



Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony Opposed to Amendment to LD 736 An Act To Enhance the Ecological Reserve System

Presented by Representative Grohoski

January 25, 2022

Patrick Strauch, Executive Director

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and distinguished members of the Agriculture Conservation and Forestry Committee. My Name is Patrick Strauch, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Forest Products Council. MFPC is testifying against elimination of the cap established for ecological reserves established within the Bureau of Public Lands, but we are supportive of other provisions within the amended language.

At this point MFPC cannot support the removal of acreage restrictions in **Section 5** because we don't understand the goals of the BPL ecological reserve system. With over 900,000 acres of Federal and private land placed into ecological reserves in the last 25 years, the urgency for BPL to add acres has been significantly reduced¹.

MFPC believes a better approach is to evaluate how the BPL ecological region goals overlap with the state-wide inventory of preserved land. We would be willing to participate in this collaborative process.

The removal of almost one million acres of land from Maine's wood basket is significant and further uncontrolled growth of the system is not in the best interests of Maine's rural economy. The Council represents wood consuming mills that are dependent on a sustainable supply of wood to support Maine's \$8 billion industry. BPL harvest are an important part of this economy and reductions in a productive tree growing acres is an important factor that can shift wood demand on to a shrinking number of commercially managed acres.

¹ *Since 1997 both federal and private conservation organizations have increased conservation of ecological reserves. Including state, federal, and private conservation land, **the area of land managed as ecological reserves has doubled since 1997 to a total of 900,000 acres or 4.6% of the state.** (2021 Draft Assessment of accomplishments and gaps in Maine Land Conservation. MDACF).*

Sec. 1. 12 MRSA

§1805. Designation of ecological reserve

MFPC supports the language changes in the following section but believes a reciprocal procedure should be included to strengthened language for adding land into the Ecological Reserve System.

When a proposed management plan includes designation of an ecological reserve, the director shall submit a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over matters pertaining to public lands of the proposal.

Section 1. Allowed Uses – MFPC supports these revisions

Section 5.

The provision to prevent a decline in the volume of timber harvested is important and in the interest of the public mission of the BPL. We believe this provision needs to be retained. We suggest alternative language as follows:

The designation of land as an ecological reserve may not result in a decline in the bureau's sustainable harvest level as modeled.

This language allows the Bureau to manage lands in a professional manner linked to the silvicultural objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Patrick Strauch