



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
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JANET T. MILLS
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION, AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST 895

*An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the
Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program*

March 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Andy Cutko, Director of the Bureau of Parks and Public Lands (BPL) within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking neither for nor against LD 895, "*An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.*"

This bill establishes a program to provide outdoor education to serve Maine students. The outdoors is part of our state's DNA. Many of us were fortunate to obtain outdoor literacy through our childhood experiences – hiking, camping, swimming, hunting, fishing, and exploring the outdoors with our families and friends. More broadly speaking, the goal of the Outdoor School for All aligns well with the Department's mission and allows us to instill the importance of our natural resource industries in Maine and to plant seeds for future generations of farmers, foresters, fishermen, and others working outdoors and/or as stewards of our natural resources.

Unfortunately, many children in Maine lack opportunities to enjoy and learn about the outdoors due to their home circumstances, lack of access and transportation, or the lack of suitable school or community-based programs. LD 895 takes an important step to address this deficiency. The Bureau of Parks and Lands periodically holds a two-week training session for our staff in natural history interpretation, and we regularly incorporate outdoor education into many of our public events at state parks across all seasons. We would be happy to participate in the advisory committee to help make recommendations regarding the program to ensure that the State is a nationwide leader in outdoor education.

I would gladly answer any questions at this time or during the work session.

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