

Dear Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and other members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Leslie Hudson, and I am a resident of Orono. From 1994 through 1996, I was the director of the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project. This unusual collaboration involved parties who were not always allies: state and federal agencies, environmental groups, commercial forest and conservation landowners, university scientists, and others with a variety of leanings. Yet within its overarching goal to consider the biological diversity of Maine's forest lands, the group agreed on the following needs:

1. to assess the status of Maine's biodiversity;
2. to develop guidelines to help commercial and private forest land owners manage their forests with biodiversity in mind; and
3. to establish a system of ecological reserves representing the full variety of Maine's native species and landscapes.

The first two needs were met and spelled out in publications in January 1996 and August 1999, and the first ecological reserves were established following the passage of legislation in 2000. However, this system, which was intended to represent *all* native ecosystem types across their natural range of variation in Maine and to protect habitats for species not found elsewhere, is incomplete. An arbitrary cap established under the original legislation limits the state's ability to build the system in accordance with its stated goals. Currently, the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands manages 19 reserves that encompass about 96,000 acres, meaning the 100,000-acre cap has nearly been met. Among these state-owned ecological reserves, which comprise less than 1% of the state's lands, are some of our most iconic and exemplary landscapes, e.g., Nahmakanta, the Cutler coast, and the Mahoosucs.

In addition, certain types of habitats, especially those found in the southern half of the state, are not represented. Adding examples of these would fill significant gaps, as well as provide important educational and low-impact recreational resources for that part of Maine. Also, we now understand that at least one-third of Maine's plants and animals and the habitats they depend on are affected by climate-related threats, so it's even more vital to continue the process begun 22 years ago.

Trees are not harvested on Maine's ecological reserves, allowing them to grow large and provide habitat for some of our scarcest species. Reserves also serve as benchmarks against which ecological change can be measured in relation to managed forests. As Maine's climate changes, the value of these benchmarks becomes ever more important. Ongoing monitoring is helping us understand how trees and soils sequester carbon, how species adjust to climate change, and much more.

Finally, ecological reserves store roughly 30% more carbon per acre than other land in Maine. Therefore, expanding the system of reserves is crucial to meeting the goals laid out in *Maine Won't Wait*, the state's plan to address the impacts of climate change.

In closing, I urge you to support LD 736, thus providing for the critical expansion of the system of ecological reserves, and making other needed improvements to the original legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this legislation.