



Natural Resources Council of Maine
3 Wade Street • Augusta, Maine • 04330 • www.nrcm.org

**Testimony in Support of LD 1881,
*An Act Regarding Compensation Fees and Related Conservation Efforts to Protect Soils and
Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat from Solar and Wind Energy Development and High-impact
Electric Transmission Lines Under the Site Location of Development Laws***

May 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 1881.

NRCM works across a broad range of issues, including reducing the risks of climate change and conserving Maine lands and wildlife habitat, especially in the North Woods. Although climate action and land conservation can sometimes be in conflict, LD 1881 provides a framework for progress toward both.

While clean energy development is necessary and important for Maine, we recognize that all development has some degree of environmental impact because the infrastructure directly or indirectly impacts wildlife and may cut across large, undeveloped lands or waterways. LD 1881 would help address this dilemma by creating a compensation program for unavoidable impacts of solar energy development, wind energy development, and high-impact electric transmission lines. The bill would require developers to pay a mitigation fee if development occurs on prime agricultural soils or soils of statewide importance. The bill would also require developers to pay a compensation fee to fund off-site habitat improvement or conservation projects to mitigate the adverse effects of a development on wildlife and fisheries habitats.

Compensating for habitat impacts is critical for the sustainability of fish and wildlife populations throughout Maine. Habitat loss and degradation are the leading causes of species declines and are compounded by other stressors, such as climate change, invasive species, and disease. As real estate pressures continue and as more clean energy projects are built to meet the State's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, this bill provides a sensible strategy that should simplify the process for mitigating project impacts on flora and fauna.

The program proposed in LD 1881 would provide more predictability for developers because currently compensation requirements under Site Law are not applied consistently. Much like the successful Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program, a program of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that primarily deals with wetlands, resources of the same or similar type would be protected elsewhere. By mitigating such impacts, we can protect resources valued by Maine people and businesses while continuing to make gains in decarbonizing the electrical grid.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1881. Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.