

Anne Mitchell  
Readfield

### Testimony on LD 324 An Act to Limit Public Land Ownership in Maine.

To Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Anne Mitchell. I reside in Readfield and am a taxpayer in Kennebec and Penobscot counties. I want to address you today to express my support of LD 324. I believe this bill is vital and beneficial for all of Maine and Maine taxpayers.

LD 324 would limit federal, state and municipal land ownership statewide at 33%, with no more than 50% in any given county; it also includes a 2/3 legislative cap override option.

This is a bill that is quite frankly, long overdue. The well-known benefits of public land ownership like recreational opportunities and conservation have led to the acquisition of thousands of acres of state-owned land. This is all well and good, but there's an imbalance here that cannot be overlooked.

The vast majority of state public lands in Maine are located in the northern counties, specifically Penobscot, Piscataquis, Aroostook, Somerset, Franklin, Oxford, Washington, and Hancock Counties. This does not include federal ownership of land in Maine which is located mainly in Hancock, Penobscot, Oxford, Washington, and Aroostook Counties; again, all northern counties.

The potential for more land lost from the tax rolls puts each county budget in flux and impacts local and state taxes as well. With the tough economic times we face, we can lessen this impact by putting a limit on federal or state-owned land in every county.

When considering this bill, another factor to keep in mind is the control of federal agencies in our states. We need to look at western states like Colorado, California, Montana, and Oregon, for example, and the struggle they undergo each year with the US Forest Service and BLM. These western states want to follow measures to lessen the threat of forest fires, but federal policy is counter to those efforts. The amount of federal land in those states impacts their entire landmass when it comes to policy. And we have seen the devastation brought by the major wildfires of the past few years.

We don't want to face that kind of battle in our own state where we have followed good fire prevention practices with careful management and landowner cooperation. We need to assure that we can continue to protect our forests that we have managed and sustained so well for hundreds of years.

In order to protect our local, county and state tax base and continue to make our own decisions on land use practices, I urge you to pass LD 324.

Thank you for your time.