



Testimony before the

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

By Kaitlyn Bernard, Natural Resources Policy Advisor

March 25, 2021

**RE: LD700 – An Act to Promote Economic Development and Outdoor Recreation through
Investment in State Parks**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Bernard and I am the Natural Resources Policy Advisor for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of The Nature Conservancy **in support of LD 700, An Act To Promote Economic Development and Outdoor Recreation through Investment in State Parks.**

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. Working in more than 70 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 275,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

Our organization is proud of Maine’s outdoor heritage and the range of incredible places to experience it across the state. Maine State Parks are treasured by residents and visitors alike – and as you know 2020 was a banner year with record-breaking visitation. COVID-19 has generated a renewed appreciation for close-to-home recreation and inspired many to try new activities and explore Maine’s State Parks. Looking forward, we anticipate that interest in outdoor recreation will continue as we return to normal.

In addition to supporting access to outdoor recreation, The Nature Conservancy advocates at the state and federal level for conservation funding to advance new projects across Maine and the nation. We worked hard to pass the Great American Outdoors Act which included dedicated

funding for the Land and water Conservation Fund. This federal success will bring a significant amount of new funding for Maine's State Parks and Public Lands and we need to be ready to capitalize on the opportunity.

This bill is a commonsense effort to support ongoing maintenance and investment in our beloved State Parks system. It would allocate any annual revenue from State Parks over \$4.5 million to a dedicated, non-lapsing account for capital improvements. This fund would serve to both improve existing state-owned infrastructure and provide match funding to leverage the opportunities from federal LWCF funds. We support this smart solution and thank the committee for considering this bill.