



**APPALACHIAN  
MOUNTAIN CLUB**  
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**Testimony of Eliza Townsend  
in support of LD 1529**

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

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, 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 support LD 1529, *An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-value Natural Resources Statewide*. AMC manages our 114,000 acres of woodland sustainably, with the goal of promoting biodiversity and countering climate change. We do that by holding about a quarter of the property in ecological reserves and managing our harvested lands to move them to a mixed age, mixed size, mixed species forest.

The world is experiencing a crisis of biodiversity loss, most evident in the dramatic drop in both insect and bird populations in recent decades. An unprecedented number of animal and plant species are threatened with extinction. We must act to counter this trend before it is too late. Studies have found that next to conversion to other uses, the biggest threat to forest biodiversity is the loss of older age classes of trees. Late-successional and old-growth forests (LSOG) have a high density of large trees, large snags, and large downed logs, all of which are important to many species.

The October 2024 report from Our Climate Common is galvanizing. Examining LiDAR maps of the Unorganized Territories, the researchers found that only 3% of the forest there was late successional, and less than .09% "old growth-like." They estimate that the late successional forest class is being lost at a rate of 1.4% a year, with rates four times higher on commercially owned land than on public land.

LD 1529 addresses this situation with three strategies:

- It requires the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Board to give preferential consideration to projects that conserve at least 5 acres of late-successional and old-growth forests. This is similar to existing language prioritizing deer wintering habitat.
- It directs the DACF to develop a strategy for the conservation of late successional and old growth forests by soliciting input from a broad range of stakeholders, and to report their strategy to this committee by next year so that you may consider legislation.
- It directs the Maine Forest Service to include information on late-successional and old-growth forests in the report on the state of the State's forests given to this Committee every 5 years.

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These are reasonable steps to promote the conservation of older age classes of trees, thereby preserving forest biodiversity.

Finally, the bill directs the Land Use Planning Commission to undertake rulemaking to ensure the protection of undeveloped, high-value lakes, an issue that has not been revisited in 37 years. That rulemaking, of course, requires both notification of the legislature and a public comment period.

LD 1529 is a thoughtful approach to protecting unique, valuable natural resources, one which ensures public input. We ask you to vote Ought to Pass.