

**Dr. Lindsey Rustad (Forest Ecologist, retired) - Testimony in Support of LD 1529**  
***An Act to Enhance the Protection of High-Value Natural Resources Statewide***

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1529. My name is Dr. Lindsey Rustad, and I'm here today as both a scientist and a citizen—as someone who has spent decades studying northern forests and as someone who has worked, raised a family and lived here in Maine for over four decades.

I first came to Maine in 1983 as a thru-hiker on the Appalachian Trail, and I fell in love with the forests, mountains, and waters. I returned to earn my Ph.D. in Plant Science from the University of Maine in 1988, then worked as a research scientist for 10 years before joining the federal government, where I recently retired after 28 years as a Senior Research Ecologist. My work has focused on the impacts of air pollution, climate change, and extreme weather on forest ecosystems - right here in New England.

My husband - flyfishing guide and author: Lou Zambello - and I raised our family in Maine, and now we share these woods and waters with our children and grandchildren—flyfishing, hiking, birding, and paddling.

As both a scientist and a Mainer, I know how special and irreplaceable our old growth forests are. They are magnificent, complex systems that ***take centuries to develop***, storing carbon, filtering water, and supporting wildlife—from microbes to moose. They also fuel Maine's tourism and sporting economy, while providing vital services like clean drinking water, flood protection, and carbon storage—services that would cost millions of dollars to replace.

Yet only 3% of Maine's unorganized territories still support old growth forests—a far cry from the estimated 70% that covered the area before European settlement.

Our undeveloped lakes are also under extreme pressure. These remote ponds support wild brook trout, landlocked salmon, and offer some of the last truly remote recreational experiences in the Eastern U.S. But development is increasing. Nearly 30% of new permits in the unorganized territories have been on lakefronts.

And, with a changing climate, development is likely to continue. Specifically, more people are likely to move to Maine in the future, fleeing the heat and drought that are making other places, like the Southwest, increasingly inhospitable. That makes it even more urgent to ***act now*** to protect these unique and important landscapes before they're lost. Because once they're lost, they're gone. We can't just snap our fingers and bring them back.

LD 1529 is a straight-forward solution. It protects what Maine does best—forests, waters, and the wild beauty that define us.

As a scientist, a mother, a grandmother, and a lifelong steward of our forests, I urge you: please support LD 1529.

Thank you,

Dr. Lindsey Rustad (Windham, ME)