



**Testimony before the
Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife
By Kaitlyn Bernard, Natural Resources Policy Advisor**

February 22, 2021

**RE: LD361 – An Act To Establish a Permanent Appointment of a Member of the
Wabanaki Tribes to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council**

Senator Dill, Representative Landry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Kaitlyn Bernard and I am the Natural Resources Policy Advisor for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of The Nature Conservancy **in support of LD 361**, An Act To Establish a Permanent Appointment of a Member of the Wabanaki Tribes to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council.

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit 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 leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

Too often when it comes to the decisions that affect their lands, waters, and livelihoods, Indigenous Peoples have been denied the opportunity to participate in meaningful ways. This results in the exclusion of important rights-holders from decision-making processes and in management approaches that do not consider the lessons and solutions offered by Indigenous Ecological Knowledge. As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, we believe that one of the most effective and enduring actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous People's voices, choices, and actions in natural resource stewardship. This is a major focus of TNC's work around the world.

LD 361 represents an opportunity to ensure representation of the Wabanaki Tribes and their important perspective to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council. This is a critical step to bring the vast experience and knowledge of Wabanaki people into discussions and decisions about Maine's natural resource laws and management which have direct impacts to their culture and livelihood.

The Nature Conservancy supports this effort to add a member to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council representing the Wabanaki Tribes. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.