



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, providing testimony today on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust neither for nor against LD 1529.

While Maine Coast Heritage Trust supports the conservation of old growth and late successional forests, we do not support additional preferential treatment within Land for Maine's Future (LMF) as outlined in the bill. Any discussion about amending LMF priorities should be done in a more comprehensive way to ensure a proper balance among the program's many worthwhile goals.

LMF Prioritizes Old Growth Conservation

The LMF statute already prioritizes "habitat for plant or animal species or natural communities considered rare, threatened or endangered," which includes old growth forests according to the LMF Board's scoring process. In fact, proposals with old growth and late successional forests would likely receive maximum points in a variety of LMF scoring categories, including:

- **"Naturalness of the land;"** and
- **"Project Need"** which emphasizes the protection of:
 - resources that are **"rare or unique;"**
 - resources that are **"under severe threat, are in high demand and/or are not well-represented."**

Such a proposal could also receive maximum points within a relatively new scoring category that rewards climate change resilient landscapes.

Current LMF Priorities Strike an Appropriate Balance

The LMF statute has evolved over the years. For the first decade, the program focused on large conservation projects of statewide significance. Amendments in the late 1990s and early 2000s added emphasis on recreational water access, farmland conservation, working waterfronts, and local and regional conservation projects. In 2010, deer wintering areas in northern, eastern, and western Maine were highlighted in response to support from legislators throughout those regions.

Most recently, the legislature established “community conservation projects” as a category to replace local and regional projects. This change sought to address concerns that the program was tilting too much in favor of conserving remote areas of statewide significance and not enough on outdoor places closer to where Maine people live, work, and play. Over the past four years, the LMF board has effectively implemented community projects along with the program’s other priorities. The result has been a more balanced distribution of funds across the state, supporting projects close to Portland and Lewiston; locations in unorganized parts of northern Maine; and everything in between.

MCHT encourages the committee to tread carefully before amending the LMF statute as proposed in LD 1529. The program currently works well, including for efforts focused on old growth forests. Thank you for the opportunity to share the views of MCHT on this issue.

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.