



March 12, 2021

Dear Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Say NO to NECEC, a grassroots 501c3 non-profit organization, which is an environmental, education and advocacy group opposed to large-scale industrial development in western Maine. Say NO to NECEC was founded in 2018 and comprises nearly 10,000 members.

We are a non-partisan and member-funded organization opposed to Central Maine Power's (CMP's) New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) project to build a 145-mile transmission line from the Québec-Maine border to Lewiston. Some of our members have been engaged as citizen intervenors at the Maine DEP and LUPC and are participants in the DEP permit appeal. Additionally, our members have been involved in submitting testimony to the Legislature and have volunteered to collect signatures to leverage a referendum vote in November 2021.

We urge the ACF Committee to support LD471: An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands.

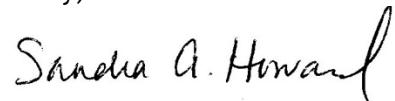
Currently, the Legislature must put forth a vote on any proposed lease on public lands. In 1993, 72% of Maine voters amended Article IX, Section 23 to the Maine Constitution, which states: "State park land, public lots or other real estate held by the State for conservation or recreation purposes and designated by legislation implementing this section may not be reduced or its uses substantially altered except on the vote of $\frac{2}{3}$ 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 1994, the Legislature implemented this constitutional amendment.

In 2014, the requirement of a $\frac{2}{3}$ Legislative approval was not followed when the State signed a lease with Central Maine Power for 36 acres that bisect a parcel of public land in Somerset County between Johnson Mountain and Wilson Pond for construction of the NECEC Corridor. The NECEC Corridor would significantly alter the value and use of the public land, and destroy critical wildlife habitat, it was granted behind closed doors and without the required legislative input for only \$1,400 per year or \$39 per acre. In 2015, another backroom deal was brokered with CMP for \$3,600 per year, or \$100 per acre. The pattern continued when a third secret lease was again negotiated by the current administration in 2020, again without the required legislative approval.

Even though the law, and Maine's Constitution are very clear, two different administrations entered into illicit leases with CMP for construction of the NECEC Corridor. LD471 simply reaffirms that the Bureau of Public Lands must secure a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote for the approval of their lease with CMP.

We ask the ACF Committee members to support LD 471: An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands to ensure proper oversight of use for lands that belong to the people of Maine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra A. Howard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'S'.

Sandra Howard, Ph.D.
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