



Testimony in Opposition to LD 486:

Resolve, Directing the Bureau of Parks and Lands to Convey Certain Land in Township 12, Range 13 WELS in Exchange for Other Land in Township 11, Range 10 WELS

Jeff Reardon, Maine Brook Trout Project Director
March 9, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

My name is Jeff Reardon, and I am providing this written testimony on behalf of Trout Unlimited (TU), a national conservation organization whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America’s trout and salmon and their watersheds. TU has 5 chapters and more than 2,000 members in Maine. For more than 20 years we have worked closely with Bureau of Public Lands to protect lands and waters that provide important habitat for trout and salmon and recreational opportunities for Maine anglers and other users.

TU opposes **LD 486: Resolve Directing the Bureau of Parks and Lands to Convey Certain Land in Township 12, Range 13 WELS in Exchange for Other Land in Township 11, Range 10 WELS**, for three reasons.

First, the bill does not specify what exactly what land rights the state will give up, and what lands the state will acquire. Based on the bill language and conversations with BPL staff, we believe the state owns a partial, common and undivided interest in all or most of T12, R13 WELS, and the bill is intended to direct the BPL to exchange that interest for fee simple ownership of approximately 6,000 acres in T11 R10 WELS or approximately 6,000 acres in T12 R13 WELS. We don’t oppose a land swap to that would allow the State and another landowner to resolve a common an undivided interest and consolidate fee simple ownership for both parties, but for the Legislature to approve the transaction, they should know exactly what the state is giving up and what they are getting in return. The bill does not even specify the township where the state would receive land, much less the precise parcel the state will receive.

Second, before approving such a transaction, the Legislature should have an assessment of the value of the land rights to be exchanged—both in terms of their appraised value based on timber, water, and potential development rights, and in

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terms of their value as resources to the state for habitat, recreation, and ecological value. You don't have that here. You don't even know which lands the state will receive.

Third, we believe land transfers between the BPL and private parties should occur on a willing buyer/willing seller basis. Our understanding from the BPL is that is not the case here. This bill is not being presented at the request of the BPL. To our knowledge, it is also not being presented at the request of Clayton Lake Woodlands. The Legislature should not even consider this transfer unless both BPL and Clayton Lake Woodlands support the exchange.

There may be a fair exchange of lands to be made between BPL and Clayton Lake Woodlands that would better serve the public and Clayton Lake. If so, we would likely support it. But that should not happen until the lands in question are clearly defined; the parties both agree that the exchange is fair; and the public and the Legislature can evaluate the exchange on its financial and public interest merits.