

To: Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the committee

Re: LD 471

From Brenda Cummings, Bath Maine

I would like to provide a short personal testimony regarding this bill and the legacy of my father, Bob Cummings.

My father died in 2016 at the age of 87. The handful of articles my sister and I have shared with you are a small portion of his writings on the public lots of Maine; they are the ones that seemed most likely to give you some perspective and history on the public lots in Maine, and on the financial and moral implications of the leasing of our public lands to private interests.

When the saga of the public lots was finally resolved – by the Supreme Court's decision in 1981 and the land settlements later in the 1980s – Bob wrote about Sen. Harrison (Harry) Richardson, who chaired a special committee on public lands, crafted legislation to return the public lots to the people of Maine, and who stood up to paper companies who insisted they owned these lands.

Although Bob was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1975 for his series of stories on the public lots of Maine, it was the gift given him by Harry Richardson that he was most proud of. It is a piece of lake-front driftwood with a small brass plaque thanking him for "Showing the people of Maine the way to the public lots."

The restoration of the public lots to the people of Maine – the protection of Deboullie, Mahoosuc, and Bigelow as well as small treasures like the fishing in Wilson Hill Ponds located on the public lots to be crossed by the CMP transmission corridor -- was one of the defining threads of my father's life. After he died, my sister Charli placed a small amount of his ashes on Bigelow, and I have pledged to visit as many of the other public lots as I can to do the same. It is where he would want to be – at home in all the wild and special places he sought to restore to the people of Maine.

My sister and I are here today to share Bob's stories, because they are Maine's story. My father wrote a paragraph in his very first public lot story that he quoted again in his 1981 article on the Court's decision. It is applicable today: "It may be one of the ironies of history that these lots set up to ensure eventual civilization may become a major tool in preserving one of the rarest commodities of the final decades of the 20th century – natural areas and wildness." Natural areas and wildness remain rare commodities in the 21st century, and thus I urge you to stand up as Sen. Harry Richardson did to support and protect Maine's public lands, by ensuring guidance and oversight when leases propose to make substantial changes to our lands. Please vote LD 471 "Ought to pass."

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Attachment: June 4, 1984, Portland Press Herald. Early supporters crucial to success, by Bob Cummings.
