



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER  
22 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL  
COMMISSIONER

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY  
IN SUPPORT OF 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 honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Laura Graham, and I am the Director of the Land for Maine's Future. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) in support of LD 1953, *An Act to Ensure Public Access to Conservation Land by Providing Protections from Liability to Landowners*.

More than 90% of Maine is privately owned, and Maine's landmark landowner liability law, 14 MRS 159-A, provides the foundation for Maine's longstanding tradition of public access to private lands. LD 1953 would complement existing law by adding a valuable layer of liability protection for private lands with conservation easements, providing that if the landowner liability law were ever repealed, landowners could still allow public access without fear of litigation. Because conservation easements cover roughly two million acres of Maine, the positive impact of this bill is significant.

In negotiating conservation easements in recent years, the Bureau of Parks and Lands has heard from private landowners who are reluctant to guarantee public access due to concerns about the vulnerability of the landowner liability law. This hesitation restricts opportunities for outdoor recreation and impedes the Bureau's ability to obtain conservation easements. Moreover, landowners' hesitation is an obstacle to achieving the *Maine Won't Wait* vision of conserving 30% of Maine by 2030.

Public access to conservation land fosters outdoor recreation, environmental stewardship, and Maine hunting, farming, and fishing traditions. LD 1953 is an important step in preserving and expanding public access to our state's conservation lands while ensuring that landowners who voluntarily allow access are protected from undue liability.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have now or at the work session.

HARLOW BUILDING  
18 ELKINS LANE  
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200  
FAX: (207) 287-2400  
WEB: [WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF](http://WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF)