

Sarah Sindo  
Kingfield  
LD 736

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, my name is Sarah Sindo and I am here to testify in support of LD 736 as proposed to be amended by the sponsor.

I work seasonally for two nonprofit organizations who operate near numerous parcels of public land. From May through October, I am the site manager at Chewonki's Big Eddy Campground on the West Branch of the Penobscot River. The campground is in close proximity to Seboomook, Gero Island, Big Spencer, Chamberlain Lake, and Nahmakanta. I have been at the campground for 7 seasons, and I can say confidently that the attractions in the North Maine Woods continue to draw more and more people. I've witnessed a new trend over the past couple of years. People who grew up or vacationed in the area are now bringing their children along for the ride, introducing them to water sports, hiking, and camping. There's an entire new generation falling in love with the wilderness in this area. The numbers at the campground speak volumes, too. We saw 3100+ campers this season, up 20% from the previous year.

During the winter season, I head to Kingfield where I now own a home and work seasonally at Maine Huts & Trails. You might know this organization has been closed for the past couple of years, but reopened last month to overnight guests. The organization operates three backcountry huts near the Bigelows, another parcel of Maine's ecological reserves. I interact daily with prospective and current guests, and everyone is so thrilled the huts are back open. Guests and locals rave about the land and scenery that make up the trail network and comment how special and unique it is. Folks from out of state have visited over the past few weeks and have said how much of a treat it is for them to have such an accessible introduction to a backcountry experience and they will return.

I urge you to vote in support of LD 736 because Maine's ecological reserves represent some of the most special outdoor features in Maine. The arbitrary cap of 100,000 acres on the ecological reserve system is handcuffing our ability to protect more unique natural features in Maine for future generations to enjoy.

If there is one thing I have taken away from pandemic life it's how essential our outdoor spaces really are. Over the past couple of years, many of my friends here have explored new areas right in their backyards or within a short drive. Discovering new trails and camping spots. It's been really wonderful to hear their stories and even put a few new destinations on my radar.

The passing of LD 736 would mean so much for the state of Maine. Yes it would aid in preventing threats from development, climate change, and pollution but let's not forget the people. Getting outdoors in these ecosystems does wonders for people's mental health and outlook on life. It's a chance for people to come back to living in the present moment, to breathe in fresh wilderness air, to listen to the birds, and find quietness.

Thank you for your time and listening.