Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony in Support of LD 2118

"An Act To Eliminate The Natural Areas Program And Reassign Certain Responsibilities Under The Program To The Department Of Inland Fisheries And Wildlife And To Amend The Law Governing Administration Of The Department Of Inland Fisheries And Wildlife, Bureau Of Resource Management"

January 27, 2026
Krysta West, Executive Director

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Krysta West. I am a resident of Readfield and am speaking today in support of LD 2118 on behalf of the Maine Forest Products Council.

As you are no doubt aware, we also spoke in favor of a similar bill last year to achieve the same outcome as the bill before you today. Following a series of productive meetings during the off session with the DIFW and other stakeholders, we are pleased to again return to support efforts to move the Maine Natural Areas Program from DACF to DIFW without changes pertaining to the regulatory authority of the program.

MFPC landowners have worked with MNAP staff for many years, assisting in locating and identifying many special plant species and natural areas. With the land certification movement, MNAP cataloging these plants and areas has been helpful to private landowners who are voluntarily protecting these sites as they make harvesting plans. Imperative to this collaborative relationship between MNAP and the landowners has been the understanding that plants of all sizes belong to the private landowner, as is the culture within the ACF department that works with the farming community. In a similar way, MNAP's mission is a natural fit with the culture and understanding in DIFW.

Landowners have increasingly participated in collaborative wildlife conservation planning with DIFW. This work is based on the fundamental understanding that the department's charge to manage and regulate wildlife owned by the State is done in wildlife habitat owned by the landowners. We believe the greatest wildlife conservation benefit will be achieved by collaborations that adhere to the balancing of public values with private landowner rights.

To help institutionalize the relocation of MNAP from DACF to DIFW, we would like to reiterate that we believe that the voluntary, non-regulatory functions of the Maine Natural Areas Program should be carried over to DIFW with an aim toward reducing duplicative work and to better fit within the expertise of the department.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this issue and would be glad to answer any questions you may have. We urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 2118.