



Natural Resources Council of Maine
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**Testimony in Support of 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 Melanie Sturm, the Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1549.

As you well know, Maine is largely a forested state that has long relied on its forests for timber, jobs, recreation, and inspiration and more recently we have learned how important our forests are for storing and sequestering carbon and protecting biodiversity. Currently, state agencies, in conjunction with this Committee and stakeholders, set rules, regulations, and laws to manage and monitor the state’s vast forestlands. But Maine, as a state, is experiencing significant changes in demographics and the structure of our economy, and we know that issues regarding forest management have been divisive at times in the past. We believe LD 1549 could serve as a valuable tool for building understanding, and possibly consensus, regarding forest management that could lead to better outcomes for Maine’s natural resources, businesses, and people while ensuring all sides have a seat at the table.

Although Maine’s forests have been managed for multiple uses for many years, potentially competing uses and points of view have become more challenging and more complicated to address in recent years. While there used to be a handful of landowners who owned most of the 10.5-million-acre North Woods, that landscape it is now divided among hundreds of landowners with divergent goals, management plans, and objectives. Timber Investment Management Organizations and Real Estate Investment Trusts own significant tracts of Maine’s North Woods and are beholden to their shareholders. This can potentially be at odds with other values of the land that Maine people and wildlife depend on. Further, Maine is an increasingly popular place for outdoor recreation, which brings millions of Maine residents and visitors to the North Woods each year.

The makeup of people, businesses, and landowners who interact with Maine’s forests has shifted and so have the biological and environmental elements. Invasive species, pests and disease, climate change, and wildfires are all major threats to Maine’s woods that have always existed but, again, have intensified in recent years. These threats to habitat also impact Maine’s fish and wildlife populations.

Given all this change and the continued importance of Maine’s forests, we support creation of a Maine Forest Advisory Board, as called for by LD 1549. This Board would create a forum for evaluating forest resource issues through collaboration. Much like the Advisory Boards for the Departments of Inland Fish and Wildlife and Marine Resources, the Forest Advisory Board would consist of a wide range of forest

resource interests and would promote dialogue, develop policy recommendations, facilitate interagency information sharing, and ensure public participation.

Analogous Forest Advisory Boards have been created in more than a dozen states, including New Hampshire and Connecticut. In these other states, Forest Advisory Boards have served an important role in helping depoliticize complex issues regarding the stewardship of public and private forestlands. Bringing diverse interests together to deliberate multi-faceted issues and work toward common goals would be a benefit to Maine and an improvement over existing, forest-related public decision-making processes.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1549. Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.