

TO: Interested Members of the ACF Committee
FROM: Eliza Donoghue, Maine Audubon
RE: Ecological Reserve Acreage and Cap Explanation
DATE: January 25, 2022

Memo Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide clarity on some of the acreage and “cap” figures related to LD 736, An Act to Enhance the Ecological Reserve System. Please note that these figures come directly from the Bureau of Parks and Lands (Bureau), which can also be found in the [Bureau’s 2020 Annual report](#), pg. 6. However, I recommend inviting the Bureau to take part in the bill’s work session to further explain these figures and more.

This memo focuses exclusively on operable timberland acreage and current and proposed limitations to the Ecological Reserve System based on that acreage. Operable timberland is land held by the Bureau that the Bureau considers viable for commercial timber harvest operations. Operable timberland land acreage that is and is not designated as ecological reserves is arguably of primary importance to all stakeholders. The Bureau relies exclusively on harvesting from operable timberlands to fund their work. The forest products industry relies on operable timberlands within the Bureau’s land holdings as a portion of the statewide wood basket. Operable timberlands contain natural communities that are absent from the Ecological Reserve System. Furthermore, the operable timberland statutory acreage limitation is what the Bureau is closest to reaching, compared to the other caps in current statute. While the overall size and potential growth of Ecological Reserve System is very important, I urge the Committee to focus their attention on the figures below.

Basic Acreage Figures & Current Law

- The Bureau manages approximately **97,023 acres of ecological reserves**. The Bureau manages 721,529 total acres (i.e., public reserved and non-reserved lands, a portion of which are designated as ecological reserves).
- **Of the Bureau’s 721,529 acres, 428,994 acres are considered “operable timberland.”**
- Current statute limits the amount of operable timberland designated as ecological reserves at **6% or 25,740 acres** (6% of 428,994 acres is 25,740 acres). Currently, 22,755 acres of operable timberlands in qualifying reserves¹ are designated as ecological reserves. **As such, under current law, the Bureau may designate 2,985 additional acres of operable timberlands as ecological reserves (25,740 minus 22,755 acres) before reaching the 6% limit.** Other inoperable lands, like

¹Some ecological reserves do not count toward the statutory limitations, due to conditions of their acquisition by the Bureau (see pg. 44 of [BPL 2020 Annual Report](#)). Current law states, “Lands donated or acquired after the effective date of this section with the condition that the donated or acquired land be designated an ecological reserve are not included when calculating acreage limits under this subsection.” This draft legislation leaves that language intact.

wetlands, cliffs, or mountaintops can be added irrespective of the operable timberland limitation.

Proposed Amendment

- The sponsor's amendment would increase the 6% figure to 8%. **8% of the Bureau's total operable timberlands is 34,320 acres and would result in the ability to designate 11,565 additional acres of operable timberlands as ecological reserves (34,320 minus 22,755 acres).**
- Maine Audubon, The Nature Conservancy in Maine, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Natural Resources Council of Maine, and others recommend increasing that figure to 10%. **10% of the Bureau's total operable timberlands is 42,899 acres and would result in the ability to designate 20,144 additional acres of operable timberlands as ecological reserves (42,899 minus 22,755 acres).**
- For the sake of comparison, the Nahmakanta ecological reserve unit is 11,083 acres; Acadia National Park (not an ecological reserve) is 49,075 acres; and Baxter State Park (which is not managed by the Bureau) is 209,501 acres.