



CITY OF BANGOR

Testimony in support of LD 1929 - An Act To Provide Assistance to Areas Severely Infested with Browntail Moths

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Aaron Huotari. I am the Public Works Director for the City of Bangor and I thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding LD 1929. The City of Bangor supports this legislation and encourages passage.

The City of Bangor has earned the Tree City, USA designation for the last 16 years. We budget and spend a great deal of money to maintain healthy trees, remove dead and dying trees, and plant new ones every year. A great number of these public assets are the target food for browntail moth, especially oak and fruit trees. Last year's infestation resulted in dozens, if not hundreds, of trees in Bangor being completely defoliated. Many trees appear to have bounced back with a second leafing out but the trees are severely stressed at this point. Another large outbreak this year is likely to result in a significant number of previously healthy trees dying off. This effects residents and visitors of the city as areas of vibrant growth become stark brown treescapes thereby decreasing property value and no longer providing cooling effects, air cleansing, and mind calming properties. If the browntail moth infestations aren't brought under control it will take the City of Bangor's tree ecosystem years to recover.

In addition to, and equally as important as, the effect on trees, is the effect on residents, visitors, and those who work in the City of Bangor. Last year browntail moths had a mild winter and favorable spring weather allowing a large number of pupae (caterpillars) to survive and thrive. The repeated molting of their skins, as they grew, released an untold number of toxic, barbed hairs into the air. These hairs fell on people visiting our parks, pedestrians travelling for work and fun, vehicle occupants who had their windows down, residents in their own yards, and employees who had to be outside to perform the essential functions of their work. Local healthcare providers were overwhelmed with requests for assistance with the incessant itching. Local pharmacies were overwhelmed with requests for the compounded ingredients that provide relief. Stores were sold out of the items that also provide relief, such as witch hazel, calamine lotion, Benadryl, etc. Employees were forced to work through the pain or take time off work to treat the symptoms. These hairs will maintain their toxicity and remain in our environment for up to three years.

The City of Bangor has initiated a plan to measure the extent of the infestation on public land and start the removal process through winter web clippings. This low impact effort is likely to be reinforced with pesticide application on high value, low risk properties in the spring. Many municipalities in the State of Maine do not have the resources that the City of Bangor possesses to combat the browntail moth. If the entire state does not begin to coordinate their efforts to eradicate the browntail moth, the work of one municipality is likely to be quickly undone by infestations working their way in from bordering land.

LD 1929 is a step in the direction of coordinating efforts statewide. We want to reiterate our support.

Thank you for your time. If there is any additional information we can provide, please feel free to contact us.

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