

Douglas Dickinson

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Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

c/o Committee Clerk

Maine State Legislature

Augusta, Maine

Re: LD 276 — Written Testimony in Opposition

Chair, Madam Chair, and members of the Committee:

My name is Douglas Dickinson. I am the President and Founder of the Maine ATV Coalition (MAC). I submit this written testimony in strong opposition to LD 276, “An Act Regarding Inland Fisheries and Wildlife,” and I respectfully request an **Ought Not To Pass** vote.

I grew up in Maine, served 30 years on active duty in the United States Navy, and retired honorably back to Maine to enjoy the outdoors and contribute to my community. I began locally as a trailmaster for my ATV club and, as trailmaster alone, I contribute a minimum of **200 volunteer (“free”) hours per year** on trailwork. I also serve as Secretary and a groomer operator for my local snowmobile club. As President of MAC, I average **30 to 40 volunteer (“free”) hours per week and have since inception in January of 2023** coordinating statewide support, communications, and advocacy for all of Maine’s more than 145 ATV Clubs. I receive no direct compensation for this work. MAC officers are not paid. Maine’s ATV clubs are powered exclusively by unpaid volunteer labor, and that volunteer workforce—paired with voluntary landowner permission—is the human infrastructure that makes Maine’s ATV trail system function and therefore different from many other states.

I am also an end user. My wife and I love to ride, I build and maintain trails, I deal directly with landowners, and I spend time in the places where policy changes like this land first: on private land and in the volunteer clubs that maintain trails. Through MAC, I speak regularly with club leaders across the state, and I believe I have a reliable pulse on the current atmosphere. Right now, that atmosphere is tense and deteriorating. Across the state, the weight-and-now-width policy push feels rushed, feels “loose,” and feels disconnected from what matters most. Too often it appears centered on who benefits, without equal regard for those who bear the burden: landowners, volunteer clubs, and law

enforcement – none of whom are in favor of this weight or width increase.

These concerns are not abstract. Clubs are already reporting that specific private landowners—and in some cases landowner management agencies—are warning they will withdraw permission if Maine significantly changes size standards again or moves toward eliminating long-standing limitations. Those withdrawals do not merely reduce mileage; they break regional connections, concentrate traffic onto fewer corridors, increase conflict, and accelerate closures in a cascade. In several areas, clubs report that key corridors are already on a year-by-year basis because of enforcement-related concerns, and any further uncertainty or perceived expansion is likely to end those agreements.

This legislative session has reinforced that uncertainty. LD 19 began as a 2,500-pound proposal and is now discussed at **2,950 pounds**, an increase of **950 pounds** over the long-standing **2,000-pound** cap—approximately a **47% increase**. LD 341 attempted to move the ceiling to **3,500 pounds** and was ultimately voted Ought Not To Pass late in 2025. Each escalation has pushed landowners closer to the edge, particularly when proposals expand beyond what was originally presented. Even where some believed 2,500 might have been narrowly survivable, the emergence of much larger proposals—and then continued escalation—has fueled a perception that landowner concerns are being overridden rather than incorporated.

It is important to recognize that landowners understand the existing weight policy because it has been stable for years. That stability has been a key reason many landowners continued to say “yes.” Changing a long-standing standard suddenly and substantially—without time to inform and educate landowners, without enforcement readiness, and without a clear stakeholder process—predictably makes landowners feel unheard and unappreciated for allowing use of their private property. For most landowners who allow private motorized trails, the simplest response to rapidly shifting expectations is not to negotiate or adapt; it is to say, “No thanks,” and close access rather than absorb new friction, conflict, and administrative burden.

I do not claim our current boundaries are perfect. As things stand today, the public does not always understand the rules, and the boundaries are only mildly enforceable in practice. Clear standards are important. A well-designed approach that improves clarity—potentially including width clarity—may be part of a long-term solution. However, even a potentially useful idea becomes harmful when it is rushed through legislation in a matter of days without careful consideration, meaningful guardrails, and direct involvement from landowners, clubs, enforcement, and other stakeholders who will be required to implement it and live with the consequences. If the process is perceived as rushed or one-sided, landowners will not wait to see how it turns out—they will protect themselves first.

