

“Substantially altered.” That's a phrase used by the Bureau of Public Lands, a criteria that prompts the Bureau to determine if a project is subject to a constitutionally required Legislative vote. As usual, in the political world, the phrase is subject to interpretation. And since there are two political parties, there are always at least two interpretations.

In regard to the NECEC project, their leases indicate a clear cut of approximately 50 miles and the widening of an existing clear cut for approximately 100 miles in the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi. Clear cuts have been outlawed in Maine for several years now. I assume utilities have an exemption to the clear cut law but I don't believe to the extent that it applies to the “substantially altered” criteria.

Two consecutive administrations have issued leases without the constitutionally-required Legislative vote. Over 70 percent of Maine voters in 1993 voted to protect Maine's public lands by amending the Maine Constitution to require a vote of 2/3rds of the Legislature for sales and leases that substantially reduce or alter the value of land held in public trust. The Legislature has been denied that responsibility.

Bear in mind, at the same time, while an EIS was granted to the states of Vermont and New Hampshire, both of which turned down the project, Maine was not allowed that privilege.

Justice Murphy has 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. In order to ensure openness and transparency in the future and to restore the Legislature's Constitutional duty, it is important to pass LD 1075.

It's passage will ensure that the Maine Constitution is upheld and that the same standards are applied to leases or sales involving the public lands of all Maine citizens, regardless of who is in power.

Respectfully submitted.

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