

James McCarthy
Brunswick
LD 294

To: Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

From: James McCarthy, 18 MacMillan Drive, Brunswick, 04011, member of the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine

Re: LD 294, An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority

Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is James McCarthy and I'm a retired journalist who lives in Brunswick. I am submitting this written testimony in support of LD 294, An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority.

Like many Mainers, I have appreciated the wilderness beauty of Baxter State Park as a camper, hiker and canoeist. I first hiked Katahdin when I was 22 and accompanied by my 13-year-old brother; I hiked it again 40 years later with my son. I count both experiences as important milestones in my life. On the first occasion I knew next to nothing about the sacred importance of this mountain to the Wabanaki people. I know better now, thanks to Wabanaki artists, storytellers and historians such as Penobscots James Francis, Barry Dana, John Bear Mitchell and Carol Dana and Passamaquoddy Donald Soctomah. Their generous sharing of stories and cultural wisdom has helped me see how deeply entwined their culture is with the mountains, ponds, streams and rivers of this park — and, indeed, our entire state.

Adding a Wabanaki member to the current three-member Baxter Park Authority strikes me as a long-overdue acknowledgment that management of the park would benefit from Wabanaki perspectives such as “all my relations” and “the seven generations.” It would begin a long-overdue dialogue with our Wabanaki neighbors that I anticipate would complement and support Gov. Percival P. Baxter’s vision that the park “shall forever be left in the natural wild state” — a sometimes contentious ideal to uphold, I’m aware.

Along with LD 25, An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks — which I also support — it would show the original people of Maine that we understand just how important Baxter and other state parks are to their identity and heritage. And that we welcome them to join in the conversation of how best to protect and preserve Baxter State Park.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. I hope you will support LD 294 with an “ought to pass” recommendation and vote accordingly when it comes up for a vote in the House and Senate.

Sincerely,

James McCarthy

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