



SIERRA CLUB

MAINE CHAPTER

PO Box 3760
Portland, ME 04104
Phone: (207) 761-5616
www.sierraclub.org/maine

To: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee
From: Matt Cannon, Sierra Club Maine
Date: April 8, 2025
Re: Testimony in Support of L.D. 1241: An Act to Establish the Make Change for Wildlife Program to Support the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund.

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee,

I write 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 to balance both conservation and transitioning our economy to renewable energy. To that end, we urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on L.D. 1241.

In 1983, the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund ("the Fund") was created to help support the work of our state's biologists in bringing species back from the brink of extinction. The fund supports the conservation of Maine's most at-risk wildlife through population surveys, monitoring, and habitat conservation. As the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) will attest, this fund has been instrumental in some of our state's most famous conservation success stories, such as the recovery and delisting of Bald Eagles and the reintroduction of Peregrine Falcons.

However, the Fund's revenue has not kept up with the need. Per DIFW's report to this committee earlier this session, annual contributions to the Fund peaked in 1997 and have been declining annually in the decades since, plateauing in 2010.

L.D. 1241 is a bill designed to help us address this funding problem. This legislation would create the "Make Change for Wildlife" program in order to help generate voluntary contributions to benefit the Maine Endangered and Nongame Wildlife Fund. The idea is for businesses to collect customer contributions at the point-of-sale by offering customers the option to "round up" their purchases to the nearest dollar (or offer additional dollar amounts). The difference or additions would go directly to the Fund. In order to help incentivize participation, businesses have the option to deduct an amount equal to the funds voluntarily contributed by the taxpayer up to \$10,000 annually from state corporate income taxes.

Participating businesses would be equipped with information and marketing guidance from DIFW, and promoted by wildlife conservation nonprofits throughout the state. The goal of this program is to diversify contribution streams as current levels are inadequate in addressing the basic science and habitat conservation needs necessary to ensure healthy wildlife populations in Maine.

The world is experiencing a biodiversity crisis. Scientists at NatureServe¹ found that 34% of plants and 40% of animals are at risk of extinction, and 41% of ecosystems are at risk of range-wide collapse.¹ Unfortunately, only 20 percent of the country's more than 200,000 identified species have been evaluated for extinction risk, so the true total might be much higher. Per Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's (DIFW) recommendation, this committee added eight new species – five birds, one bat, one beetle, and one bee – to Maine's list of Endangered and Threatened Species in the 131st Legislature.² Currently, there are 57 listed species – and our committee should expect additional recommendations from DIFW in the coming years.

The Maine Endangered Species Act, or MESA, has been instrumental in protecting imperiled species in Maine since 1975. We know that every species plays a role in its ecosystem – when we lose species, it can cause ecological ripple effects that impact wildlife and humans. Biodiverse ecosystems help clean our air and water, pollinate crops, and regulate the climate—all for free. However, protecting the health of these systems requires time and money.

As our biodiversity crisis worsens and species' populations continue to drop, it is essential that we fund the work to protect our state's most vulnerable fish and wildlife. L.D. 1241 is one of several opportunities for us to help advance the work required of one of our state's bedrock environmental laws. I hope you will support this important initiative. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Matt Cannon
Sierra Club Maine Chapter
State Conservation & Energy Director

¹ <https://www.natureserve.org/bif>

² See LD 57 from the 131st Legislature, An Act to Amend Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species List.