

Testimony by Ray Owen, Orono, Maine

In support of LD 870 Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission

March 20, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. My name is Ray Owen, and I reside in Orono. I'm here to support LD 870, An Act Regarding Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission.

I am past Chair of the University of Maine's Department of Wildlife, past Commissioner of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife appointed by governors McKernan and King, as well as past Member and Chair of the Maine Land Use Regulatory Commission (LURC) in the mid-1980's. At that time LURC dealt with issues such as mining, lake and river classification, forestry impacts, deer wintering areas, hydro licensing, and development permits. LUPC encounters many of these same issues today.

I think of significance was the make-up of our Commission. We had a logging contractor from Ashland, a conservationist/recreationist from Jackman, a former Commissioner of Forestry, the post mistress from Claton Lake, a store owner from Eagle Lake, a lawyer/planner from Portland, and a wildlife biologist, yours truly. We represented a variety of disciplines and backgrounds and either lived in or adjacent to the Unorganized Territories (UT), or had extensive experience in the UT.

I believe that having 8 members of LUPC appointed by the eight counties most represented in the UT was an appropriate move. However, what was lost was the extensive professional knowledge contributed by the members of the Commission. The four proposed members to be appointed by the Governor with backgrounds in forestry, land use planning, conservation, fisheries,

wildlife, outdoor recreation, or natural resource-based businesses that operate in the UT fills that gap. This action would lead to a more rigorous analysis of the data presented to the Commission from applicants, agencies, and the public. Also, it could foster more in-depth discussions of the issues within the Commission.

Finally, we all have a stake in the UT; many of us have worked in the UT or recreate there. I began my career working out of Oxbow studying the impact of DDT on forest ecosystems in the late 1960's. This was followed by statewide bald eagle research, wetlands conservation, river restorations, and land conservation. This will be my 58th consecutive year of salmon fishing on the upper West Branch of the Penobscot River; there is no other place I would rather be. Adding 4 members to the Commission from throughout the state gives us all a chance to participate in the future of this truly remarkable area.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today; I urge you to support LD 870.