



Maine Coast Heritage Trust
A Statewide Land Conservation Organization

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I am with Maine Coast Heritage Trust providing joint testimony with Kaitlyn Nuzzo of The Nature Conservancy in support of LD 1072.

While we support all three sections of the bill, the focus of our testimony is Part C. This section proposes to update and improve how the state keeps track of conservation lands, by changing the conservation lands registry.

Registry History

The history of the conservation lands registry goes back to 2007, when land trusts worked with Senator Raye to develop a conservation easement registry. At the time, the goal was to help policymakers, and the public better understand how many conservation easements existed and where they were located. The legislature delegated the management of the registry to the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program, because it needed to be housed somewhere. LMF then developed an on-line portal to collect the required information.

In 2017, as State House policy discussions turned to land trust owned lands, MCHT and TNC worked on a proposal to add fee lands to the registry. This was part of a larger budget agreement to end a government shutdown. Unfortunately, the implementation of the registry expansion was challenging and resulted in a registry that does not work well for land trusts. The current registry is built on an outdated data collection system and now requires the input of an unnecessarily long list of data categories that go well beyond the statute. More importantly, the registry does not work for policymakers or the public either, as it is problematic to access the system's information.

Conserved Lands GIS Database

The state's conserved lands database, on the other hand, is an effective tool that is currently being underutilized by conservation landowners. This format has evolved on a parallel track over the past couple decades, but it relies on voluntary participation. Today, the GIS conserved lands database includes most but not all conservation lands. One of the biggest obstacles has been overcoming technical challenges facing some organizations, especially smaller land trusts. MCHT has been working with state agency staff over the past year to develop a new method to make it easier for conservation organizations to upload their data into the conserved lands database. It is this effort that inspired Part C of the bill.

New Conservation Lands Reporting System

Part C would direct LMF staff to essentially merge the current conservation lands registry requirement with the state GIS conserved lands database. Instead of land trusts entering data into the registry, they will be required to certify that all their conservation lands are uploaded into the state's GIS system at least once a year. This outcome will be better for land trusts, but more importantly it will provide more accurate and useful information to policymakers and the public.

We encourage the committee to vote in favor of LD 1072.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust seeks to advance the conservation of lands and waters in Maine to ensure ecological wellbeing and foster thriving communities. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres, including over 160 places open for traditional outdoor recreation.