



Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife 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 1308.

LD 1308 directs the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) to convene a working group to discuss opportunities and develop recommendations to support public-private partnerships to maintain public access to privately owned land. Maine is unique in enjoying a long tradition of public access to private lands. However, tensions around land use and the challenges private landowners face continue to threaten this traditional access.

Both of our organizations are committed to advancing the conservation of lands and waters in Maine to ensure they remain open and available for all to enjoy. As landowners ourselves, we guarantee public access for a wide variety of uses including hunting, fishing, and motorized and nonmotorized recreation. We also face many of the same challenges other landowners face including illegal dumping, illegal fires, and the misuse of motorized vehicles. Misuse of private land is a serious problem – one that costs landowners significant time and money.

Given the challenges landowners face, it is important to explore creative solutions to support landowners and ease the tensions that lead to loss of public access. Our organizations have long supported the IFW Landowner Relations program and TNC has regularly served on the Landowners and Sportsman Relations Advisory Board. We support convening a stakeholder group focused on this issue and believe the recommendations that would come from this working group will benefit all people and landowners in Maine.

We encourage the committee to vote in favor of LD 1308.

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*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.*