



Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Joint ACF Committee, my name is Jeremy Sheaffer, Maine State Director, The Wilderness Society (TWS). On behalf of TWS’s 10,000 + Maine members and advocates, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 736.

Maine has tremendous wealth in nature: 4.2% of our gross domestic product (GDP) comes from outdoor recreation, tied with Wyoming for fifth best in the United States (Hawaii 5.8, Vermont 5.2, Montana 4.7, Florida 4.4). Outdoor recreation accounts for 4.7% of our state’s employment. From 2018 to 2019, outdoor recreation employment in Maine grew faster than the U.S. average and supported over 40,000 jobs. Maine’s ecological reserve system plays a key role in the state’s outdoor recreation economy and should be expanded.

Conserving wildlife habitat, public access for recreation, and timber production are not mutually exclusive. The Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) permits a variety of low-impact recreation on ecological reserves, including but not limited to fishing, hiking, camping, and paddling.

From the conservation/wildlife habitat side, one of the primary goals of Maine’s ecological reserve system is to maintain representative examples of all the habitat types found in Maine. That goal has not been met yet, and many habitat types remain unprotected. BPL should be given the opportunity to expand the ecological reserve system to address the growing conservation need for protected habitats and to enhance the public values of public lands. We urge the Committee to support LD 736. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jeremy B Sheaffer

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