

Malcolm Hunter  
Amherst  
LD 736

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, my name is Dr. Malcolm Hunter. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 736 as proposed to be amended by the sponsor.

I am a recently retired professor in UMaine's Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Conservation Biology and I have produced three books and scores of papers on the interface between forest management and wildlife conservation.

In the 1990s, I was part of the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project, which was a group of almost 100 diverse stakeholders that met to address the interface between forest management and conserving biodiversity in Maine. One of the ideas that we explored was the creation of an ecological reserve system that would protect representative examples of the full range of ecosystem types in Maine. Ecological reserves provide important habitat to prevent species loss, and they offer long-term research opportunities to improve our knowledge of ecological processes and how they are modified in response to climate change. As an ecologist, I can say with confidence that our ecological reserve system has proven to be a successful experiment, but to fully realize its potential, we need more ecological reserves across the state.

In 1998, one of the outcomes of the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project was an ecological reserve inventory report that identified approximately 170,000 acres that could be established as reserves on what were then Department of Conservation lands. The statutory cap of 100,000 acres or 15% of land under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Parks and Lands, whichever is less, was the result of a compromise between conservationists and industry over the 170,000 candidate acres. I believe that that cap is no longer appropriate, and it is actually hindering Maine from protecting the state's natural features and from meeting its climate change adaptation objectives.

Over the past 21 years, we have learned that these reserves have not significantly affected the Bureau of Parks and Land's budget or ability to harvest its land. The Bureau has been very measured and deliberate about using the management planning process to designate ecological reserves when appropriate. It has also acquired ecological reserves through partnerships with private organizations and land trusts. There is no need for a cap when the Bureau has a robust, public-facing public lands management process in place. On the other hand, there is a strong argument for giving the Bureau the opportunity to designate more reserves that will help ensure that portions of Maine's natural landscapes and ecosystem types remain intact, while maintaining a sustainable level of timber harvest on Bureau lands. For these reasons, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 736.

Thank you for your time ..... mac hunter