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Testimony in opposition to LD 1441 “Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study the Future of Recreational Access in Maine”

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee,

My name is Chris Fife, I live in Winslow and am Public Affairs Manager for Weyerhaeuser. I am testifying today in opposition to LD 1441.

Weyerhaeuser owns and sustainably manages almost 840,000 acres of timberland in Maine, 660,747 of those acres are located in the Unorganized Territory (UT). Our timberlands are sustainably managed to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standards and support healthy wildlife habitat, clean water, and the capture and storage of carbon, while protecting special places and providing abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation.

We appreciate Senator Black’s long-standing support for the forest sector, landowners and traditional recreation. Last year, at Senator Black’s request, Weyerhaeuser hosted a meeting between large forest landowners, ATV clubs and the State Trails Coordinator to discuss concerns around ATV access. Last month our Moosehead District Supervisor and I met with representatives from the Northern Forest Center and Destination Moosehead Lake to identify and discuss recreational trails and features on Weyerhaeuser timberlands in the Greenville area. Each year our foresters sit down with BPL State Trails Coordinators to plan for snowmobile and ATV seasons coordinating around harvest operations and local needs. Throughout the year we work with local clubs and municipalities to provide safe and enjoyable experiences for recreational users.

As Chair of the Maine Forest Products Council (MFPC) Landowner Committee, I can assure you that these types of meetings regarding recreational use occur across the large landowners on the 10 million acres MFPC represents. This local communication and collaboration is the Maine way and a significant reason that recreational access to private land has survived as a tradition in the state.

LD 1441 changes the dynamic of traditional public access by suggesting that recreational use of land in the UT should be treated differently from the rest of the state and by directing one large landowner, with over 100,000 acres in the UT, to come to the table to map and plan for access on privately owned land. The future of recreational access in Maine is a statewide issue and we worry about the precedent set by separating out large landowners in the UT. 100 acres of posted land in central or southern Maine can have significant impact on recreational trails and traditional public use.

The duties of the Commission to Study the Future of Recreational Access in Maine are valuable however, they are redundant to the work already being successfully done by ME IF&W, nonprofit organizations like the Northern Forest Center and the High Peaks Alliance, municipalities, regional economic development organizations, and local clubs.

Respect, collaboration and responsive law enforcement are the foundation of successful public use of private land now and in the future.

We respectfully urge this Committee to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1441.

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

Chris Fife