



**Testimony of Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director  
In support of LD #1549  
An Act to Establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board  
April 29, 2021**

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Eliza Townsend, Maine Conservation Policy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club. I am pleased to address you today in support of LD 1549.

AMC is the nation’s oldest conservation, recreation, and education organization, with the mission to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We have 6,500 members in Maine and own 75,000 acres of forestland in the 100-Mile Wilderness region of Piscataquis County, managed for multiple use including sustainable forestry, carbon sequestration, backcountry recreation, and environmental education, and we are currently fundraising to acquire an additional 27,000-acre parcel.

Contracting with local loggers, we harvest 6,000 cords of wood per year that are delivered to local mills. We also have entered into three separate contracts to achieve increased carbon storage on lands that we harvest for timber and on those left in their natural state. We clearly have a strong interest in the health of both Maine’s forest, and of the forest products industry. That is why we strongly support LD 1549.

This bill would add Maine to the ranks of states that convene diverse interests to advise on the state of the forest and on the policies that can ensure its sustainable management. This approach has worked well elsewhere and has had additional benefits as described in the attached letter from my colleague, David Publicover. It is an approach already being taken at two other natural resource agencies, the Department of Marine Resources, whose Advisory Council was established in 1973 (and before that the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries had an advisory council going back to at least 1954) and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, whose Advisory Council was established in 2003.

With 17.5 million acres of forest, Maine is the most forested state in the nation, and the forest plays a role in every aspect of our lives, from cleaning the air we breathe and the water we drink, to supporting an estimated 30,000 jobs, to supporting our tourism and recreation economy, to combatting climate change by sequestering carbon.

As important, the forest is an ecosystem which supports numerous species of plants and both terrestrial and aquatic animals. Increasingly we recognize that we must act to protect ecosystems if we are to protect the future of the planet. For example, the bird population in



North America has plummeted by nearly 30% since 1970 and more than 75 studies have documented sharp declines in insect populations worldwide.

Maine's vast forest has a significant role to play in preventing the collapse of nature. Biodiversity and the habitat connectivity afforded to species by an unfragmented forest can help ensure the continued healthy populations of both plants and animals. A large, healthy, connected forest that supports biodiversity is one of the ways we can achieve Maine's target of carbon neutrality by 2045.

Given the forest's importance, engaging a wide range of perspectives in evaluating its condition, sharing information, and planning for its future makes sense. It also has the potential to reduce the intense policy struggles over the forest's current condition and its future that so often spill over into the legislative arena. Convening an advisory board made up of landowners and biologists, land managers and ecologists, loggers and an indigenous representative would ensure a very different discussion, one more comprehensive in its scope.

Looking at our forest comprehensively is what is called for as we look to combat climate change, ensure ongoing biodiversity, and support a robust forest products industry.

Please vote LD 1549 Ought to Pass.

To the committee:

My name is David Publicover. I am Senior Staff Scientist and Assistant Director of Research with the Appalachian Mountain Club based in Gorham, NH where I have worked since 1992. Throughout my career I have been actively engaged in a wide range of forest policy and management issues, primarily in Maine and New Hampshire. I am submitting this statement as a supplement to the testimony of Eliza Townsend in support of LD 1549 that would establish the Maine Forest Advisory Board.

I have been a member of the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board for over 20 years. As stated on the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands web site, *“Authorized under RSA 227-I:5, the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board (FAB) advises the Division of Forests and Lands on ‘factors affecting the use, ownership, and management of forest resources.’ The mission of the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board is to advocate implementation of the recommendations of the New Hampshire Forest Resources Plan, to coordinate forest policy development, facilitate dialogue between diverse interests, to assure opportunities for public participation in forest policy development, and to advise the State Forester in the development of state programs and policies.”*

As with the proposed legislation, the NHFAB represents diverse interests including state and federal agencies, UNH, NGOs, foresters, loggers, landowners and the timber industry. However, unlike LD 1549, the authorizing legislation in New Hampshire does not specify the Board’s membership or specific terms, which are left to the discretion of the director of the Division of Forests and Lands. While this has worked well, I believe the more defined membership set forth in LD 1549 is appropriate and will ensure that all interests are represented on the Board.

The most important function of the Board has been assisting the Division in the development of the 10-year state Forest Action Plan. Most recently the Board held multiple meetings over nine months of 2020 to refine the draft plan before it went out for public comment. We reviewed multiple iterations of the plan. The diversity of the Board ensured that the text, background information, and recommendations were vetted from a range of perspectives. There were disagreements and we had extensive discussions about how to present certain issues such as climate change. However, these discussions always remained collegial and respectful. In the end we gained a better understanding of each other’s viewpoints and concerns, and the document was the better for it.

The Board serves other functions as well, including considering legislation of relevance to the division or the broader forest community, providing guidance on state land management, and providing a source of information on emerging or relevant issues. It also serves as an opportunity for public input; though not common (Board meetings are open to the public but



not required to be publicly noticed), on occasion members of the public have come before the Board to present their concerns about particular issues.

However, perhaps the most important unofficial function of the Board is serving as a place for mutual education and understanding between diverse interests in a non-confrontational setting. Unfortunately, Maine currently has no such forum. Too often, debates over major forest policy issues, from the clearcutting referendum to outcome-based forestry to management of state lands, have taken place at a distance. Opposing parties present their viewpoints before legislative committees or in the media, with little opportunity for face-to-face discussion. The proposed Forest Advisory Board can provide this type of opportunity. It can also provide an opportunity for less prominent or well-organized voices, such as loggers or indigenous communities, a better opportunity to have their perspectives heard.

In my experience, the New Hampshire Forest Advisory Board has provided a valuable forum for more reasoned debate about issues important to the forestry community in the state, and has helped build more respectful relationships among stakeholders. I believe a similar board in Maine would provide the same benefit, and I support the passage of LD 1549.

Sincerely,

David Publicover, D.F.