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Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

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

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of LD 294, An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. Working in more than 70 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. TNC Maine has been leading conservation in the state for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in Maine, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

Supporting the voice, choice, and action of Indigenous Peoples is key to The Nature Conservancy's vision of a world where people and nature thrive. As an organization, TNC has endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and we believe that one of the most effective and enduring conservation actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' voices, choices, and actions in natural resource stewardship. A UN-backed report found that at least a quarter of our planet's land is owned, used, occupied, or managed by Indigenous Peoples, and biodiversity is better maintained in these places.

Katahdin is sacred to the Wabanaki People, whose relationship with that region spans thousands of years – far longer than the relatively brief time Maine law has been imposed on that land. Their exclusion from the governing bodies that oversee their ancestral lands and sacred places is unjust and should be addressed.

We understand the legal complexities raised by this bill, including the unique nature of the Baxter Park Authority and the deeds governing its composition. We acknowledge that trust law may consider this proposed action to be beyond the purview of the Legislature. While that may be the outcome, we nonetheless support the intent of this bill, which is to integrate Wabanaki People meaningfully into the leadership and stewardship of Baxter State Park.

TNC sees LD 294 as an opportunity to amplify the critical work of elevating the voice, choice and action of Wabanaki people, especially in areas of land management and access. Beyond this bill, we encourage all parties to explore meaningful ways to accomplish this work moving forward, and TNC stands ready to support this process however we can.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.