

**TESTIMONY OF JAMES A. ST. PIERRE
MAINE DIRECTOR, RESTORE: THE NORTH WOODS
IN SUPPORT OF LD 736
AN ACT TO ENHANCE THE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE SYSTEM
January 25, 2022**

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the committee, I am Jym St. Pierre, Maine Director of RESTORE: The North Woods, a regional conservation organization that has been active in Maine for thirty years. We support LD 736, as proposed to be amended by the sponsor, Rep. Grohoski.

As background, I have been involved in public lands issues in my home state of Maine for more than 50 years. In the 1970s, I worked with the Critical Areas Program in the State Planning Office (now the Maine Natural Areas Program or MNAP). In the early 1980s, I wrote the first legislative bill to establish a system of wildland preserves in the western Maine mountains. In the 1990s I served on the steering committee of the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project. That collaborative effort coalesced around the concept of creating a statewide system of ecological reserves, which was launched just over two decades ago. In recent years, I have personally visited many of our ecoreserves.

Although Maine's ecoreserve system encompasses less than 1% of Maine's land area, it has been successful in helping protect essential wildlife habitat, preserve biodiversity, and benefit scientific research by serving as benchmarks to measure environmental change. Increasingly, it is clear the system is also crucial in addressing accelerating climate change. Protecting 30% of our land is a major goal for our state and nation and Maine's focus on high biodiversity areas emphasizes that ecoreserves should be a priority.

The system of reserves was intended to include representative examples of all the habitat types found in Maine. **The problem** is that goal has not been achieved. A recent assessment by MNAP found that none of the seven ecoregions in the state has sufficient representation of all habitat types within the existing ecoreserves. Moreover, the caps in the law were not science-based. They are an unnecessary block on Maine's ability to accomplish the goal of protecting important habitat types statewide.

The solution is simple:

- **Expand the caps to at least 10%** of operable timberlands to give BPL the opportunity to designate additional ecological reserves where habitat types are not adequately protected. There have been no indications that would adversely impact the wood supply or BPL due to designation as ecological reserves.
- **Let BPL acquire additional lands as ecoreserves** that can help complete the portfolio of crucial habitat types.
- **Make the ecoreserves permanent.** Allow lands to be removed from the ecoreserve system only after public input and based on a compelling scientific rationale.
- **Consider establishing a dedicated funding stream to support stewardship** of our ecoreserves to supplement to timber income for BPL.

There is every reason to pass LD 736, and no reason not to. We urge the committee to **support LD 736 as proposed to be amended** by the sponsor and with the changes mentioned here. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.