



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

March 20, 2025

RE: LD 870, An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission

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 870, *An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission*.

Maine’s Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) is the planning and zoning authority for more than half of the State of Maine. The LUPC’s jurisdiction of 10.4 million acres of unorganized territories (UT) includes natural resources of local, statewide, regional, national, and even global significance.

Maine’s North Woods are the largest, relatively undeveloped forest in the U.S. east of the Mississippi. The size of the region with its forests, lakes, rivers, wildlife, and ecosystems in their natural condition make it unique. While there are blocks of undeveloped land in southern Maine and through the eastern U.S., Maine’s North Woods include the largest area with a combination of natural ecosystems including alpine, forest, wetland, riparian, and river ecosystems. The size of this area is critical for allowing natural processes to continue and sustainable populations of wildlife to thrive, both of which are essential for the long-term conservation of biodiversity, which itself is the key to maintaining life on earth.

Biodiversity within the UT is especially important to its character. In addition to recreational hunting and fishing and the guiding economy, protecting biodiversity is part of the area’s natural character. Maine is the only state in the Northeast with a nearly full complement of predators—including weasels, otters, martens, foxes, bobcats, coyotes, and lynx—precisely because we have such expansive, relatively unfragmented forested habitat for them to meet all their needs, including places to drink, feed, den, raise young, and hide from other predators. These animals all have large home ranges and need even larger spaces to enable healthy populations to survive, to find mates, maintain a healthy genetic pool, raise kits etc. The same can be said for some of our large ranging mammals such as moose and black bear.

In addition to these charismatic megafauna, Maine’s forests are home to many kinds of birds, including songbirds, wading birds, and waterfowl. There are approximately 90 species of songbirds that nest in Maine’s forests, and these forests are considered the “baby bird factory” of the Atlantic flyway. In fact, much of western and northern Maine has been designated as a globally significant Important Bird Area because so many different bird species come here to raise their young every year.

These birds—most of whom are neotropical migrants—depend on Maine’s expansive forestlands for breeding and raising their young. Most of these birds are experiencing dramatic population declines, with eastern forest birds having seen a 17% decline and boreal birds having seen a 33% decline since 1970 based on several long-term monitoring datasets.¹ The woods of the UT offer a unique opportunity to provide high quality breeding bird habitat for these migrants and residents and stem the tide of further population decline. Though there are many threats to birds all along their travels, if they can’t breed successfully and make more chicks, their populations will certainly continue to decline.

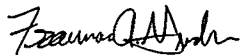
Unfortunately, the UT faces significant challenges caused by changing ownership patterns, economic and development pressures, and risks to biodiversity and climate change. To meet these challenges, Maine Audubon supports expanding and broadening the membership of the LUPC to provide additional expertise and capacity in areas such as forestry, land-use planning, outdoor recreation, and natural-resource based businesses.

LD 870 will help the LUPC serve the broad economic, conservation, and community interests of Maine by expanding membership while honoring deference to those with intimate understandings of the UT and broadening required expertise to account for modern land-use challenges in this area.

Being a member of the LUPC’s board requires a tremendous amount of time and energy. Maine Audubon expresses our sincere gratitude to the past, current, and future members of this body for their dedication to guiding land use for one of the most unique areas of our state. We believe that this legislation will support LUPC board members and staff in their tireless work to uphold principles of sound planning, zoning, and development in the UT.

We encourage the Committee to support LD 870. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca “Ches” Gundrum
Director of Advocacy

¹ See Kenneth V. Rosenberg et al., *Decline of the North American avifauna*, 366 *Science* 120 (2019), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaw1313>; see also 3 Billion Birds, <https://www.3billionbirds.org/> (last accessed Sept. 21, 2023).