



Testimony before the
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
By Rob Wood, Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy
March 4, 2021
Re: LD 437, An Act To Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Rob Wood and I am the Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **in support of LD 437**, An Act To Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is an international conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. Working in more than 70 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been working in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 275,000 acres. We work across the state to restore the rivers and streams that support healthy fish populations, partner with fishermen to rebuild groundfish populations to benefit coastal communities across the Gulf of Maine, and develop innovative solutions to address the causes and impacts of climate change.

TNC-led research shows that “natural climate solutions”—practices that increase carbon storage on natural and working lands—can provide up to 37 percent of the emissions reductions needed by 2030 to keep global temperature increases in check.¹ Agricultural practices that improve soil health, such as cover cropping, are an important component among the suite of measures that can draw down carbon from the atmosphere. In the U.S., natural climate solutions have the potential to mitigate one-fifth of our nation’s greenhouse gas emissions.²

¹ See <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/perspectives/natural-climate-solutions/>

² See <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/perspectives/a-natural-path-for-u-s-climate-action/>

Maine's new four-year Climate Action Plan also emphasizes the critical role that our natural and working lands can play in achieving the State's climate goals. Among a range of strategies, the Plan calls for state agencies to provide technical assistance and information to farmers, loggers and foresters to support adoption of climate-friendly land management practices. LD 437 is an important step toward implementing this recommendation and will help farmers to take better advantage of the substantial expertise already housed at the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

In addition to enhancing carbon storage, the healthy soils practices supported by this bill can have important co-benefits for nature. Healthy soils are less susceptible to erosion, hold more nutrients and are better at preventing runoff, contributing to healthier waterways.

Importantly, LD 437 requires no taxpayer funding and includes no mandates. Using existing resources, the bill would create an information and technical assistance hub for farmers who are interested in voluntarily adopting healthy soils practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions now or in the future.