



FRIENDS OF BAXTER STATE PARK

Testimony on LD 1724

Resolve, Authorizing the Baxter State Park Authority to Convey
Certain Land in Cumberland County

May 6, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry: my name is Aaron Megquier, and I serve as Executive Director of Friends of Baxter State Park.

Friends of Baxter State Park strongly supports LD 1724. This resolve would authorize – but not compel – the Baxter State Park Authority to convey the Austin Cary Lot in Harpswell to a new owner. Legislative approval for this conveyance is required by the Maine Designated Lands Act.

The Austin Cary Lot was originally acquired by the Maine Forest Authority in 1973 and 1974 using funds from a trust established by Percival Baxter for land acquisition. When the Maine Forest Authority was abolished in 1984, ownership of the Austin Cary Lot passed first to the Bureau of Parks and Lands, and then to the Baxter State Park Authority. Deed restrictions on the property require that the Austin Cary Lot be used for a demonstration forest, wildlife management area, or other educational and scientific uses for 99 years from the dates of the original conveyances in 1973 and 1974. If conveyed, the Baxter State Park Authority will ensure via deed restrictions that the new owner will uphold management in accordance with Governor Baxter's trust as well as the existing deed restrictions.

Management of the Austin Cary Lot has posed a significant challenge for Baxter State Park staff for over 40 years. The Austin Cary Lot is more than 220 miles by road from the Scientific Forest Management Area in Baxter State Park. This is comparable to the drive from Augusta, Maine to Providence, Rhode Island. Baxter State Park has no staff based in Cumberland County, or anywhere in southern Maine. Due to these logistical challenges, the Park has relied on the services of a contracted forester for many years – an option that has worked well for managing the land and would also be available to any landowner. The time and resources devoted to the Austin Cary Lot could be better spent on the many management challenges facing Baxter State Park.

This transfer would have significant benefits for the local community. A different owner with nearby staff and a more locally focused mission will likely be able to work more effectively with neighboring landowners and be more responsive to the needs of local communities.

Friends of Baxter State Park fully supports the Park's position on this issue. We believe that LD 1724 is in the best interests of Baxter State Park, the Harpswell community, and the Maine public. We urge the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry to vote ought to pass on this bill.