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**Testimony of Rep. Sally Cluchey presenting
LD 1241, An Act to Establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program to Support the Maine
Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and honorable Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. My name is Sally Cluchey, and I represent House District 52, which includes the communities of Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, and Richmond. I am proud to be here today to introduce LD 1241, *An Act to Establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program to Support the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund*.

The world is experiencing a biodiversity crisis. Scientists at NatureServe¹ estimate that about a third of all U.S. species are at risk of extinction. That percentage translates to more than 8,500 of our country's best-known plant and animal species. Notably, only 20 percent of the country's more than 200,000 identified species have been evaluated for extinction risk, so the true total might be much higher. Maine is no exception. Per Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's (DIFW) recommendation, this committee added eight new species – five birds, one bat, one beetle, and one bee – to Maine's list of Endangered and Threatened Species in the 131st Legislature.² Currently, there are 57 listed species – and our committee should expect additional recommendations from DIFW in the coming years.

The Maine Endangered Species Act, or MESA, has been instrumental in protecting imperiled species in Maine since 1975. We know that every species plays a role in its ecosystem – when we lose species, it can cause ecological ripple effects that impact wildlife and humans. Biodiverse ecosystems help clean our air and water, pollinate crops, and regulate the climate—all for free. However, protecting the health of these systems requires time, energy, and expertise.

In 1983, the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund was created to help support the work of our state's biologists in bringing species back from the brink of extinction. The fund supports the conservation of Maine's most at-risk wildlife through population surveys, monitoring, and habitat conservation. As the department will attest, this fund has been instrumental in some of our state's most

¹ NatureServe, Inc. is a U.S.-based non-profit organization that provides wildlife conservation-related data, tools, and services to private and government clients, partner organizations, and the public.

² See LD 57 from the 131st Legislature, *An Act to Amend Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species List*.

famous conservation success stories, such as the recovery and delisting of Bald Eagles and reintroduction of Peregrine Falcons.

While several sources – such as as voluntary charitable donations via “Chickadee Check-off” we can make on our personal income tax forms and the Conservation Registration Plate AKA the “Loon Plate” – currently feed the fund, unfortunately these sources have either plateaued or decreased so much so that the additional revenue sources are necessary to support the conservation of endangered, nongame, and at-risk wildlife in Maine. Per DIFW’s report to our committee earlier this session, annual contributions to the fund peaked in 1997 and have been declining annually in the decades since, plateauing in 2010.

LD 1241 is a bill designed to help us address this funding problem. This legislation would create the “Make Change for Wildlife” program in order to help generate voluntary contributions to benefit the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund. The idea is for businesses to collect customer contributions at the point-of-sale by offering customers the option to “round up” their purchases to the nearest dollar (or offer additional dollar amounts – e.g., \$1, \$3, or \$5). The difference or additions would go directly to the fund. In order to help incentivize participation, businesses have the option to deduct an amount equal to the funds voluntarily contributed by the taxpayer up to \$10,000 annually from state corporate income taxes.

Participating businesses would be equipped with information and marketing guidance from DIFW, and promoted by wildlife conservation nonprofits throughout the state. The goal of this program is to diversify contribution streams as current levels are inadequate in addressing the basic science and habitat conservation needs necessary to ensure healthy wildlife populations in Maine.

As species’ populations begin to drop or as once-common animal species become less common, it is imperative that we fund the work to protect our state’s most vulnerable fish and wildlife. LD 1241 is one of several opportunities for us to help advance the work required of one of our state’s bedrock environmental laws. I hope you will support this important initiative. Thank you for your consideration.