

Testimony by James L. Robbins opposing LD No. 1529
April 17, 1:30 pm, Cross Office Building, Room 214

Good afternoon. My name is James L. Robbins. Our family owns white pine sawmills in Searsmont and East Baldwin, Maine. We saw about 50 million board feet per year and employ about 200 men and women in those sawmills, our power plant and paint plant. We have been in business since 1881.

We own about 30,000 acres of land on which we grow white pine to supply those mills. We believe in good forest management and have conservation easements on over 23,000 of those acres. The objectives of the conservation easements are to produce timber for mills, prevent development, protect the wildlife, and provide land for public recreation.

This bill is a huge transgression on private property rights.

At our mills we produce lots of 12 inch and wider boards. We need big logs to do it. White pine trees require 100-125 years to get big enough to produce this kind of lumber. Unless we are thinning a stand, we don't harvest the trees unless they are 16"-20" dbh. Are you going to tell us that we can't harvest our own trees after growing them and paying taxes on them for over a hundred years? The seedlings that we are planting today will hopefully be harvested by my great grandchildren if they aren't stopped by this ridiculous law. Remember, this is privately owned land – not state-not federal, private!

Are you going to try to stop farmers from harvesting their mature corn? Of course not. That would be ridiculous. This is no different- only we have a longer growing cycle.

As our population grows, the demand for housing, and therefore wood, will increase. We can't afford to tie up our woodlands.

Maine is one of the few states in the country where private landowners allow the public access to recreate free of charge. If you want to take away our ability to harvest our mature timber, then landowners will seriously consider denying public access on our lands. It's about time that the public realizes what a great privilege this is and stop trying to make life difficult for us.

It isn't a good idea to tie up large areas of old growth because it eventually dies, becomes a fire hazard, and releases carbon back into the air. The last big forest fire in Maine occurred in Baxter State Park in 1977. It started in an area killed by spruce budworm, blew down, dried out, and caught fire and burned 1900 acres in the park and 3500 acres in total. There was an effort to salvage the downed timber and remove the fire hazard, but environmentalists sued to stop the salvage effort. Therefore, the fire had plenty of fuel to burn.

Another example of old growth fires: every summer lately, we have had air quality issues here in Maine caused by smoke from fires in old growth, wilderness areas in Quebec and the Pacific Northwest on federally owned lands. We haven't had big forest fires in Maine since 1947 because of privately owned land being well managed. If we start tying up our lands in old growth, we will be setting ourselves up for devastating fires,

insect infestations and disease. I don't think anyone with common sense wants this to happen in Maine.

As to storage of carbon, the best way to store carbon is to harvest mature trees, turn them into lumber and then store the carbon in houses for the next 150 years. In the meantime, the new younger, faster growing trees will store even more carbon.

If we start using our forests to tie up large areas of old growth and store carbon, we will threaten the wood supplies to our mills which directly and indirectly employ thousands of Maine men and women while providing products badly needed by society.

I ask you to vote no on LD 1529.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.

James L. Robbins