



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

IN OPPOSITION TO LD 1549

An Act to Establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board

April 29, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Patty Cormier, Director of the Maine Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am testifying on behalf of the Department in opposition to LD 1549, *An Act to Establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board*.

The bill enumerates seven duties of the board. We would respectfully suggest that six of those duties are already occurring under the umbrella of successful and long-standing programs and initiatives in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, including: facilitating dialogue among diverse interests involving forestry matters; promoting cooperation among state agencies involving forestry matters; and ensuring public participation in the development of forestry policy. The seventh duty, submitting a report to the 130th Legislature, is something the Bureau would be happy to provide even in the absence of the formation of a permanent, 18-member advisory board.

The Maine Forest Service currently participates in and receives guidance from multiple councils, advisory groups, and boards. We are fortunate in Maine to have a strong infrastructure of forestry associations, conservation-oriented NGO's, academics, agencies, and other interested parties that have existed for many years and which have a demonstrated track record of working collaboratively on issues of common concern. We value opportunities to consult with and receive feedback from these stakeholders but do not see the need to construct another advisory body, as we have numerous avenues for soliciting input that we utilize regularly, and it is not clear what new value, protections, or benefits such a board would offer.

One example of this is the process by which we developed the 2020 Forest Action Plan (FAP). The USDA Forest Service requires state forestry agencies to develop a FAP every ten years to maintain eligibility for Cooperative Forestry Assistance programs. The FAP provides an analysis of forest conditions and trends in the state, delineates priority rural and urban forest landscape areas, and suggests long-term strategies for investing state, federal, and other resources to manage priority landscapes, focusing where federal investment can most effectively stimulate or leverage desired action and engage multiple partners.

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

To update the 2010 FAP, we convened an advisory committee of interested stakeholders. Using input from that process, the plan was updated and sent out for public comment. We again revised the plan based on those comments. We then held six virtual sessions to go over the plan before it was submitted to the USDA in January 2021. The process worked well, and we received many good suggestions which were incorporated.

Other public MFS-facing partnerships include the Outcome Based Forestry Panel, the State Forest Stewardship Coordination Committee, the Project Canopy Leadership Team, the Cooperative Forestry Research Unit, the Prescribed Fire Council, and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Implementation Committee, to name a few. There are many more.

The Maine Forest Service, alongside many of these partner organizations and advisory groups, has successfully addressed multiple issues impacting Maine's forest. The Spruce Budworm Task Force is a good example of a serious, complex forestry issue being addressed with a collaborative effort by the private and public sectors outside of a formal structure. This task force was formed to prepare for the impending spruce budworm outbreak. The goal of this effort is to assess risk and report out recommended response to an outbreak for Maine's forest community.

Maine has a comprehensive set of forest practices laws that address clearcutting, shoreland harvesting, harvesting in LUPC protection subdistricts, and liquidation harvesting, among others, which has resulted in an abundant, well-managed forest resource, and it has been remarkably productive for many years. Other indicators of our successful management include the following:

- There is much more standing timber volume now than 30 years ago, and growth exceeds harvest, unlike the past situation;
- Over half of Maine's forest lands are certified to one or more major forest certification standards, and there are approximately 100 loggers participating in the Northeast Master Logger Certification program;
- Landowners effectively implement Best Management Practices on close to 90% of timber harvests monitored annually, a substantial improvement since systematic monitoring began nearly 20 years ago; and,
- Maine now has a forest inventory system in place that allows us to track the condition of the forest in close to real-time, again, a significant improvement over the situation that existed in the 1990's.

In summary, the goal of having Maine forest practices be transparent, informed by experts, and conforming to state-of-the-art procedures is one we share. We do not believe, however, that the formation of a new board that largely duplicates existing and ongoing functions is the best way to achieve these goals.

I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.