

TESTIMONEY TO THE AGRICULTURAL, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY
COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 657 "An Act to Clarify the Law Enforcement
Powers of the Bureau of Parks and Lands."

March 18, 2021

Dear Senator's Dill and Representative O'Neil and Honorable Members of the
Agricultural, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Matthew
LaRoche of Shirley, Maine – I am representing myself and I am speaking to
support the passage of L.D. 657.

I am a 44-year career employee of the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL). I have
held the following positions within BPL: Park Ranger, Allagash Park Ranger, Park
Manager II and am currently employed as Superintendent of the Allagash
Wilderness Waterway (AWW).

I am one of the few employees left in BPL that has been designated by the Bureau
Director as an enforcement agent and swore to uphold the laws of the State of
Maine before a licensed Notary Public. I will be retiring on March 31, 2021. After
that date there will be no designated BPL enforcement agents on staff within the
AWW.

Over my 44-year career I have written approximately twenty summonses for
various infractions of: park rules, littering cases, illegal fires and fishing violations.
I firmly believe that enforcement action in the form of a summons is the best tool
to use in certain situations. Our visitors expect Rangers to enforce park rules and
state laws in a fair expedient manner. I have found that most park visitors expect
violators of rules to be cited for those violations by the ranger charged with
overseeing that area.

During my career I have used the power of writing a summons to show intentional
violators that I was serious about enforcing park rules and protecting the
resources in my area of jurisdiction. I have found that enforcement action is an

excellent deterrent to future violations by that individual and others that find out the ranger is serious about enforcing the rules for that area.

With that said, I believe the best approach to rule enforcement at parks is to inform and educate our visitors. Unfortunately, this method does not always work, or the violation is so significant that enforcement action must be taken swiftly and decisively. Sometimes the knowledge that enforcement action may be taken is enough to gain voluntary compliance.

I believe that BPL has been delinquent in designating enforcement agents at: parks, public lands, the Penobscot River Corridor and Allagash Wilderness Waterway. Relying exclusively on outside enforcement agencies to enforce state law and rules at the above areas is not always feasible because of the remote nature of some of these areas, the lack of availability for assistance from other agencies and the perceived minor nature of many park rules by other enforcement agencies.

I fully endorse the enhanced enforcement training at the Maine Criminal Justice Academy (MCJA) required by this bill. All the training provided by MCJA is fully accredited training that meets the standards for all enforcement agencies in the State of Maine. Academy trained BPL enforcement agents could/should be identified as law enforcement for the purposes of the protections in law given to enforcement officers from assault, use of emergency lights and running prior criminal history background checks.

BPL could supplement MCJA training with a “Parks Brand” of inhouse training to ensure staff provide police supervision of bureau managed lands in a safe, friendly and professional manner.

I support the passage of LD 657 with the following amendments:

- Replace Park Ranger with BPL enforcement agent. To include: Park Rangers, Allagash Park Rangers, Allagash Park Ranger II, Superintendent, AWW and Park Managers.
- Delete the section requiring firearms training.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Matthew LaRoche