

**Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director  
In support of LD #1075  
An Act to Protect Public Lands  
April 1, 2021**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club. I am pleased to address you today in support of LD 1075.

AMC is the nation’s oldest conservation, recreation, and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,500 members in Maine, and own 75,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, backcountry recreation, and environmental education. Our lands abut the Nahmakanta public land unit.

Over the past 15 months, this committee has expended a fair amount of time and energy discussing a proposed private use of two parcels of public land. This will not be the last time that such a question arises. As we testified on LD 471, and before that on last year’s LD 1893, there will be future requests for use of the public lands that we cannot anticipate today.

The best way to make difficult decisions balancing the many demands placed upon the Bureau of Parks and Lands is through transparency. Yet two successive administrations have chosen the opposite, negotiating and signing a lease for private use of public lands without informing or seeking the approval of the legislature. Most recently, BPL Director Cutko declined repeatedly even to answer the committee’s questions about the lease. Clearly the people of Maine, the owners of the lands, need and deserve a better process.

LD 1075 requires the Bureau of Public Lands to develop through rulemaking an objective process for evaluating whether a proposed use would reduce or substantially alter them. Further, it requires public notice and comment before any new use can be authorized. This approach is sensible and clearly needed.

Two weeks ago, in opposing LD 471, Director Cutko argued that the bill offered no threshold for what constitutes a substantial alteration pursuant to Title 12 M.R.S. §598-A. He further provided the committee with an 11-page memo retroactively justifying the Bureau’s actions in signing a lease with Central Maine Power for use of the Johnson Mountain Township and West Forks Plantation public lands.

The time for the Bureau to conduct that analysis and share it with the committee was before the lease was signed. LD 1075 will help ensure that in the future such proposals get the scrutiny they deserve and that the public will have a say in the fate of the lands held in trust for them.

I ask the committee to vote Ought to Pass and I am happy to answer any questions.