



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

Testimony in Support of LD 1054

An Act to Amend Certain Definitions in the Laws Governing Conservation Easements

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

February 24, 2026

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Sam Zuckerman. I am the Policy Coordinator of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. I am here today on behalf of the Commission's Policy Committee to testify in support of LD 1054, "An Act to Amend Certain Definitions in the Laws Governing Conservation Easements."

The Permanent Commission strongly supports legislation that recognizes the inherent rights of Wabanaki Nations. This includes any bill that returns stewardship of lands and waters to the Tribes. Most importantly, though, is the fact that this is legislation that the Tribes are asking for. The Tribes are the experts on their own needs and the legislature should listen to them when they say what will and will not be most beneficial to their communities.

The land that the state of Maine currently occupies was not empty when European colonists first arrived. It was stolen through violence and treaties where there was a fundamental difference in understanding around what ownership of land means.¹ This is a wrong that can never be fully rectified, but that doesn't mean that nothing can be done to try. Returning land to the Tribes and engaging in co-stewardship between the Tribes and the state government are important steps toward making amends for these past wrongs that the state continues to benefit from. It will ensure that the Tribes receive the benefits that come along

¹ Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 3-11. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>

with having access to and stewardship over the land and its resources.² Information about the experience of tribes outside of Maine indicates that when tribes' rights to manage land and resources are recognized, those tribes are better able to meet social, economic, and environmental goals of sustainable land and waterway management.³ And while allowing the Wabanaki Nations to hold conservation easements is not a substitute for full land return, it is a step toward a relationship of co-stewardship between the Tribes and the state government, which is important progress to make.⁴

Thank you for your time and attention. We urge you to listen to the Tribes and pass this bill. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

² Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 19-26. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>.

³ Kenney, J. (2012). Tribes as managers of federal natural resources. *Natural Resources and Environment*. 27(1); Cronin, A., Ostergren, D. (2007). Tribal watershed management culture, science, capacity, and collaboration. *The American Indian Quarterly*. 31(1), 87-106.

⁴ Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 23. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>.