

**TESTIMONY OF JAMES A. ST. PIERRE
MAINE DIRECTOR, RESTORE: THE NORTH WOODS
IN OPPOSITION TO LD 324
AN ACT TO LIMIT PUBLIC LAND OWNERSHIP IN MAINE
March 4, 2021**

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Jym St. Pierre, Maine Director of RESTORE: The North Woods, a regional conservation organization that has been active in Maine for more than a quarter century. I have been involved in public lands issues in my home state of Maine for over forty-five years.

With due respect to the sponsors, **we oppose LD 324**, An Act to Limit Public Land Ownership in Maine, because the bill **poses a number of serious problems**:

- **LD 324 runs counter to public opinion.** Numerous public opinion polls over decades have shown strong public support for substantially increasing the amount of public conservation land in Maine.
- **LD 324 is inconsistent with our goals.** Every blue-ribbon panel that has studied the issue, including in 1986, 1997, and 2019, has recommended increasing conservation lands in Maine. The most recent report of the Land Conservation Task Force found that “we are faced with a pressing need for revitalizing land conservation in Maine and ensuring that it meets the future needs of Maine people.” The report recommended reviving funding for land conservation to meet the challenges of the next generation. This bill could also conflict with efforts to reach our state climate goals.
- **LD 324 is undemocratic** because it seeks to preempt the normal public policy process. By putting an artificial cap on the amount of public land in the state, it would prevent our elected representatives, citizen boards and state administrators from making sound decisions in the future about which lands are most important to bring into public ownership.
- **LD 324 inequitable** because it would interfere with efforts to address the long-standing imbalance of land ownership in Maine. We have made progress, but with barely 7% of our land in public ownership, Maine still ranks near the bottom of the list of states. While LD 324 would allow for some increase in the amount of public lands statewide, it could hamstring efforts to fix this problem.
- **LD 324 unfair to landowners** because it would circumvent the willing seller-willing buyer process. Under our state and national constitutions private landowners have the right to sell their land to whomever they wish, including to the public. That right should not be abridged.
- **LD 324 goes against precedent.** In 1999, the legislature rejected LD 727, which would have severely limited efforts to protect land in Maine by setting an arbitrary cap. In 2003, the legislature rejected LD 94, An Act to Limit the Use of State Funds to Purchase Land or Conservation Easements, which would have meant fewer local properties preserved for farmland, recreation, and boat access. In 2005, the legislature rejected LD 73, which would have prohibited the federal government from owning conservation land in Maine, such as Acadia National Park.

At a time when more people than ever want and need to get outdoors, when investing in infrastructure such as conservation lands to preserve our quality of life is essential, when we are experiencing a real estate boom, when improving and keeping our waters and air clean is paramount, when we have a chance to help correct the imbalance of public-private lands, **LD 324 would move Maine in the wrong direction. We urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 324.**