



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Senator Lawrence, Representative Zietler and Members of the Joint Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

From: Becky Bartovics

Date: March, 30, 2023

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 1111 **"An Act Concerning Contracts and Agreement for Large-scale Water Extraction"**

Dear Co-Chairs Lawrence and Ziegler and Members of the Committee,

I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nationwide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. We urge you to vote "ought to pass" on the bipartisan sponsored bill, LD 1111 **An Act Concerning Contracts and Agreement for Large-scale Water Extraction"**

Looking at the Maine Gazetteer, Maine's water resources appear to be substantial. And in fact Maine's forests, rivers and embayments benefit from the redolent water resources that we have. However, our climate has dramatically changed and continues to do so. During my 40 years of experience in and around Penobscot Bay, foggy days in July have evaporated to much higher temperatures, no morning dew, no thunderstorms. Droughts, beginning with the last rain in mid March until "six dry drops" fall in Mid August, have haunted our farms as yearly temperatures rise. Rising temperatures increase evaporation and cause further drought. Last year the drought caused serious declines in food production as well as increased fires in Maine¹. My artesian well ran dry on my farm every day last summer and I am someone who is very careful with water.

Another Climate driven variable for our future is the extreme likelihood of a vastly increased population in our region due to cooler temperatures than the sweltering western US². Water resources we now have will need to be shared with these new Mainers as well as provide for our ability to both continue to hydrate our very important North Woods that can serve as a significant climate mitigation strategy and sustain livelihoods as well. Our water resources are precious to us now and especially as the legacy we can leave to our children and grandchildren. The horrendous western US situations have arisen in large measure due to the dramatic and wasteful squandering of the Oglala Aquifer- formerly the

¹<https://www.maine.gov/mema/sites/maine.gov/mema/files/inline-files/Drought%20Task%20Force%20Report%208-04-2022.pdf>

² <https://www.themainemonitor.org/fleeing-to-maine-from-climate-disasters/>



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largest aquifer in the continent³. To paraphrase Marc Reisner (Cadillac Desert), “vandalizing our present will only lead to bankrupting our future”. We apply the precautionary principle here to our benefit.

Wholesale extraction of water resources for a contracted period of almost half a century poses a serious threat to the continued ability of our region to provide for itself. Prior to the mid 2000’s a historical contract restriction of three years enabled local communities to have better control over extraction in times of greater need locally and within the watershed. However, once that restriction was abandoned, little has stood in the way of vast extraction and plastic bottling of our water resources- privatizing and profiting while leaving local communities thirsty for their share of a communal resource.

By providing community based public hearings, LD 1111 supports democratic processes and allows transparency that is now unavailable to communities. Recently, for instance, in Belfast a contract for more than a million and a half gallons per day all year was hammered out behind closed doors, while there was no citizen oversight. Little protection for that community to address dwindling local water supply was provided by that contract. Had there been the required public hearing, a more equitable solution would have been likely.

It is time that in every way we look to protect the beneficial resources we are provided, to steward for the next generations as they were stewarded for ours. Locally and transparently approved with a reasonable contract period of three years for large scale water extraction makes good policy. Please vote “ought to pass” on LD 1111

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Bartovics
Chapter Volunteer Leader
Sierra Club Maine

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<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2020/05/01/nifa-impacts-saving-ogallala-aquifer-supporting-farmers#:~:text=Water%20pumped%20for%20irrigation%20from,than%20rainfall%20can%20replenish%20it.>