



To: Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

From: Ezra Sassaman, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: February 10, 2023

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

Sen. Ingwersen, Rep. Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Ezra Sassaman. I am writing as a representative for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 450 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in favor of LD 294: An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority.

At the core of our work is climate justice; we acknowledge that the climate crisis is caused by systemic failures and forms of oppression, and disproportionately impacts marginalized communities. Colonialism is at the root of climate change, so when combatting the climate crisis, we need to simultaneously address colonial structures and the environmental injustices they have caused.

The place now called Maine is the homeland of the Wabanaki people and they have stewarded this land since time immemorial. However, when it comes to the decisions that impact their lands, waters, and livelihoods, the Wabanaki community has been denied an equal seat at the table and often excluded from decision-making processes altogether.

As described by Ojibwe author and historian David Treuer, “The national parks are sometimes called ‘America’s best idea,’ and there is much to recommend them... But all of them were founded on land that was once ours, and many were created only after we were removed, forcibly, sometimes by an invading army and other times following a treaty we’d signed under duress... Oglala Lakota spiritual leader Black Elk noted darkly that the United States ‘made

little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds, and always these islands are becoming smaller.’”¹

Including a Tribal citizen in the Baxter State Park Authority would be a small, but necessary step towards the state fully recognizing Wabanaki sovereignty over their ancestral territory.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 294. Thank you.

¹ David Treuer, “[National Parks Should Belong to Native Americans](#)”, *The Atlantic*, September 2, 2021.