

Testimony by Peter Kallin, Ph.D

In Support of LD 1529

An Act to Enhance Conservation of High-Value Natural Resources Statewide

April 17, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Peter Kallin, and I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 1529.

By way of background, I have a doctorate in civil and environmental engineering (Water Resources) and am a retired naval officer. I've served as a consulting wetland scientist, professional watershed manager, Executive Director of the Belgrade Regional Conservation Alliance, Board President of Maine Lakes, Board Member and acting CEO of the 7 Lakes Alliance (an LTA-Accredited Land Trust), and member of the Maine Land Trust Network Steering committee. I'm an avid hunter and angler, and I live on Long Pond in Rome, Maine.

I strongly urge the Committee to support LD 1529, which brings overdue attention to two categories of high-value natural resources that Maine has, and most other states do not: undeveloped lakes and older growth forests.

In terms of lakes, the bill directs the Land Use Planning Commission, as the planning and zoning authority for Maine's Unorganized Territories (UT), to provide more protective zoning for a discrete set of undeveloped lakes that have resources of statewide significance. As I understand it, the total number of lakes that might receive increased protections through changes in their management classifications would be about 52 – which is 3% of the 1,500 lakes in the UT. While most of these lakes are located on private property, the Colonial Great Ponds Act of 1647, which was integrated into Maine's Constitution in 1820, specifies that any of these lakes that are greater than 10 acres belong to the citizens of Maine and not to the owner of the shoreline. At least 30 of these lakes are State Heritage Fish waters.

The fact that Maine still has an opportunity to conserve the remote, undeveloped character of these lakes is extraordinary, and worthy of LUPC's attention. But this is a vanishing opportunity as development pressures almost certainly will result in camp lots landing on these remote ponds in the years ahead.

In terms of old growth forest, here, too, we have a vanishing opportunity to act. The bill calls for a stakeholder process to review all available strategies as it develops a statewide strategy for the conservation of late-successional old-growth forests (LSOG). According to John Hagan's analysis, only 3% of the UT still qualifies for this older age class. These small patches of late-successional old-growth forests are pockets of forest biodiversity that

provide critical habitat for certain wildlife and tree species. They are especially important in increasing the overall resilience of the forest ecosystem to adapt to climate change.

With the passage of time, these older growth forests will disappear from the landscape. That seems pretty clear. So, now would be a good time to have a focused conversation, examining how landowners could be compensated or incentivized so that it makes more sense to not cut stands with 150- or 200-year-old trees than it does to cut them.

Opportunities for carbon credits, alternative forestry management options such as Maine Audubon's "Forestry for Maine Birds" or "Forestry for Maine Fish", and similar programs should all be considered.

The bill's inclusion of these older age class forests as an LMF priority consideration makes a lot of sense, since it could help facilitate the acquisition of parcels of older forests within larger projects. These "islands of biodiversity" can provide critical linkages for wildlife.

To me, this bill serves as a great starting point to help protect two resource categories that deserve enhanced conservation. As the saying goes: "You don't know what you've got 'till it's gone." That seems to apply to Maine's remote, undeveloped lakes, and older growth forests.

While the bill seems sensible to me, I'm aware that LD 1529 is being called a "five alarm fire!" by others.

I would hope that we could talk about strategies to conserve these resources without this level of alarmism. The bill does not apply regulations to older growth forests; it simply initiates a stakeholder process, with a report that would come back to this committee. The scope of the bill only focuses on 3% of the UT's forests, and 3% of its lakes. That doesn't seem like a sweeping assault. Rather, it seems like a case where legitimate private interests and public interests intersect, and civil discourse about appropriate paths forward are possible. In my experience, the most effective environmental regulations are developed in a way that successfully bridges the gap between protecting the natural resources while allowing sustainable wise uses of the resources so future generations can do the same. This requires dialog and compromise. I commend the sponsor and cosponsors for bringing this bill forward, and I hope you'll pass a version of the bill that, as the bill title suggests, enhances conservation of these high-value natural resources.

Thanks for this opportunity to address the committee, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

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