



**Testimony on L.D. 471 –
An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands**

**SUPPORT
March 18, 2021**

Greetings Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. I am Jeanne Christie, the President of the Maine Wilderness Guides Organization, and I am providing testimony in support of LD 471.

The Maine Wilderness Guides Organization consists of over 90 registered Maine guides, sporting camp and lodge owners, and their supporters. Our mission is to provide a unified voice for the profession of wilderness guiding while maintaining the highest professional, educational, and stewardship standards for the conservation of remote woods and waters. We are dedicated to the protection of habitat and natural resources in the areas we guide in for our livelihoods, our clients, the fish and game we pursue, and for future generations.

We support LD 471 because it would correct missteps made in the past by the Bureau of Parks and Lands. Article IX, Section 23 of the Maine Constitution was passed in November 1993 with the support of 72% of Maine voters. This section of the Constitution states:

“State park land, public lots or other real estate held by the State for conservation or recreation purposes and designated by legislation implementing this section may not be reduced or its uses substantially altered except on the vote of 2/3 of all the members elected to each House. The proceeds from the sale of such land must be used to purchase additional real estate in the same county for the same purposes.”

In 2014, the Bureau of Parks and Lands issued a lease to Central Maine Power for the New England Clean Energy Connect project (NECEC), which crosses two public lots in Western Maine, the Johnson Mountain Township and West Forks Plantation. Despite the requirement for a 2/3 vote of the Legislature before issuing a lease, the Bureau of Parks and Lands did not get legislative approval as the Constitution requires. The lease was revised in 2015 and 2020, again, without legislative approval or public notice. Allowing such an egregious oversight to go unaddressed sets a dangerous precedent. On what other public lands could this happen and how often?

Constructing a powerline constitutes a reduction in use and substantial alteration of public land and requires a 2/3 vote of the Legislature. The Bureau of Parks and Lands has failed to get the approval by the Legislature that is needed to conform to the Maine Constitution. LD 471 would correct that error and hold the Bureau of Parks and Lands accountable for the damage that NECEC and projects like it would do to our public lands, which are heavily relied upon by Maine wilderness guides.

We respectfully urge the Committee to vote ought to pass on LD 471. Thank you for your time and consideration of our views.