Many landowners and volunteers now perceive a “pipeline” effect: if one bill does not succeed, a different bill becomes the vehicle toward the same end result. Whether or not that is anyone’s intent, the perception itself is damaging. LD 276, arriving and moving quickly on the heels of the weight-limit debate, reinforces the belief that decisions are being made in a vacuum and that landowner consent is an obstacle to be overcome instead of the foundation to be protected.

The public discourse is also becoming corrosive. There are real examples of those who benefit from expanding machine size shaming landowners on social media—portraying reasonable caution as selfishness or obstruction. Some commentary has even drifted into punitive ideas, such as increasing taxes or threatening programs like Tree Growth treatment to pressure landowners into consenting. Even when those suggestions are “just talk,” the effect is real: landowners hear it as “comply or be punished.” Public access to private land is voluntary. When landowners feel blamed, bullied, or threatened, they withdraw.

The economic and access impacts of major closures could be catastrophic and would extend beyond ATV riding. I have been told directly in these discussions that if Maine continues pressing major changes to size standards in this manner, some major landowners intend to **post** large holdings. In at least one case, the landholding described is **over 800,000 acres**. If closures of that magnitude occur, the consequences would reach far beyond ATVs, affecting snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, and other traditional outdoor uses across an enormous footprint, while also fragmenting recreation corridors that communities depend on.

There is also a time-sensitive reality. Many landowner agreements and permissions are renewed in the spring, and clubs plan their seasons around that renewal cycle. We are hearing that if major size-related legislation remains pending or appears likely to pass as renewals approach, some landowners and management agencies will decline to renew agreements. Put plainly: uncertainty itself is becoming a trigger for closures. The Committee should understand that timing is not an administrative detail—it can determine whether trails remain open this year.

Enforcement remains the number one concern raised by landowners and volunteer trail leaders. If Maine wants to preserve public access to private land, trail-specific enforcement must come first. Better enforcement also functions as **landowner appreciation**, because it demonstrates that the state is willing to protect the people who provide public access. I understand the state is exploring landowner incentives and better support mechanisms, and that is important work. But those mechanisms are not finalized, and they will take time to do responsibly. Passing LD 276 now—before enforcement and landowner-support measures are established—creates an avoidable risk of closures, fragmentation, and long-term damage to the statewide network.

One provision alone should be enough to show why LD-276 is not ready: it requires that,

during the entire 2026 calendar year, enforcement of the new classification-based trail restrictions be limited to written warnings only. That is effectively a one-year free pass—no penalties, no deterrence—inviting riders to take any machine anywhere without consequence. It undermines landowner confidence, makes clubs look powerless to control use, increases conflict, and increases the risk of trail closures. A bill that creates new restrictions but then bars meaningful enforcement for a full year is not responsible policy, and it's another clear reason LD-276 should receive an Ought Not To Pass vote.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to vote **Ought Not To Pass** on LD 276. If the Committee believes Maine needs a new framework—whether related to weight, width, classifications, enforcement, or landowner incentives—MAC believes it is imperative to convene a **new ATV Task Force in 2026** or allow this work to be discussed and led by meaningful representation from large and small landowners, ATV and snowmobile club advocacy organizations, enforcement, municipal partners, and other affected stakeholders. That task force or special committee should be charged with producing recommendations on enforceable size standards, landowner incentives and retention, signage and education, and dedicated enforcement funding. Any major changes to size classifications should be based on those findings and structured for implementation beginning in **2027**, after stakeholders have been heard clearly and guardrails are designed intentionally—not rushed through on an accelerated timeline.

Where are the boundaries? 2026 would be a free for all

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I am available to answer questions or provide additional detail.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Dickinson