



**APPALACHIAN
MOUNTAIN CLUB**
SINCE 1876

**Testimony of Eliza Townsend
in opposition to**

L.D. 383 *An Act to Facilitate the Consolidation of the Department of Environmental Protection and the Maine Land Use Planning Commission into a Single Combined Entity*
April 14, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC is a people-oriented conservation nonprofit; our mission is the protection, understanding, and enjoyment of the outdoors. We have 6,200 members in Maine and manage 130,000 acres of forestland in Piscataquis County for multiple use, including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and outdoor education. We pay property taxes on all of our land.

We oppose LD 383. This sweeping bill would upend an agency and a policy that have been in place for more than 50 years, at a moment when the need for good planning is more needed than ever.

The Commission was first established in 1971, the result of bipartisan recognition of the unique value of Maine's unorganized territories and the need to address growing development pressure that threatens it. Its establishing statute reads "The legislature declares it to be in the public interest, for the public benefit, for the good order of the people of this State and for the benefit of the property owners and residents of the unorganized and deorganized townships of the State, to encourage the well-planned and well-managed multiple use, including conservation of land and resources and to encourage and facilitate regional economic viability."

LD 383 would instead prioritize landowner rights.

At 10.4 million acres the Unorganized Territories comprise more than half the State of Maine and are a place of global importance. The UT makes up the largest block of undeveloped forestland in the northeastern US, and sits at the core of the largest, most intact temperate forest in the world. It is the reason Maine is the most forested state in the nation, the beating heart of our \$8.1 billion forest products industry¹. That forest holds the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the continental US². It holds 139 rare plants and animals, 21 of them globally rare³.

¹ <https://maineforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2019-FP-Impact-Final-to-MFPC-Revised-Nov-021.pdf>

² <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back/>

³ <https://mainemountaincollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Ecological-Values-of-the-Western-Maine-Mountains.pdf>



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The UT also encompasses 21,000 miles of rivers and streams, over 3,000 lakes and ponds, and 780 coastal islands⁴. It is home to iconic species from moose to Canada lynx to the Atlantic salmon and provides the backbone of the most extensive distribution and abundance of wild native Brook trout in the United States⁵.

The Unorganized Territories include famed destinations whose names evoke Maine's essence: Katahdin, the Allagash, the St. John, Moosehead, Kineo, Gulf Hagas; Grand Lake, the Narraguagus and the Machias; Matinicus, Monhegan, and Criehaven.

What these places do not have in abundance is a year-round population, nor much in the way of local government. Beginning in the late 1960's, Maine began to recognize that these extraordinary and beautiful places sit within a day's drive of millions of people with increased disposable income and leisure time, and that without proper planning and regulation, they are very much at risk. Thus, the legislature created the Land Use Regulation Commission, now the Land Use Planning Commission, "to extend the principles of sound planning, zoning and development to the unorganized and deorganized townships of the state."

A half century later, the complexity and urgency of the issues addressed by the Commission have only increased. Climate change and biodiversity loss threaten our future, and we know that a healthy intact forest is critical to countering both. The economics of forest products are dynamic, changing almost weekly, and land ownership patterns are anything but stable. Where once a handful of landowners focused on growing pulpwood made up the bulk of the UT, ownership is now scattered among hundreds of owners, some anonymous, each with a different goal. Demand for both second homes and energy, including renewables such as solar and wind power, drives proposals that could fragment the forest and its critical habitat.

We can say today, as State Senator and former paper company executive David Huber put it in 1971: "The present unspoiled nature of much of Maine is the state's number one asset. If we screw up this asset, Maine is in a bad way."

LD 383 proposes to alter a structure that has served Maine well. We ask you to vote Ought Not to Pass.

⁴ https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/plans_maps_data/clup/Chapter3.pdf

⁵ <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/fisheries/wild-brook-trout.html>