



Testimony before the

Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

By Kaitlyn Bernard, Natural Resources Policy Advisor

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RE: LD 1572, Resolve, To Analyze the Impact of Sea Level Rise

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Kaitlyn Bernard and I am the Natural Resources Policy Advisor for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **in support of LD 1572**, Resolve, To Analyze the Impact of Sea Level Rise.

The Nature Conservancy 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. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 275,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

The Maine Climate Council's release of the Climate Action Plan is an enormous achievement for Maine, and a clarion call-to-action for conservation in the state. The four-year plan reinforces that there is an essential need for strategies to help communities across our state become more resilient. LD 1572 directs state agencies to make recommendations to incorporate consideration of 1.5 feet of relative sea level rise by 2050 and 3.9 feet by 2011 into the administration of the laws and rules they administer, as well as to recommend any changes necessary to implement Strategy F3 of the Climate Action Plan, which calls for updating Maine's land-use laws, tools, and practices to emphasize climate resilience.

The impact of changing climate conditions is already being felt on the ground in Maine. In Portland, sea levels rose by roughly eight inches during the 20th century, about seven inches higher than expected based on prior data. In this century, sea levels are projected to rise another

one to six feet globally, with sea levels expected to rise more in the Northeastern U.S. than the global average, according to the 2018 National Climate Assessment.

Underinvestment in coastal resilience can carry a significant cost. An analysis conducted to inform the development of the Climate Action Plan found that with 1.6 feet of sea-level rise by 2050 (relative to 2000), combined with storms occurring at the same frequency and intensity as the historic baseline, Maine can expect \$17.5 billion in cumulative building damage between 2020 and 2050.¹ Another recent study found that sea-level rise has already cost Maine nearly \$70 million in lost home values alone between 2005 and 2017.²

Sea level rise threatens both built infrastructure and Maine's diverse coastal habitats. Homes, businesses, roads, and working waterfronts will all benefit from a focus on climate resilience. This issue is not unique to Maine's coast - inland communities also face significant climate risk. Increased rainfall and more intense storm events can affect vulnerable infrastructure. For example, undersized culverts at road-stream crossings commonly lead to road washouts.

On the natural infrastructure and habitat side, sea level rise drives coastal wetlands to migrate inland. Without proper planning and investments to support marsh migration, wetlands will not have the space to retreat and reestablish. Tidal wetlands support a range of critical ecosystem functions, including filtering surface water and serving as feeding and stopover points for sea run fish and migratory birds.

Incorporating climate resilience considerations into comprehensive planning, stormwater and floodplain management, and other land-use laws, tools and practices will help all Maine communities become more prepared for the future.

LD 1572 provides a strong directive and foundation for Maine's agencies to review and plan for these potential impacts. The infrastructure, resources, and public interest overseen by these key agencies are of critical importance – identifying risk reduction recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources now will allow Maine the time to take action before it's too late.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1572. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ *Assessing the Impacts Climate Change May Have on the State's Economy, Revenues, and Investment Decisions: Summary Report* (November 25, 2020), State of Maine, Eastern Research Group, Inc. and Synapse Energy Economics, p. 10, https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/ERG_MCC_AssessingImpactsClimateChangeMaine_Summary_11.25.20.pdf.

² "Rising seas swallowed \$70 million in Maine home values, study says," Lori Valigra, Bangor Daily News, January 22, 2019, <https://bangordailynews.com/2019/01/22/business/rising-seas-to-swallow-70-million-in-maine-home-values-study-says/>.