

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

March 18, 2025

RE: LD 402, An Act to Move the Natural Areas Program from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and to Amend the Law Governing Administration of the Bureau of Resource Management Within the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

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

Maine Audubon and The Nature Conservancy thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 402, *An Act to Move the Natural Areas Program from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and to Amend the Law Governing Administration of the Bureau of Resource Management Within the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife*. Maine Audubon is the state's oldest and largest wildlife conservation nonprofit. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Our organizations support the proposed transfer of the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) to the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW). Together, MNAP and DIFW could more effectively and efficiently facilitate the conservation of Maine's biodiversity by providing comprehensive information and scientific expertise on at-risk species, natural ecosystems, wildlife habitats, ecological reserves, and invasive plants to landowners, developers, resource managers, towns, and other conservation partners through one coordinated program – equipping decisionmakers with tools to make informed and responsible land management decisions.

Moving this program to DIFW now, after they recently established new Habitat and Wildlife Diversity Sections and are currently in the middle of updating the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), would be very timely. It would bring together both animal and plant experts, and encourage a more integrated approach to working with landowners and others on how to best conserve our significant natural heritage alongside other management goals. The move would reduce duplicative work between agencies and create a more coordinated approach to database management, environmental review, species tracking, and leveraging of federal funds for habitat conservation.

We thank Commissioner Beal and Commissioner Camuso for embracing efficiency with this transfer. **We encourage the Committee to support this bill.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy
Maine Audubon



Kaitlyn Nuzzo
Director of Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Maine