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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

OPPOSED TO LD 276

An Act to Modernize ATV Classification, Registration, Trail Access and Landowner Protections

February 25, 2026

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Matthew Foster, and I am the Supervisor of the State's Off-Road Recreational Vehicle ATV Program in the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking today on behalf of DACF in opposition to LD 276, which has an amended title, "An Act to Modernize ATV Classification, Registration, Trail Access and Landowner Protections."

After a thorough review of the proposed bill and several discussions with our staff, landowners, and clubs throughout the state, we believe the proposed approach has some potentially positive attributes, including simplification of enforcement and registration procedures, and updating Maine law to reflect the realities of today's ATV industry. However, we also have several questions about the interpretation, implementation, and landowner implications of this proposal, and we are also concerned that it may overturn the guidance given in the 2019 ATV Taskforce. Unfortunately, given the very short turnaround time to review the new bill and the overwhelmingly negative feedback we have received from both clubs and landowners, we cannot support the bill.

Maine's ATV trail network, which contributes more than \$750 million to the outdoor recreation economy in rural Maine, relies almost entirely on access given by private landowners. Because ATVing has become one of Maine's largest economic drivers in the outdoor recreation sector, we feel it is extremely important to allow sufficient time for review, feedback, and adaptation to the concerns landowners and clubs have voiced about this new approach. In addition, we would also like more time to gather feedback from the statewide ATV organizations.

DACF's Off-Road Vehicle Office oversees approximately 6,600 miles of ATV trails throughout Maine. The breakdown of the system is, 1,287 miles of ATV Access Routes on public ways, 1,105 miles of trail on state owned lands, and 4,210 miles on thousands of landowners across the state. Through private landowner feedback received by our office over the past year since the introduction of LD 19, we have been able to estimate that approximately 30 percent of the 4,210

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miles of trail on private property is at risk of either closure or significant reduction in width and weight, that we know. If these owners are willing to keep the trails open on their property we have been told many will most likely choose the Class I option since no weight limit has been attached to the Class II option. This could lead to one of the most significant reductions in Maine's largest outdoor recreation economy to rural Mainer's who greatly rely on it to earn a living.

The largest majority of ATVer's are riding Side-by-Side ATVs or "UTV's," with fewer users still riding standard size ATVs. This is important because it tells us that even a reduction to 50" without a trail closure will eliminate the majority of users from state-wide connectivity.

Tiered class systems have worked well in other states throughout the U.S. but often result in "islands" of trails that are not connected to the other "islands," resulting in users needing to trailer their equipment to different parts of the state to enjoy riding.

There is also significant concern over the costs associated with having a tiered-class trail system. Many of the bridges currently on the system were never designed or built to accommodate heavy UTVs and many bridges run in the \$5,000 to \$20,000 range. Another significant financial stress is the addition of hundreds of gates requested to protect landowners' properties from equipment they wish to keep off their property. The gates are approximately \$1,500 without the installation costs associated with them.

Other than the increased cost, we are also concerned about the ability to enforce a system that may have several weight limits from one landowner to the next on the same trail. Most trail systems have between 20-100 landowners who have given permission, resulting in trails possibly being managed to the lowest Class allowed by one of the landowners on a specific trail. This will require excessive signage or gates installed to prevent users from accessing properties that landowners do not wish them to be on. Because of this, wardens may be forced to know what "Class" each landowner has set, for each specific property, on any given trail, in Maine to violators accountable.

In light of our agency's concerns, DACF recommends that the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife directs both DACF and DIFW to work closely with the State Associations, Clubs, and Landowners to further refine LD 276 over the coming year and report back during the next legislative session. With sufficient time for review and consultation, we are optimistic that a solution can be found that meets the needs of most stakeholders.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have now or at the work session.