



April 3, 2025

Senator Tim Nangle, Senate Chair

Representative Lydia Crafts, House Chair

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

c/o Legislative Information Office

100 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Testimony of **Friends of Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge (501c3)**
in Support of LD 956: Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to
Implement the Recommendation of the Calais Branch Rail Use Advisory Council to
Create a Multi-use Trail

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Transportation
Committee:

Friends of Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge (FOM) supports converting the
Rail Corridor in Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) into a multi-use trail
using the existing rail bed as long as the trail conversion is done 1) with collaborative

planning, 2) a priority on and adherence to environmental laws, including NEPA, and 3) active engagement of ALL stakeholders of the Refuge.

The Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge is a local and national treasure. It has been an international center for research on waterfowl and woodcock. The refuge has benefited and served its friends and neighbors for nearly 90 years economically, socially, educationally and spiritually. According to the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, *“The System was created to conserve fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats and this conservation mission has been facilitated by providing Americans opportunities to participate in compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, including fishing and hunting, on System lands and to better appreciate the value of and need for fish and wildlife conservation.”* Wildlife-dependent recreation is defined in the Act as *“a use of a refuge involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, or environmental education and interpretation.”*

FOM believes that allowing unnecessary motorized vehicles into the Refuge is inconsistent with the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge system and does not fall within the definition of *“wildlife-dependent recreation.”*

FOM has concerns about the following impacts of converting the rail corridor into an trail for motorized use: the loss, disturbance, disruption, and pollution of wetlands and essential wildlife habitat; the possible introduction of invasive species; the disruption of bird watching and hunting (in particular) by high-decibel ATV noise; the possibility that ATVs would leave the rail corridor and enter the Refuge’s federally-protected wild lands; oversight and maintenance concerns, including law enforcement, trash removal, and trail maintenance; and numerous ATV-related safety concerns.

The MNWR is a place where researchers, students, and the general public come to experience wilderness and learn about nature and wildlife. The University of Maine brings a field crew to the Refuge to train their students. Refuge visitors also come to jog, ski, hike, bird watch, ride their horses, walk their dogs, hunt, fish, camp, gaze at the dark night sky, and appreciate the myriad sights, sounds, and scents of the beautiful, wild Maine woods. In past years the public has harvested blueberries, timber, Christmas trees and deer. There's an annual fishing day for veterans, and a local high school has its yearly "run" at the Moosehorn so they don't have to risk running on Route 1. The international scouting camporee was held at the Refuge again this year, as it has for the past 42 years.

As a federally funded or federally influenced project, the proposed rail corridor conversion must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which mandates an assessment of environmental effects before proceeding with development. NEPA ensures that all environmental concerns are properly addressed and that mitigation strategies are implemented to minimize negative impacts.

These specific negative impacts and the NEPA Compliance and Mitigation strategies related to them include:

1. **HABITAT CONCERNS:** The Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding lands provide critical habitat for numerous species, including migratory birds, large mammals, amphibians, and plant communities that rely on undisturbed environments. The proposed multi-use trail may impact these species through:
 - Habitat fragmentation – The trail could disrupt natural corridors used by wildlife for movement and migration.

- Increased human activity - Noise and presence of motorized recreation may disturb sensitive species, particularly those in breeding or nesting seasons.
- Displacement of wildlife - Frequent human traffic could lead to changes in animal behavior, reducing habitat suitability for some species.

NEPA Compliance & Mitigation Strategies that should be undertaken:

- Conducting a Biological Assessment (BA) to evaluate potential impacts on threatened or endangered species.
- Implementing seasonal restrictions or buffer zones in critical habitats.
- Developing wildlife crossings or underpasses to maintain natural corridors.
- Using educational signage to inform trail users about wildlife sensitivity.

2. **TRAFFIC CONCERNS:** Rail corridors often traverse wetlands, streams, and other sensitive water systems. The introduction of increased foot, bike, and motorized traffic may lead to:

- Erosion and sedimentation - Soil degradation along the trail edges could lead to runoff, impacting local waterways.
- Contaminant introduction - Potential for pollutants from vehicle use or maintenance activities.
- Introduction or spread of invasive plant species, which could outcompete native vegetation and alter local ecosystems.

NEPA Compliance & Mitigation Strategies:

- Conducting a Hydrological Study to assess the impact on local watersheds.
 - Using erosion control measures such as gravel reinforcement, wooden boardwalks in wet areas, and strategic vegetation planting.
 - Implementing a stormwater management plan to reduce runoff and protect water resources.
 - Conducting an Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify sensitive plant species.
 - Routine monitoring and removal of invasive species along the corridor.
 - Reseeding disturbed areas with native plants to encourage ecological stability.
3. **CONCERNS ABOUT MOTORIZED USE:** motorized use of the corridor, particularly ATVs and snowmobiles, raises concerns regarding:
- Increased noise pollution affecting both wildlife and the visitor experience.
 - Air pollution from vehicle emissions in otherwise pristine environments.

NEPA Compliance & Mitigation Strategies:

- Conducting a Noise and Air Quality Impact Study to measure potential disturbances.

- Establishing designated motorized and non-motorized sections where feasible.
- Implementing noise reduction guidelines and vehicle restrictions in sensitive areas.

FOM wants to highlight that in compliance with NEPA regulations, this project opening the heart of the refuge to motorized traffic may require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) if it is determined to have significant environmental effects. This process will involve:

1. Public Scoping Meetings to gather input from local communities, conservation groups, and recreational stakeholders.
2. Preparation of a Draft EIS, evaluating alternative approaches and their environmental consequences.
3. Public Comment Period, allowing stakeholders to review and suggest modifications.
4. Final EIS and Record of Decision, determining whether and how the project proceeds.

SUMMARY: With collaborative planning, adherence to environmental laws, and active engagement of all stakeholders, FOM supports converting the Rail Corridor into an interim multi-use trail using the existing rail bed—provided that **environmental protections remain a priority, NEPA laws are rigorously followed, and ALL stakeholders of the Refuge are included in this process.**

Sincerely,

Eric Mauricette, President

Friends of Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge

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