



**APPALACHIAN
MOUNTAIN CLUB**
SINCE 1876

**Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director
In support of Segments of LD 2212
pertaining to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
February 27, 2026**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, Senator Talbot -Ross, Representative Pluecker, distinguished members of the ACF Committee, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

AMC's mission is to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,200 members in Maine and own 127,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education.

AMC strongly supports the proposed appropriation of \$2.25 million for the operations of our cherished public lands, including Tumbledown and Bigelow Mountains, Donnell Pond and the Cutler Coast, Deboullie, and Pineland. These magnificent places have for decades been self-funded by timber revenues, but can no longer meet their budget needs alone due to the same challenges facing the industry as a whole. Tariffs, changing markets for wood, a shortened harvest window due to climate change, and the fact that there are fewer logging contractors in business because it's a hard way to make a living have each taken their toll.

Even as funding has become unreliable and inadequate, the public lands, like the state parks, are welcoming ever more visitors seeking adventure and the renewal of spirit that comes from time spent in beautiful, remote places. Their affordability in an uncertain economy, the rise of social media and apps, increased interest in physical activity and outdoor recreation all put more pressure on these beloved destinations.

Importantly, the public lands drive economic activity in rural Maine, supporting guides, restaurants, lodging, and retail.

Our public lands become even more important as more and more private land is closed to public access. I note that the *Report Back on L.D. 1308 Resolve, Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Examine Issues Related to Public Access to Privately Owned Lands* recommends promoting the public lands further as a strategy to reduce pressure on private property. The public lands must not be expected to welcome more users without adequate staff, operating funds, and capital funds to maintain infrastructure.

This leads us to a closely related issue not yet addressed in this budget: the Land for Maine's Future program. An essential strategy for reducing the pressure on private and public lands alike is to disperse users across the state. Funding Land for Maine's Future will help do that by creating both close-to-home and remote opportunities across the state. It will help us slow and



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adapt to climate change and protect against biodiversity loss. It will add to our \$3.4 billion outdoor recreation economy. We urge you to find a way to replenish the LMF program.

Finally, missing from this budget is any funding for the state's historic sites. They are an important part of the strategy of dispersing users, boosting local economies, and supporting healthy physical activity. They are an especially valuable resource for low-cost family outings, because they are fun to explore, and often offer walking trails, picnic spots, and dramatic views. If you haven't taken your kids or grandkids to Fort Kent or Fort McLary, Katahdin Iron Works or Eagle Island, you really should.

You can't go to Eagle Island now, though, because it's closed due to storm damage and the historic sites were not eligible for any of the American Rescue Plan Act funds allocated for repairs to the state parks by the 130th legislature. Like the state parks, the historic sites have long suffered from a lack of maintenance and investment, and they are very much in need of funding and action before they fall further into disrepair. Cared for, they will contribute to our \$9 billion tourism sector. Left to fall apart, they will not. Senator Grohoski's LD 761 is sitting on the Appropriations Table, and we urge you to incorporate it into the final budget.

The public lands, state parks, and historic sites cannot continue to welcome growing numbers of visitors without adequate funding. We ask you to invest in them, and in further opportunities for public access through the Land for Maine's Future program.