

To: Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee

From: Linda Woods, Waterville

Date: March 30, 202

Re: Support for LD 1075 An Act To Protect Public Lands

During my 36 years of teaching public school, I found maintaining discipline was easier if the administration clearly established rules for the entire student body. LD 1075 would do just that: establish a uniform set of rules for all future public land leases and sales. Whenever an entity wanted to buy or lease public lands, the buyer would need to meet certain clearly articulated criteria that would ensure the integrity of the land and water. Rules are created for a reason—typically for everyone’s protection. LD 1075 would establish rules to ensure that the Maine Constitution is upheld, and that the same standards are applied to leases or sales involving our public lands, regardless of who is in power.

In 1993, an amendment was added to the Maine Constitution that required a vote of 2/3 of the Legislature for sales or leases that “substantially reduced or altered the value of land held in public trust.” Since there is no clearly established definition of “substantially reduced or altered value,” these terms were overlooked in 2014 and 2020 when the Bureau of Parks and Lands decided to grant permission to CMP to construct a high-intensity transmission line through two public lots in Western Maine, the Johnson Mountain and West Forks Plantation lots. LD 1075 will clarify the criteria for “substantially altered or reduced value” and mandate legislative approval for public land use. Additionally having such a law in place would prevent any future administration from making deals with corporations with deep pockets.

The Bureau’s decision to issue permits to CMP certainly complicated my schedule as I knew I needed to volunteer to stop the destruction through the mountains I love so much. I gathered signatures at farmers’ markets and in parking lots. With things as contentious as they were, my husband was nervous about my collecting signatures at the polls. If the Bureau of Parks and Lands had followed established protocol and brought CMP’s lease request to the legislature, my inclination is I could have stayed home on Election Day. Instead I was outside the polls gathering signatures to right CMP’s proposed injustice.

We Mainers have a long history of recreating on Maine’s public lands. By definition, public lands should be just that: land that is available to the public free of encumbrances. Public land should not be used as the administration’s bargaining chip. Some of my happiest childhood memories are of camping with my parents at what my father called “Lost Pond.” That meant that he would drive through public lands on a dirt road until he felt lost enough to pitch a tent. Preserving public lands with thick forests and clear streams is crucial and should not be

sustainably reduced or altered. LD 1075 would ensure the interpretation of the Maine Constitution is not subjective. Future generations are depending on you to do the right thing now to protect the quality of our public lands. I urge you to vote in support of LD 1075. Thank you.