

Jason Bouchard, Owner and operator of Chandler Lake Camps and lodge and member of the Maine Sporting Camp Association.

132 Maine Legislature First Special Session-2025

LD 1737 An Act to Ensure the Future of Maine Sporting Camp Heritage

Dear Madam/Mr. Chair,

My name is Jason Bouchard, and my family and I have owned and operated Chandler Lake Camps and lodge, located in Township 9 Range 8 in Northern Maine, for more than 25 years. Its a traditional Maine sporting camp that opened in September of 1902, a time when sporting camps were a major icon of Maine's outdoor culture and heritage. Camps, as they are known in Maine, have served the public by offering lodging, meals and recreational access to Maine's most beautiful and natural locations. The "Sporting Camp Experience" is as unique today as it was 125 years ago. A family-run business offering rustic log cabins surrounded by fantastic scenery and wildlife with hearty home cooked meals. Offering traditional outdoor recreation like fishing, hunting, hiking, wildlife watching and more.

In 1904 there were more than 300 sporting camps in operation in Maine. By 2025 there are less than 75. As more Traditional Maine Sporting Camps are lost, this unique part of Maine's cultural heritage disappears along with the vital role they play in supporting Maine's rural economy and outdoor traditions. Maine's sporting camps are world-renowned destinations for persons seeking recreational opportunities in one of the largest remaining wilderness areas in the lower 48 states.

I am testifying in support of the proposed Act to Ensure the Future of Maine's Sporting Camp Heritage. Sporting camps by nature are family owned and run businesses and are often referred to as a "lifestyle" choice or "Labor of Love" rather than that of a great money-making enterprise. With that said, sporting camp owners have led the way in conservation providing stewardship to Maine's valuable natural resources.

Traditional Maine sporting camps are primarily located in "Unorganized Territories" that are located in some of Maine's most remote and poorest counties and are facing serious challenges in today's business environment. High land valuations and taxes, business complexities and increasing and ever-changing regulations. For example, a Land Use Planning Application for commercial development five years ago was 5 pages and is now more than 100 pages long. We operate our lodge off-the-grid, more than 30 miles in the woods from the nearest town. Services are a challenge for about everything. Plumbers,

electricians, fuel deliveries, groceries and any type of service. For any type of major repair or upgrade it requires significant resources and most contractors don't want to travel into the industrial forest and if they do it is at a premium.

If we, the state of Maine, wish to preserve this valuable piece of our heritage, the Traditional Maine Sporting Camp, then we need to act now.

As a lodge owner dealing with all of the serious challenges facing the sporting camp industry it almost feels like a death from a thousand small cuts.

With this legislation, the legacy of Maine's Sporting Camps will be offered an amount of protection to continue to operate with their unique Heritage Status, in a safe, healthy and lasting manor. The continued operation of Maine's commercial sporting camps contributes not only to local and regional economies, but also benefits the Maine tourism industry as a whole. In addition, it will protect the INTENT of the 2012 legislation authorizing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to issue Moose Lodge tags to working, traditional commercial sporting camps to support their loss of deer hunting revenue following a number of harsh winters and loss of habitat.

Being that the "Sporting Camp Experience "is as unique today as it was 125 years ago. The urbanized public still appreciates and longs to experience the important role our traditional camps play in Maine's history and their continued existence provides the public access to the natural resources and offers the opportunity to experience and value our outdoor traditions.

Therefore, I thank the Legislature for listening to my concerns and I urge the committee to support LD 1737 and keep this Maine tradition alive.

Sincerely,

Jason Bouchard

Chandler Lake Camps and Lodge.