

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee,

My name is Barbara Vickery. I live in Richmond. Although I am retired from a 33 career with The Nature Conservancy as Conservation Programs Director, I still serve on the Bureau of Parks and Lands Ecological Reserve Science Advisory Com. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 736.

The enabling legislation for the states Ecological Reserves enacted 20 years ago was well thought out and visionary in many respects. It has served the state well. However, not surprisingly, it is in need of some important updates to its provisions.

The purposes of the ecological reserve designation on public lands authorized in 2000 included conserving species whose habitat needs are unlikely to be met on managed forests, providing sites for research and education, and serving as benchmarks against which changes to the landscape could be measured. While the ecological reserves now designated on state Public land make up less than 1% of Maine's land base they have outsized importance in protecting biodiversity and increasing our understanding of the natural world. Their benchmark function has become all the more important at a time when the climate is changing so fast.

From the inception of the ecological reserve concept in Maine it was envisioned as a *system*. This was underlined in the passage of the 1989 legislative resolve calling for *A Study to see if Maine needed a system of reserves*. The Maine Forest Biodiversity Project, a collaborative conversation that included forest landowners, public agencies, academics and environmental non-profits, after much debate came to a consensus statement in support of an ecological reserve system on public land. A system of reserves would be designed to include representative examples of all the habitat types found in Maine. But to date that goal has not been met; many habitat types in southern Maine and even very common types such as lower elevation hardwood, spruce fir flats and cedar swamps in northern Maine are poorly represented, if at all. We need such areas that are reserved from harvest to help us understand how the climate is changing our forests and what we can expect in managed forests, and to ensure habitat needs of ALL species are met.

The Bureau should be given the opportunity to expand the ecological reserve system in order to address the conservation needs for protected habitats and round out the reserve system. With the current cap on acres of operable timberland in reserves of 6% the Bureau could add perhaps 3,000 acres to reserve status. However, to appropriately conserve examples of northern hardwoods, spruce flats and other such unrepresented habitats in their characteristic settings will require more acres. Increasing the cap to 8% of operable acres, which would allow about 14,000 additional acres, would help. However, 10% is what might actually be needed. In its 20-year history, there have been no reports of adverse impacts to the Bureau or the wood supply due to setting aside of ecological reserves. I believe that the Bureau would find that it could still meet its budget obligations with the potential additions this bill would make possible.

Land conservation, public access for recreation, and timber production are not mutually exclusive. The Bureau of Parks and Lands ("Bureau") has done an exemplary job managing its lands for multiple purposes and balancing the needs of all user groups that it serves, with the notable exception of acknowledging the traditional uses by Maine's native tribes. The Bureau permits a variety of low-impact recreation on ecological reserves, such as to fishing, hiking, camping, and paddling. It should also allow gathering of materials for cultural and traditional uses by members of Wabanaki nation.

Steady and sufficient timber supplies can be sustained by the Bureau while selectively setting aside certain lands and waters as reserves. Ecological reserves are designated by a transparent, comprehensive land management planning process that takes into account these multiple purposes and user groups. Importantly, LD 736 would make sure that removal of areas from reserve status would also be done via a transparent management planning process.

For all these reasons, I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 736 as amended by the bill sponsor. Thank you for your consideration.

Barbara Vickery