



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of
LD 993 - *An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine*
March 20, 2023

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

A broad-based community, MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities.

MOFGA certifies 535 organic farms and processing operations representing roughly \$90 million in sales and we are working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent.

LD 993 is important to MOFGA for many reasons, but especially important because, while all of our members want Maine to have healthy forest ecosystems, most of our farmers and many of our members have woodlots that they wish to manage in the spirit of organic land management practices. For more than two decades we have run a Low Impact Forestry Program, which is a group of loggers, foresters, landowners, farmers and interested persons teaching, practicing and advocating for ecologically-based and economically-sound forest practices. We practice and endorse forestry that seeks to reduce the known harmful impacts of logging, and promote the social and ecological benefits of Low Impact Forestry. The program hosts workshops year-round covering all sorts of forestry-related topics and collaborates on logging projects that explore creative forest management and contracts that benefit both landowner and logger. In fact, tomorrow we are sponsoring a webinar entitled, *Managing Forests for Carbon and Climate Change*, which will focus on climate resilience and adaptation, carbon sequestration and storage, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity, while also considering the benefits of local renewable resources to justice, equity, and human health.

MOFGA appreciates that LD 993 would organize a board in the spirit of many other Maine state entities such as the Marine Resources Advisory Council, which dates back to 1973. Other examples are the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Advisory Council, the Maine Climate Council, and the Water Resources Planning Committee. The Maine Forest Advisory Board would ensure that advice going to the Department of Forestry and other administrative departments would include input from stakeholders with demonstrated interest in forest ecology. We hope that the level of discussion would evolve so that environmental health would garner as much, if not more, consideration as do short-rotation market interests.



LD 993 would create an important forum for addressing the estimated loss of 10,000 acres of forestland each year, and the extensive spraying of carcinogenic herbicides over industrial, monoculture forestry operations. As we know from Governor Mills' climate report, *Maine Won't Wait*, Maine's forests are not only an essential component of our state economy, generating more than \$8.5 billion from forest products and \$3 billion from recreational activities annually, they are of global importance in protecting biodiversity. Our forests offer the habitat connectivity and varied topography that allow species to move and adapt to rising temperatures. The forests are home to 139 rare plants and animals, including 21 globally rare species, and hold the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the United States. Maine's 17.5 million acres of forests absorb 60% of our carbon pollution annually and we must ensure that the forest ecosystem is managed properly to meet the goal of carbon neutrality by 2045.

Mainers are fortunate to have great access to the citizen legislature and we appreciate the opportunity to discuss agriculture, conservation and forestry issues here with this honorable committee. We feel that a Maine Forest Advisory Board would provide an important complement to this legislative forum, allowing informed stakeholders with a broad range of expertise and opinions to help administrative departments prioritize projects, resource allocations, and rulemaking as those activities relate to forestry. The spectrum of interests that this bill includes would help educate Maine citizens about the challenges facing our forest health and economy.

Maine's Board of Pesticides Control (BPC) is an example of an advisory board that hosts regular public meetings and is structured to include diverse perspectives in decision making and prioritizing. Though MOFGA often has divergent opinions about BPC policies and decisions, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to attend meetings and provide input. We have attended nearly every meeting since the Board's inception.

Another forum that MOFGA regularly attends is the semi-annual meeting of the National Organic Standards Board. The NOSB is a great example of how an advisory board can work to ensure that administrative departments are held accountable to existing law. In this case, the NOSB works to provide recommendations to the USDA's National Organic Program staff to ensure that practices comply with the Organic Food Production Act. The board members represent a broad range of interests across the country and regularly host public meetings with input from hundreds, sometimes thousands, of stakeholders. This is a democratic process that promotes a thriving organic farming sector while ensuring that human health and environment do not take back seats to market interests.

At least 15 other states have established forest advisory boards. We hope you will support this bill so that Maine can broaden its awareness of the critical role that forests play in the health of our environment and so that we can work collaboratively to develop a thriving and sustainable forest economy.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer questions if you have any.