

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST L.D. 1441**

**“Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study the Future of Recreational Access in
Maine”**

DATE OF HEARING: April 28, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Timothy Peabody, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, neither for nor against L.D. 1441 a Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study the Future of Recreational Access in Maine.

The Department relies on public access to private land for carrying out the mission of the Department. Using hunting and trapping as part of our overall wildlife management strategy we rely on public access to private land to carry out that strategy. The Department’s statewide fisheries management program relies on the same access to provide fishing opportunities for the public in thousands of lakes, ponds, rivers, brooks and streams. The economics of recreational vehicle trails across the state additionally relies on this same access.

Changing land ownership policies, and concerns of maintenance costs for general public access, coupled with more powerful and frequent storm events that damage roadways, bridges and culverts on private land across the state creates a challenge for all and we believe was the reason for this bill. How do we maintain some of the traditions we have enjoyed as costs for landowners to maintain private access roads for land stewardship and harvest operations have increased? Perhaps exploring more opportunities for public/private partnership as suggested in Section 5 of LD 1441. The Departments Landowner Relations Program is a very successful small example of where public funds are used to support private landowners who allow recreation on their property.

We support the intent of this bill as we testified in favor of a similar bill LD 1308 – a *Resolve, Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Establish a Working Group to Explore Opportunities to Maintain Public Access of Land*. LD 1441 has more detail with similar goals, however the Department is concerned that the make-up of the working group does not have adequate representation from the landowner community to have a balanced conversation.

If the Committee is supportive of moving the concept forward, we would ask that LD 1308 and LD 1441 be consolidated. Additionally, through discussions with staff at the Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry we recommend both departments co-chair the group, and consideration be given for a later report date unless an emergency preamble is part of the bill.