

Testimony in favor of LD 1953

May 13, 2025

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is David Miller. I am the Director of the Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust (RLHT), a conservation organization in Rangeley, Maine.

I support LD 1953, because I have seen firsthand how its provisions would strengthen Maine's Recreational Use Statute to help organizations like RLHT permanently preserve public access and our ability to hike, hunt, fish, snowmobile and spend time outdoors in our beautiful state.

- RLHT has been playing an intermediary role for the past 2.5 years on a large conservation easement project in which the seller wants to enable and improve perpetual public access on the property. This would include establishing a permanent snowmobile trail and permission to build a new hiking trail to the top of a mountain. However, neither seller nor buyer (the State of Maine) is willing to accept liability for public recreation if Maine's Recreation Use Statute is ever repealed.
- RLHT has raised a substantial amount of funding for the project, but the question of who will assume ultimate liability in the unlikely event that the Recreation Use Statute is repealed has stalled the project, and without this bill, the project will not be able to go forward.

Our ability to access the mountains, hills, waters, and forests of our State is at the heart of what it means to be a Mainer. This tradition, and by extension, a central part of our culture, is threatened as landowners buy large tracts of forestland and close access to the public. One way to counter this growing trend is through land conservation projects that include permanent public access provisions guaranteed through legal protections such as easements. LD 1953 would ensure that for these projects, Maine landowner liability protections would be as permanent as the terms of the conservation easement.

It is incumbent upon all of us to perpetuate our ability to be on the land, on the trails, and in the mountains and forests we love, or it is a privilege that we and our children will ultimately lose. Please support LD 1953. Thank you.

Sincerely,

David L. Miller

Executive Director, Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust