



**Testimony of the Environmental Priorities Coalition  
In Support of LD 983**

***An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Promote Land Conservation, Working  
Waterfronts, Water Access and Outdoor Recreation***

**April 26, 2021**

Good day Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Maureen Drouin, I am Executive Director of Maine Conservation Alliance, and I offer testimony on behalf of the Environmental Priorities Coalition in support of LD 983. Thank you to Senator Breen for being a champion of the Land for Maine's Future Program.

The Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) is a partnership of thirty-two conservation, environmental, and public health organizations. You can find the list of organizations at the bottom of this testimony. We represent over 100,000 members in Maine and work together to protect the good health, good jobs, and way of life that our environment provides. This year, LD 983 is one of only nine priority bills that are part of the EPC's shared legislative agenda. Investing in State Parks and LMF are essential in protecting Maine's natural legacy.

Maine's natural resources promote health, boost our economy, and offer climate solutions. While Mainers have always enjoyed outdoor recreation, the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn Mainers and visitors to the outdoors in record numbers, creating demand for recreational infrastructure like trails, parks, and boat launches. Outdoor places are providing a more important function than ever in the mental and physical health of Mainers.

Maine's 48 State Parks and Historic Sites in all 16 counties attract 2 million visitors each year to enjoy unparalleled beauty and recreational opportunities – from sandy beaches and scenic hiking trails to family camping. And 2020 broke all attendance records at our state parks.<sup>1</sup> The economic benefits of this visitation are impressive: State Parks generate \$100 million annually for Maine's economy. Yet they have an estimated \$50 million backlog of basic infrastructure

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/about/news/news.shtml?id=3933399>

maintenance. Antiquated facilities do not meet visitors' needs, placing us at a disadvantage to neighboring states.

The Land for Maine's Future Program secures public access to beloved mountains, lakes, rivers, and shorelines in all 16 counties by partnering with land trusts and communities.<sup>2</sup> But LMF funds are depleted, and we risk losing access to these special places. LD 983 would provide \$60,000,000 to LMF and \$20,000,000 for repairing state park infrastructure.

In addition to providing public access, LMF supports Maine's traditional industries—fishing, farming, forestry, and tourism—that depend upon Maine's extraordinary environment. To date, LMF has conserved 315,000 acres of working forest, 9,700 acres of productive farmland, and two dozen working waterfront sites from York to Lubec.

I am a member of the Climate Council's Natural and Working Lands Working Group, along with Senator Breen. Maine's natural and working lands and waters like forests, farmland, and wetlands are powerful climate tools. These lands slow down climate change by capturing carbon pollution and help protect our communities from flooding and erosion.

According to the state's Climate Action Plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, Maine's forests alone can remove an amount equal to at least 60% of the state's annual carbon emissions. Unfortunately, Maine loses approximately 10,000 acres of natural and working lands to development each year — a figure which is projected to grow in coming years.<sup>3</sup>

We are pleased that LD 983 includes a provision that requires the LMF Board to give “special consideration to projects that address climate change, resiliency and mitigation strategies that benefit natural ecosystems, wildlife and working waterfronts and farmland to adapt.”

It is important to note that LMF has been a highly successful and popular program since 1987 and **every dollar of LMF funding is matched by other funds**, at the local and/or federal level. This leveraging has enabled the program to maximize the value of state investment.

We now have a particularly good opportunity to leverage federal dollars. The Great American Outdoors Act, enacted by Congress last year, secured permanent and full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF, which is funded by oil and gas lease revenues, was established in 1964 to assist federal, state, and local governments in the acquisition and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lmf/projects.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/MaineWontWait\\_December2020.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov.future/files/inline-files/MaineWontWait_December2020.pdf)

development of public outdoor recreation opportunities and land conservation. LWCF makes \$900 million available annually to conserve working forests and ensure access to outdoor recreation for every American. Maine stands to draw as much as \$40 million per year from this federal program, and those funds require a match which LMF can provide.

The Land for Maine's Future program has long enjoyed strong bipartisan support from voters. Please give Maine voters the opportunity to approve funding for LMF and state parks by voting "ought to pass" on LD 983. Thank you.



Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) includes 32 environmental, conservation, public health, and community organizations who have joined together around a Common Environmental Agenda. The EPC works to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that our environment provides for all of us.

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