



Testimony in Support of LD 1549:

An Act To Establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board

Jeff Reardon, Maine Brook Trout Project Director

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Senator Dill, Representative O'Neill, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

My name is Jeff Reardon, and I am testifying today on behalf of Trout Unlimited (TU), a national conservation organization whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America's trout and salmon and their watersheds. I am testifying on behalf of our 6 Maine chapters and over 2000 members in support of **LD 1549: An Act To Establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board**.

Like Maine's wildlife and fish, Maine's forests are a state resource of enormous value, critical to Maine's economy and quality of life. We are the nation's most forested state. Maine's forest is the largest unfragmented forested block east of the Mississippi; is critical to supporting the nation's last populations of Atlantic salmon and landlocked Arctic charr and most robust population of Canada lynx; supports the east's stronghold populations of moose, marten, brook trout, landlocked salmon and lake whitefish; and the largest expanse of dark sky in the East. Through a combination of long tradition and hard work to secure conservation easements, Mainers enjoy better access to hunting, fishing and other forest-based recreation on private land than any state in the country. And it supports one of Maine's oldest industries, serving as a wood and fiber basket for the world. According to the Maine Forest Products Council, Maine's forests support an \$8 billion industry and more than 30,000 jobs. (2016) Whether we are "Vacationland," "The Way Life Should Be," or the birthplace of Paul Bunyan, Maine's forests are central to our identity, our economy and our way of life.

Unlike Maine's wildlife and fish, Maine's forests do not have any advisory body to seek the public's input and expertise on policy and management. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has a 10-member Advisory Council. The Maine Department of Marine Resources has a 13-member Advisory Council, and 7 additional Councils that focus on specific resources (lobster, seaweed, scallops, aquaculture, etc.).

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection and Land Use Planning Commission each have citizen boards to oversee permitting and rulemaking. For Agriculture, we have an Agriculture Water Management Board, a Maine Milk Commission, a Nutrient Management Review Board, and a Pull Events Commission.

There is no equivalent for the Maine Forest Service and it shows. Last year, I provided comments on both the DIFW's Strategic Fisheries Management Plan and the MFS's Draft Forest Action Plan. Input on the Fisheries Plan started way back in 2016, with a comprehensive angler survey, public meetings, a dedicated website, a Steering Committee, and eight Advisory Groups

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for specific fish species. Sometime this summer or fall, there will be a published draft and a final opportunity for public comment, but literally thousands of people have been engaged, and dozens have provided extensive comment. In the meantime, an enormous amount of information and draft products is available for review: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/fisheries/strategic-management-plans.html> The final product will be much better for this input.

By contrast, for the Maine Forest Action Plan, the Maine Forest Service put out a draft report on December 2 and asked for written comments by December 16.

This bill will establish an Advisory Board. Its functions are clearly established and are purely advisory. Unlike the DIFW, DMR, DEP and LUPC Councils and Boards, it will not have a formal role in rulemaking or permitting. Its role is solely to engage both experts and the general public to provide input and advice to the Maine Forest Service. We would encourage just one change to the legislation as proposed, to add one or two public Advisory Board members who have specific expertise in fisheries. The current board includes specific expertise and interests in ecology, land conservation and wildlife, but does not have a dedicated slot for fisheries. We would suggest including at least one fisheries biologist, perhaps from the academic community, and one member of an fisheries conservation organization.

Thank you.

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