



Maine Coast Heritage Trust
A Statewide Land Conservation Organization



**FOREST
SOCIETY
of MAINE**

LD 1953, An Act to Ensure Public Access to Conservation Land by Providing Protections from Liability to Landowners

May 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I'm providing joint testimony with Jeff Romano of Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Jake Metzler of the Forest Society of Maine **in support of LD 1953, An Act to Ensure Public Access to Conservation Land by Providing Protections from Liability to Landowners.**

As organizations that work to permanently conserve land in Maine and preserve public access, we take seriously the responsibilities and challenges facing landowners. Maine has a unique, long-standing tradition where private landowners allow the public use of their lands. This access supports a variety of traditional activities including hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing, and more.

According to the 2019 Maine Conservation Task Force report, Maine's long-standing tradition of public use of private lands is increasingly threatened by inappropriate public use and a range of financial pressures.¹ The report highlighted Maine's existing Landowner Liability Law as a key finding, noting that it offers "critical protections for landowners who make their lands open to the public for recreational uses and is a critical tool for ensuring the tradition of public use of private lands."

LD 1953 builds on the strength of the existing law by providing future assurances to landowners who have agreed to easements or other legal instruments that secure public access. It guarantees that for these landowners the existing liability laws will also apply in perpetuity. This change will not only help landowners feel confident that they will remain protected by Maine's Landowner Liability Law, it will also encourage more landowners to grant permanent public access through easements and other conservation tools.

Thank you for your consideration, and we are happy to answer questions at any time.

¹ Shaping the Next Generation of Land Conservation in Maine: Final Report from the Land Conservation Task Force, 2019. <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/Maine-Conservation-Task-Force-Report.pdf>

Maine Coast Heritage Trust seeks to advance the conservation of lands and waters in Maine to ensure ecological wellbeing and foster thriving communities. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres, including over 160 places open for traditional outdoor recreation.

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The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together.

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The Forest Society of Maine (FSM) is a state-wide land trust particularly focused on Maine's North Woods. FSM conserves Maine's forestlands to sustain their ecological, economic, cultural, and recreational values. To date FSM has conserved more than 1 million acres of Maine's forest in support of those values.

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