



Natural Resources Council of Maine
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**Testimony in Support of LD 700,
An Act To Promote Economic Development and Outdoor Recreation through
Investment in State Parks
March 25, 2021**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Melanie Sturm, the Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I am providing testimony in support of LD 700.

Maine State Parks are in critical need of investment. They face \$50 million of deferred maintenance that has accrued over years of being underfunded. LD 700 would help the Bureau of Parks and Lands start to chip away at that large backlog by setting aside funds for things like sewer systems, roads, and accessibility issues. For years, Maine’s State Parks have provided positive experiences for millions of visitors annually on a slim budget, but that way of operating is not sustainable, especially when our State Parks are more popular than ever. In 2020, Maine State Parks had a record-breaking year, surpassing three million visitors. 2021 is on track to be just as busy if campground reservations are any indication. This is a testament to the important role of State Parks to Maine residents and visitors.

Even during non-pandemic times, Maine’s parks are a centerpiece of Maine’s outdoor recreation and tourism economy. State Parks contribute at least \$100 million per year to the state economy. They also provide wildlife habitat and other ecosystem services, which themselves have great value ecologically and economically.

The last time Maine State Parks received bond funding for capital improvements was in 2010, and any funding that has been made available in the interim has only been for minor updates. In 2019, the Land Conservation Task Force called for “creating a dedicated source of revenue to address ongoing capital needs.” This bill would help accomplish that by creating a non-lapsing fund that would receive revenue in excess of \$4.5 million from State Parks, historic sites, and the Allagash Wilderness Waterway. These funds would be allowed to be used as match for federal dollars from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which provides grants to state and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Each dollar in Maine funds would draw a matching dollar from the federal government.

If Maine does not invest in basic infrastructure and facility improvements at State Parks, we stand to lose our competitive advantage over other New England states, no matter how spectacular Maine’s natural resources and landscape features are. Without investment, over time State Parks will not be as popular or meet the new and evolving outdoor recreation interests of the public, potentially causing visitation and revenue to decline.

We need a solution, like the one offered in LD 700, to the growing maintenance backlog at Maine State Parks. The contributions of State Parks to the state of Maine are significant – some of which you can put a dollar figure on, while others you cannot. State Parks like Lily Bay, Quoddy Head, Popham Beach, Peaks Kinney, and Rangeley Lake are worth our investment and stewardship.

We respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 700. Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.