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*Testimony of Rep. Bill Bridgeo introducing*  
**LD 870, An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning  
Commission**  
*Before the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee*

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, I am Representative Bill Bridgeo and I represent the East Side of the city of Augusta. I'm here to introduce **LD 870, An Act Regarding the Membership of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission.**

I urge you to support this bill for reasons that I'll explain, but let me begin by sharing a bit about myself – which will help you understand where I'm coming from with this legislation.

I'm a native of Aroostook County, born in Houlton and raised in Caribou, and I'm a lifelong sportsman. I have fond memories as a kid fishing on Prestile Stream, biking there after school and returning home with a stringer – an alder branch really - of trout. I've been fishing ever since. For the past several decades, my favorite spots have been at Pleasant Lake and Mud Lake in T6 R6 in the unorganized territories (UT), on the Pisquataquis and Penobscot county lines. These lakes have spectacular native brook trout and land-locked salmon – but don't let anyone know that I told you.

I've spent more than 40 years of my professional life as a city manager, including six years in Calais and 24 years in Augusta. As City Manager of Calais, starting in my late 20's, I would hunt and fish around my home on Keene's Lake whenever possible, including off the Airline in the nearby unorganized territories. This is my second term as a state representative.

I share this background to illustrate that I am no stranger to the UT; indeed, many of my favorite places in Maine are in the UT. I'm also no stranger to planning boards, which is what the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) is. Having been a municipal manager for more than half my life, I strongly support local control. But I also recognize that for a landscape as large as Maine's unorganized territories – which comprises more than half of the State of Maine – there is a very substantial State interest that needs fair representation on the LUPC.

As many of you likely know, the LUPC, in its current configuration, was created by statute in 2011. Prior to that, the planning and zoning authority for the UT was called the Land Use Regulation Commission, or LURC.

For 40 years, from 1971 to 2011, the Governor was responsible for all of the appointments to LURC. In 2011, the Legislature changed the appointment process to what exists today – with eight of LUPC’s nine commissioners appointed by the eight counties with the most acreage in the UT, and only one appointed by the governor.

This change ensured that people who live and work in the UT are strongly represented on the LUPC. That’s critically important, and – in my opinion – represented an improvement. However, I believe the time has come to make some further adjustments to LUPC, with the goal of enhancing the capacity of the Commission with a broader range of required skills and experiences and a fuller blend of representatives with local and statewide perspectives.

I believe these adjustments will help position the Commission for the challenges and pressures that will face the UT in the years and decades ahead.

Now, let me talk about the specifics of LD 870:

- The bill would expand the LUPC to 13 members, with eight still appointed by the eight counties with the most UT acreage, and five appointed by the Governor.
- The Governor would be required to appoint individuals “with the broadest possible interest and experience that can be brought to bear on the administration and implementation” of the LUPC’s work.
- The County Commissioners would continue to appoint individuals who reside or work in the UT, are former residents of the UT, or have significant professional experience working in the UT – but the requirement of at least five years of prior work experience in the UT would be dropped.
- The bill would update the qualifications for commissioners, with appointees expected to have experience in one or more of the areas of forestry, land use planning, conservation, fisheries, wildlife, outdoor recreation and natural resources-related businesses that operate in the UT.
- The bill also would establish term limits of two consecutive four-year terms, and it proposes some changes to the administrative processes for the posting of openings.

I believe these are sensible, constructive and fairly modest changes.

The governor would have additional appointments, which makes sense given the importance of the UT to the state as a whole. The UT supports Maine’s \$8.5 billion forest products industry and a large portion of Maine’s \$3 billion outdoor recreation economy. It also is home to some of

Maine's most significant rivers, wildlife habitat, mountains and remote areas for hunting, fishing and remote recreation.

Regardless of who the governor is, I believe Maine's Chief Executive should have the responsibility of appointing more than one commissioner to the planning authority for half the state.

With regard to increasing the membership of the LUPC, I don't think that 13 is unreasonable for a planning body with a jurisdiction of 10.5 million acres. As the City Manager of Augusta, I worked with a nine-member planning board responsible for about 37,000 acres, which is about .004% the size of the UT.

Multiple other State Commissions and Boards have 13 or more members, including FAME with 15 Board members, the Maine Community College Board with 14 and Loring Development Authority with 13, not to mention that legislative committees also have 13 members.

The suggested adjustments to areas of expertise for appointees also seem warranted. For the duties of LUPC commissioners, it makes sense to seek candidates with backgrounds in forestry, land use planning, conservation, fisheries, wildlife, outdoor recreation and natural resource-based businesses that operate in the UT.

These recommendations for changes to the LUPC are not a criticism of the current commission. We should all be thankful for the work and commitment of the current LUPC commissioners, and their LUPC and LURC predecessors, over the past 54 years.

Rather, the intent with LD 870 is really future-focused, with an eye to enhancing LUPC's ability to address pressures on the UT that have been building in recent years and will only increase.

It may be hard for some to get excited about modifications to a planning board like LUPC, but for me, governance, leadership, areas of expertise and balancing public interests matter a lot.

Those are the elements that guide my support for LD 870, in addition to my life-long love of Maine's unorganized territories and my career as a City Manager and as a State Representative.

I appreciate this opportunity to present LD 870 and would be glad to answer any questions you may have.