across the state. Our organization has been participating in a community led effort in the Sandy River watershed over the last several months. From the very beginning farmers, landowners, and community leaders recognized that the best way to address the increased flooding and the associated impacts and risks would be to work together. They established the Sandy River Watershed Association and have been organizing local meetings to gather input and identify the resources they needed.

In January the Association convened a public meeting to hear from impacted landowners and experts who helped identify data needs that could better inform future resiliency work. The interest in this issue was obvious as the RSVP list grew from 10 to 30 to a full house of 50+ people in attendance. It was clear from this convening that people were eager to work together to address this problem. As the meeting wrapped up there was a clear sense of optimism and hope – and a commitment to keeping the conversation going.

The amended version of LD 758 is a key next step in that ongoing conversation. The bill requests resources from the newly established Maine Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) to conduct a geomorphic study within the Sandy River watershed. This study would be a necessary compliment to the updated

floodplain mapping that FEMA is currently conducting, and was identified as a priority need from the Association meeting in January. This work is an important step towards reducing flood risk in communities while also protecting fish and wildlife habitat.

The Sandy is a highly dynamic river, subject to natural processes of sediment and woody debris mobility, ice scour, and erosion. Furthermore, as is the case with many rivers in Maine, the Sandy has been artificially straightened and constricted in multiple places; this further exacerbates the impacts of the natural processes of the river and the flood risk they pose to communities in the floodplain. By better understanding these impacts and the sources and processes of sediment transport and erosion, and paired with updated FEMA flood mapping, the communities will be much better equipped to plan for future resiliency.

We believe this work could be an early success story for the soon-to-be established State Resilience Office within MOCA. Work done in this watershed - which is ready to act now - can help inform and inspire other areas of the state to follow suit. The community led approach and support will result in tangible lessons that can be applied state wide.

Focusing on updated flooding information will make Mainers safer while helping to protect our natural resources through better planning. We hope you will join us in supporting the Sandy River Watershed Association and vote ought to pass on the amended version of LD 758.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and I am happy to answer questions at any time.