



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1529

"An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide"

April 17, 2025

Patrick J. Strauch, Executive Director

Good morning, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the ACF Committee. My name is Patrick Strauch. I live in Exeter, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Forest Products Council. I am submitting testimony today in opposition to LD 1529 on behalf of our 8 million acres of woodland owners.

MFPC is concerned that this legislation establishes predetermined outcomes for forest stands on private land without any consultation with the landowner community. This flies in the face of decades of collaborative input from landowners on policy issues that affect their property. LD 1529 hijacks this process and makes unilateral changes to existing standards and regulations.

This bill attempts to codify definitions of Late Succession and Old Growth forests without input from foresters and landowners. The definitions in LD 1529 are open to debate. At the federal level the Biden administration backed away from establishing definitions for old growth in federal forests because of the complexity of the country's forests and diversity of interest group values. The process needs to be scientific and inclusive of the landowner community.

The landowner community contributed funding to Dr. Hagan's recent LSOG research published 6 months ago. This group also contributed to the project in the field to further understand the dynamics of LSOG management. In addition, MFPC landowners have invested millions of dollars in keeping our forests healthy and productive. For example, we've been active in road crossing improvements that create a healthy fishery, our stewardship actively combats climate change through carbon sequestration, and we work with the Maine Natural Areas Program to conserve important plant species and habitat types. LD 1529 ignores these types of landowner collaborative efforts and needlessly reduces timberland value.

LD 1529 does not recognize Maine's position as a national leader in third-party certification programs that have standards for the management of LSOG, which is now mapped thanks to the support of certified landowners. Both leading certification systems in Maine (FSC & SFI) have standards that evaluate landowner's efforts to conserve Old Growth stands verified through third party independent auditors.

LD 1529 jumps to establishing a conservation acquisition LMF policy without a discussion of "how much conservation of LSOG do we want, how we want it distributed, and most importantly just how we might achieve the societal goal while preserving rural, vibrant, forest-

based economy.”¹ These discussions are important in the context of determining where LSOG fits in our current State Eco-reserve program. The recently expanded protection zones in the adopted statewide shoreland ordinances may have captured more LSOG stands, and it will be important to investigate if currently prioritized and protected deer wintering areas contain elements of LSOG.

Attempts to circumvent the LUPC Lakes Classification Process by moving potentially over 1,300 lakes in the UT into more protected zoning classifications without public comment is inappropriate, unfair, and unacceptable. The lakes classification system is established in the LUPC Comprehensive Land Use Planning document that is currently being reviewed by LUPC staff and the commissioners. Regarding Management Class seven, the current CLUP states, “The Commission will manage these lakes for multiple use, including resource conservation, recreation, and timber production, giving specific consideration to identified resource values when evaluating the merits of lake-related rezoning and permit applications. It is the Commission's intention that the majority of these lakes remain in Management Class 7 and be managed under applicable requirements.”²

Bypassing the reclassification procedures established by LUPC is not an acceptable public policy approach. Wholesale reclassification of UT lakes could also have unintended consequences such as the mandated loss of public access. By regulation, lakes and ponds moved to Category 1 will require gates to prevent motorized access within ¼ to ½ of a mile.

Current post-covid and world economic conditions are significantly slowing wood harvesting and therefore hypothetical LSOG losses. A more immediate threat is the advancing spruce budworm epidemic, which left unchecked could kill millions of trees. Landowners are launching a multi-year suppression program in the next month with the goal of protecting all the forest age classes (including LSOG) and the economic health of rural communities in the region.

MFPC forest landowners intend to continue efforts to identify LSOG in their land databases, continue collaborative work to encourage voluntary management of important LSOG locations, and continue to operate and seek support for the protection of forests from spruce budworm.

We believe the State has obligations to ensure that the lake classification system is managed by LUPC staff, not a unilateral decision by interest groups that bypass all opportunities for public input, and to continue to concentrate LSOG protections on Maine's public lands and reserves.

These represent a more realistic approach to further the management of LSOG than those outlined in LD 1529. We urge you to vote ‘Ought not to Pass’ LD 1529.

¹Hagan, J., B. Shamgochian, M. Taylor, and M. Reed. 2024. Using LiDAR to Map, Quantify, and Conserve Late-successional Forest in Maine. Our Climate Common Report, Georgetown, Maine. 44 pp.

² https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lupc/plans_maps_data/resourceplans/CLUP-AppendixC.pdf