



Natural Resources Council of Maine
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**Testimony in Support of LD 1285,
An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program
April 10, 2023**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Melanie Sturm, the Forests and Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1285.

The Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program is Maine's most effective land conservation program. Over the past three decades, the program has helped fund more than 300 projects and protect more than 600,000 acres spanning all 16 Maine counties. LMF supports conservation and recreation projects for activities ranging from biking to birding, fly casting to cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling to swimming. LMF also provides one of the few funding options available for land conservation, often in the form of conservation easements, to conserve working farmland, working forests, and working waterfronts. LMF projects are diverse and benefit all Mainers, as well as many businesses. Maine people have consistently shown their strong support for land conservation at the ballot box, passing six ballot measures to fund LMF since 1987.

In 2021, the Legislature passed a budget with \$40 million for the LMF program over four years. Those appropriations were badly needed and are already being spent on meaningful projects, large and small, across the state. While that boost of funding was critical, as the program had essentially run out of money, those appropriations expire in 2024. Without continued additional funding, many important conservation opportunities will be lost that would help protect fish and wildlife habitat and natural resources, sequester and store carbon, enhance and expand recreational access, and provide economic benefits to communities both from tourism and from lands managed for timber, agriculture, and marine resources. This bill would provide \$10 million to the LMF program in FY24-25 and FY25-26. **We are aware of the proposed amendment to adjust the funding years in the bill, and we support that change.**

Funding LMF is a smart investment for the state. Virtually every significant land conservation project in recent decades has required funding from multiple sources, including state, federal, and private funds. LMF funding plays a critical role in leveraging federal and private funds that can make land conservation projects possible. Every \$1 spent by the State of Maine using LMF funds is matched, approximately, by \$3 of private and federal funds.

Although the State and cooperating entities have made a great deal of progress on land conservation in recent years, there is much left to do as demand continues to increase for Maine real estate, pressures mount on natural resource-based businesses in the state, and climate change among other threats tests the resilience of our ecosystems.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1285 to extend available funding for this important and effective program. Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.