



Testimony in Support of LD 1241, An Act to Establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program to Support the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund

Before the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

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April 9, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 20,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1241, An Act to Establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program to Support the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund.

Now more than ever, wildlife across the globe needs our help, and Maine is no exception. Leading scientists in the fields of biology and paleontology believe that we are currently living in Earth's sixth mass extinction event due to the current rate of species loss caused by humans via direct mortality, habitat loss, and the impacts of climate change.^{1,2} Following the passage of the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, there were 70 species listed as Endangered or Threatened in the US. Today there are more than 1,300. In Maine, there are currently 57 species listed as Endangered or Threatened under the Maine Endangered Species Act, and 378 species identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) under the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). Conserving these species is critical to prevent a collapse in biodiversity that would have ripple effects throughout Maine.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) has been carefully protecting the most at-risk species for decades through the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund. Established in 1983, this fund supports wildlife conservation through population surveys, monitoring, and habitat conservation. Funding for this program comes from several sources including the Chickadee Checkoff, Conservation and Sportsman's license plates, and donations. These funds play the key role of providing state match to unlock larger federal funding sources like State Wildlife Grants and Pittman-Robertson funds. In 2024, only \$395,000 was contributed to the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund, which is clearly inadequate to address the growing lists of species that need protection.

¹ Barnosky, A. D., Matzke, N., Tomiya, S., Wogan, G. O. U., Swartz, B., Quental, T. B., Marshall, C., McGuire, J. L., Lindsey, E. L., Maguire, K. C., Mersey, B., & Ferrer, E. A. (2011). Has the Earth's sixth mass extinction already arrived? *Nature*, 471, 51–57. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature09678>

² Ceballos, G., Ehrlich, P. R., Barnosky, A. D., García, A., Pringle, R. M., & Palmer, T. M. (2015). Accelerated modern human-induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction. *Science Advances*, 1(5), e1400253. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1400253>

LD 1241 aims to fix this by establishing a new funding source for the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund. Titled the “Make Change for Wildlife” program, this new funding source would encourage private donations by giving businesses the opportunity to allow customers to contribute to the Fund by “rounding up” on their purchases. To encourage adoption, this bill allows businesses to deduct customer contributions up to \$10,000 on their annual corporate income tax.

This voluntary program is a clever solution to address Maine’s problem of inadequate state funding for nongame wildlife conservation. At a time when wildlife needs our support more than ever before, increasing funding for the critical work that DIFW does to protect our most threatened species here in Maine is paramount. LD 1241 would accomplish this, and for this reason, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass. Thank you for your time and consideration.