

**To:** Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee

**From:** Linda Woods, Waterville

**Date:** March 12, 2021

**Re:** Support for LD 471 An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands

In 1991, I changed my last name to Woods to honor the primal connection I feel to the woods. They are my escape and my refuge. Evidently many Maine voters share my affinity with forested places since every Land for Maine's Future bond request has passed. Maine's identity is about our outdoors, woods, waterways, and ocean for our seasonal activities like hiking, fishing, hunting, skiing, and snowmobiling. Most of these activities happen on our public land; therefore, I encourage you to support protecting public lands.

My history of concern about protecting land dates back to 1964. When I was in eighth grade, my teacher at Benton Elementary School assigned an essay, "What have you seen change the most in your lifetime." My response was the loss of farmland to housing developments. Even at that young age, I knew the importance of land preservation.

Starting with working to ban the Dickey-Lincoln Hydro Dam in 1972, continuing with collecting signatures to stop the Plum Creek Development proposed for Moosehead Lake area (2005) and most recently supporting the creation of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument (2016), I have been active in land conservation advocacy. Whenever I hike or ski in the Bigelow Mountain Preserve, I say a prayer of gratitude to the people of Maine for protecting this region from encroaching development. Stopping this Corridor is my current mission.

The proposed construction of the New England Clean Energy Connect would significantly alter the value and use of the public land in Somerset County between Johnson Mountain and Wilson Pond. This area is a home to at least 2 species that are listed on the Maine Department of Fish and Wildlife List of endangered species: the roaring brook mayfly (*Epeorus frisoni*) and the Bicknell thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*). Additionally, the brown trout which is a popular quest for anglers depends on the shaded overstory to breed successfully. In my Maine Master Naturalist class, I learned the importance of vernal pools. As a keystone species, amphibians indicate the health of an area. These, too, require a treed overstory to successfully move into the woods after birth in the vernal pool.

As someone who has dedicated most of my life to being a voice for the environment, I could rest easier knowing public lands are protected to provide multiple opportunities for recreation. Future generations will appreciate your foresight. I urge you to vote in support of LD 471 An Act To Require Legislative Approval for Certain Leases of Public Lands. Thank you.

