



Testimony before the

Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

By Rob Wood, Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy

May 17, 2021

**Re: LD 1429, An Act To Implement the Most Time-sensitive Recommendations of the
Maine Climate Council**

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Rob Wood and I am the Director of Government Relations and Climate Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **in general support of LD 1429**, An Act To Implement the Most Time-sensitive Recommendations of the Maine Climate Council, **with recommended changes**.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a 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 working in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 275,000 acres. We work across the state to restore the rivers and streams that support healthy fish populations, partner with fishermen to rebuild groundfish populations to benefit coastal communities across the Gulf of Maine, and develop innovative solutions to address the causes and impacts of climate change.

We thank Rep. Dunphy for bringing forward this bill. As a member of the Maine Climate Council, TNC understands the urgency of enacting the near-term recommendations of the Climate Action Plan. We especially applaud the emphasis placed by LD 1429 on conservation measures and strategies to increase carbon sequestration.

As with any substantial piece of legislation, we believe that some of the provisions in this bill are stronger than others, and there are some provisions that are outside of our area of expertise. TNC offers the following comments on the specific provisions in the bill:

General support

- The proposed tax credit for enrollment in the EPA SmartWay program is generally aligned with the Climate Action Plan recommendations, which states that, “Voluntary participation [in SmartWay] should be encouraged in Maine to significantly increase participation through loans or grants, by ensuring technology is available, and recognizing excellence within the program.” We can’t speak to whether a tax credit is the most appropriate incentive mechanism, but as a member of the Transportation Working Group of the Climate Council, TNC believes it is important for the State to encourage climate solutions for the medium- and heavy-duty trucking sectors, and we appreciate Rep. Dunphy’s creative proposal.
- TNC supports increasing funding for public transportation through an appropriation to MaineDOT. New investment in public transportation is important for improving accessibility and mobility for all Mainers, while reducing emissions.
- We also support increasing funding for the Efficiency Maine programs identified in LD 1429 (electric vehicles, heat pumps and weatherization). We note that Governor Mills’s plan for state American Rescue Plan funds includes funding for weatherization, and there are two weatherization bonds currently before the Legislature as well.
- TNC strongly supports robust funding for the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program, which has provided myriad benefits to Mainers for decades. We appreciate that LD 1429 recognizes that LMF is in need of new investment. There are three LMF bond proposals currently pending before the Legislature presented by Sen. Breen, Rep. Corey and Gov. Mills, and we are hopeful that between these bond proposals and LD 1429, the Legislature will agree that the time is right to replenish LMF.

Recommended changes

- We believe that the proposed inventory of carbon stocks on land and in coastal and marine ecosystems is important, but it is largely covered by the existing requirements in MRS 38 §576-A that were developed by this Committee in 2019. Current law requires the DEP to track and report net annual greenhouse emissions, and the DEP is currently promulgating rules to comply with this law. Therefore, we believe this provision in LD 1429 may be redundant of existing law.
- There are three other sections of LD 1429 that address carbon sequestration and current use taxation programs (farmland, open space and tree growth). In general, we support incorporating carbon sequestration into current use taxation programs to provide an incentive for landowners to increase carbon stocks on their lands. However, we believe that the Legislature would benefit from the recommendations of the State’s Task Force on a Maine Forest Carbon Program, created in January 2021 by Executive Order 24, before moving forward with specific changes. This Task Force is building on the recommendations of the Climate Council and is identifying a suite of financial incentives and technical assistance activities to increase carbon sequestration on woodlots 10 to 10,000 acres in size, with a particular focus on the open space program. Recommendations will be ready by September 2021.
- We appreciate the intent of the proposal to remove the language from the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) statute that allows for the suspension of scheduled RPS increases. TNC would prefer not to see the RPS suspended at a time when Maine and the

region need to substantially increase clean energy deployment. The current statute was developed in the EUT Committee in 2019, so we simply recommend that the ENR Committee consults with the EUT Committee before moving forward with this provision.

Finally, TNC notes that we have no significant experience in food policy issues in Maine; therefore we cannot speak to those provisions of the bill, except to say that they appear generally aligned with the Climate Action Plan recommendations.

Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to testify, and thank you again to Rep. Dunphy for developing this legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have now or in the future.