



**Testimony of Eliza Townsend
in support of LD 870
*An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission***

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the ACF Committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC is a people-oriented conservation nonprofit; our mission is the protection, understanding, and enjoyment of the outdoors. We have 6,200 members in Maine and manage 130,000 acres of forestland in Piscataquis County for multiple use, including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and outdoor education. We pay property taxes on all of our land.

At 10.4 million acres the Unorganized Territories comprise more than half the State of Maine and are a place of global importance. The UT makes up the largest block of undeveloped forestland in the northeastern US, and sits at the core of the largest, most intact temperate forest in the world. It is the reason Maine is the most forested state in the nation, the beating heart of our \$8.1 billion forest products industry¹. That forest holds the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the continental US². It holds 139 rare plants and animals, 21 of them globally rare³.

The UT also encompasses 21,000 miles of rivers and streams, over 3,000 lakes and ponds, and 780 coastal islands⁴. It is home to iconic species from moose to Canada lynx to the Atlantic salmon and provides the backbone of the most extensive distribution and abundance of wild native Brook trout in the United States⁵.

The Unorganized Territories include famed destinations whose names evoke Maine's essence: Katahdin, the Allagash, the St. John, Moosehead, Kineo, Gulf Hagas; Grand Lake, the Narraguagus and the Machias; Matinicus, Monhegan, and Criehaven.

What these places do not have in abundance is a year-round population, nor much in the way of local government. Beginning in the late 1960's, Maine began to recognize that these extraordinary and beautiful places sit within a day's drive of millions of people with increased disposable income and leisure time, and that without proper planning and regulation, they are very much at risk. Thus, the legislature created the Land Use Regulation Commission, now the Land Use Planning Commission, "to extend the principles of sound planning, zoning and development to the unorganized and deorganized townships of the state."

A half century later, the complexity and urgency of the issues addressed by the Commission have only increased. Climate change and biodiversity loss threaten our future, and we know that a healthy intact

¹ <https://maineforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2019-FP-Impact-Final-to-MFPC-Revised-Nov-021.pdf>

² <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back/>

³ <https://mainemountaincollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Ecological-Values-of-the-Western-Maine-Mountains.pdf>

⁴ https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/plans_maps_data/clup/Chapter3.pdf

⁵ <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/fisheries/wild-brook-trout.html>



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forest is critical to countering both. The economics of forest products are dynamic, changing almost weekly, and land ownership patterns are anything but stable. Where once a handful of landowners focused on growing pulpwood made up the bulk of the UT, ownership is now scattered among hundreds of owners, some anonymous, each with a different goal. Demand for both second homes and energy, including renewables such as solar and wind power, drives proposals that could fragment the forest and its critical habitat.

State Senator and former paper company executive David Huber put it best in 1971: “The present unspoiled nature of much of Maine is the state’s number one asset. If we screw up this asset, Maine is in a bad way.”

LD 870 proposes to strengthen the Land Use Planning Commission by adding 4 members appointed by the governor on the basis of their expertise in forestry, land use planning, conservation, fisheries, wildlife, recreation, or natural-resource related businesses. This modest proposal will add much-needed capacity as the Commission wrestles with ever more complex pressures placed on a unique and irreplaceable resource.

We support LD 870 and urge you to vote Ought to Pass.