



Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

April 29, 2025

RE: LD 630, Resolve, to Facilitate Implementation of Portions of the 'Protecting Maine's Beaches for the Future: 2017 Update' Report Regarding Beach Nourishment and Dune Restoration Projects

Dear Sen. Tepler, Rep. Doudera, and Members of the ENR Committee:

My name is Francesca "Ches" Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon's Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to "conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat" by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 630, *Resolve, to Facilitate Implementation of Portions of the 'Protecting Maine's Beaches for the Future: 2017 Update' Report Regarding Beach Nourishment and Dune Restoration Projects*.

Each spring, endangered Piping Plovers and Least Terns return to nest and raise their young on southern Maine beaches. For more than 35 years, Maine Audubon and our partners have worked with local residents, landowners, and visitors to ensure that endangered birds, wildlife, and people can safely share the beach. Piping Plovers and Least Terns need sandy beaches in order to nest and raise their young. Of course, people also love to live near and visit the beach. Over time, the development and construction of seawalls, jetties, piers, homes, parking lots, and other structures has significantly reduced the available shoreline habitat for these two species of birds. Habitat loss and lack of undisturbed nest sites and roosting areas are the two primary factors jeopardizing populations of Piping Plovers, Least Terns, and other migratory shorebirds.

Unfortunately, climate change represents another tremendous factor as Maine's coastal sand dunes are under threat from more frequent and severe storm events and sea-level rise. Coastal communities and ecosystems are seeing increased frequency of nuisance flooding, inundation of coastal lowlands with saltwater, erosion, and loss of dry beaches, saltmarshes, sand dunes, and other habitats. Functional sand dunes are essential for a healthy beach, and the future of our beach-nesting species that rely on



them. Maine has more than 20 species of shorebirds and the majority of these species are in severe population decline.¹

LD 630 directs the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to review the 2017 "Integrated Beach Management Program Working Group Report," in order to identify and, where necessary and appropriate, develop strategies, legislation, or other actions to assist municipalities in the mitigation of coastal erosion in the face of more frequent and more severe storm events, protection of habitat for coastal wildlife species, and protection of recreational uses. DEP shall deliver a report to the committee by January 2026, where the committee could then consider proposing legislation to implement the agency's recommendations.

Maine Audubon's Deputy Director of Conservation Laura Minich Zitske, who leads our Piping Plover and Least Tern Recovering Project, was a member of the working group that helped draft the 2017 report. We support this legislation as a way to take a fresh look at the group's findings. We specifically appreciate Rep. Foley's desire to ensure that this updated report would require DEP to review measures to advance "habitat protection for coastal wildlife species."

Maine Audubon staff would be more than willing to support DEP and other stakeholders should this effort advance. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesca Gundrum".

Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy

¹ Paul A Smith, Adam C Smith, Brad Andres, Charles M Francis, Brian Harrington, Christian Friis, R I Guy Morrison, Julie Paquet, Brad Winn, Stephen Brown, Accelerating declines of North America's shorebirds signal the need for urgent conservation action, *Ornithological Applications*, Volume 125, Issue 2, 1 May 2023, duad003, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ornithapp/duad003>