



Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition
Supporting LD 1572

Resolve, To Analyze the Impact of Sea Level Rise

Before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee

May 7, 2021

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the ENR Committee. My name is Beth Ahearn, Director of Government Affairs at Maine Conservation Voters and I offer testimony on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) in support of LD 1572.

The EPC is a partnership of thirty-two conservation, environmental, and public health organizations who unify around a common agenda every year. The EPC represents over 100,000 members in Maine who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that depend upon a healthy environment. LD 1572 is priority legislation for our coalition for 2021. Thank you to Rep. Blume for sponsoring this important bill.

This Resolve is about preparedness. Sea-level rise is already affecting coastal communities and the impacts will be severe. The Science and Technical Subcommittee (STS) of the Maine Climate Council advised that we must commit to manage for 1.5 feet of Sea Level Rise (SLR) by 2050 and 3.9 feet of SLR by 2100. Maine's Climate Action Plan adopts those recommendations and makes it a priority to promptly revise our coastal land use regulations to incorporate those projections.

The nuisance flooding that already impacts coastal Maine will increase 10-15 fold with just 1 foot of SLR, increasing from average flooding of roughly 14 hours per year to about 142 hours per year and threatening communities with strong dependence on waterfront tourism, ports, and fishing.

STS projected impacts of 1.6 feet of SLR, include: inundation of six wastewater treatment facilities, 26 miles of coastal public roads, nearly one thousand road crossings and culverts, almost half of Maine's dry beaches, 61% of undeveloped sand dunes, and 85% of developed dunes. Projected impacts are even more severe with 3.9 feet of SLR. Economists estimate that by 2050, Maine's coastline will sustain damages of up to \$17.5 billion.

Land-use planning tools can help Maine communities manage climate impacts and enhance resilience -- but only if they reflect science-based projections. Local governments have the authority and responsibility for planning and implementing most activities for community resilience. The tools communities currently use -- including comprehensive planning, zoning, site location of development, and stormwater and floodplain management practices -- were not designed with climate change in mind.

Maine's Climate Action Plan calls on the state to lead a process to update land-use laws, tools, and practices to address threats communities face from climate change impacts and make our natural and built coastal lands resilient to climate change. This process begins with incorporating official projections for sea-level rise and directing state agencies to determine what laws and rules will need to be updated. Updated, science-based planning tools -- coupled with technical assistance and training -- will enable local governments to consider climate hazards like sea-level rise in waterfront planning, development, risk reduction, and conservation.

LD 1572 would specifically direct state agencies to manage for 1.5 feet of relative sea-level rise by 2050, relative to the year 2000, and 3.9 feet of sea-level rise by 2100, as recommended in the Climate Action Plan.

Incorporating these official sea-level rise projections into state planning and regulatory processes will give communities the tools they need to build resilience, enhance ecosystem services, and get out of harm's way, as recommended in Strategy F3 of the Climate Action Plan:

STRATEGY F - Build Healthy and Resilient Communities.

As Maine reduces greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change, we must also respond to climate impacts occurring now and expected soon. State support for communities to be proactive about understanding, planning, and acting to reduce their risk from climate change is essential.

F3: Emphasize Resilience Through Land-Use Planning and Legal Tools

- Develop and implement updated land-use regulations, laws, and practices by 2024 in order to enhance community resilience to flooding and other climate impacts.

For the above reasons, we urge your unanimously support of LD 1572. Thank you for your time.