



April 1, 2021

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

I submit this testimony 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.

Our organization urges the ACF Committee to support LD 1075 An Act To Protect Public Lands.

Last month, I was privileged to address this committee by providing testimony in support of 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. And today, I am here to assert that because the Bureau of Public Lands does not have a process or specified rules to determine if a project meets “substantially altered” criteria, this puts the protection of public lands in Maine in jeopardy. LD 1075 would address this very issue.

In 1993, 72% of Mainers voted to protect Maine's public lands by amending the Maine Constitution to require a vote of 2/3 of the Legislature for sales or leases that substantially reduce or alter the value of land held in public trust. However, a recent example of non-compliance was revealed when two administrations in a row issued leases to CMP without the constitutionally-required Legislative vote.

Recently, Justice Murphy found that the Bureau did not properly identify if NECEC would substantially reduce or alter the value of public lands before issuing leases to CMP. The concept of altering public lands extends beyond one single project, however, and we ask the Legislature to take action to require the Bureau to develop and evaluate project requests in accordance with an objective set of specified criteria that defines what substantially altered truly means as it relates to protecting public lands.

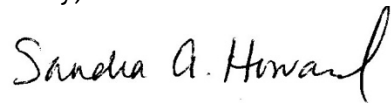
Public lands belong to the people of Maine. Mainers need to be able to rely on transparent processes, predictable measurements, and that the Maine Constitution is being followed by state government’s leaders and agencies.

In order to ensure openness and transparency in the future, it's important to pass LD 1075.

Establishing rules will ensure that the Maine Constitution is upheld, and that the same standard is applied to leases or sales involving our public lands, regardless of who is in power.

We urge the ACF Committee to support LD 1075 An Act To Protect Public Lands to ensure proper assessment of potential projects that would substantially alter the public 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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