



# Maine Coast Heritage Trust

## *A Statewide Land Conservation Organization*

### **Testimony on LD 1969: An Act to Expand the Use of Funds to Support Land Conservation**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry committee, my name is Jeff Romano. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Maine Coast Heritage Trust in support of LD 1969.

Maine Coast Heritage Trust conserves and stewards Maine's coastal lands and islands for their renowned scenic beauty, ecological value, outdoor recreational opportunities, and contribution to community well-being. We provide statewide conservation leadership through our work with land trusts, coastal communities, and other partners. Over the past five decades, we have conserved more than 185,000 acres in Maine.

The Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program has effectively worked to conserve outdoor recreational areas and working landscapes in every corner of the state for nearly four decades. While LD 1969 has many sections, it would build upon LMF's record of success in the following three ways:

1. **Establishes the LMF Trust Fund.** This change would ensure all investment income from public and private dollars committed to LMF will stay with the program, expanding conservation opportunities. The LMF Trust Fund is also part of a broader effort to secure more consistent and regular LMF funding in the future, with a goal of relying less on either bonds or general fund appropriations. MCHT is working with partners to identify potential future funding sources. LD 1881, a bill we recently testified in support of in this committee, is one option. We hope to recommend other options over the next year.
2. **Redesigns the LMF Fund Structure.** There are currently four distinct programs within LMF: conservation and recreation, recreational water access, working waterfront, and working farmland. LD 1969 would move all four of these functions under the newly created LMF Trust Fund. In addition, the bill proposes a fifth program, focused on recreational infrastructure and wildlife habitat investments on existing municipal, state, and land trust conserved lands. This is an important change to ensure Maine's conserved lands are well managed for the long-term.
3. **Transfers what remains of the \$40 million appropriated in 2021 into the LMF Trust Fund.** When enacted two years ago, the legislature directed the LMF Board to spend no more than \$10 million per year for four years. By immediately moving what remains of these dollars into the LMF Trust Fund, future investment income will be able to expand the amount of money available to the LMF Board to fulfill its mandate for Maine people.

Thank you to Governor Mills and Senator Pierce for introducing this bill and to this Committee for your consideration of LD 1969 which seeks to bring sustainable funding and predictability to the popular and critical LMF program.

# Land for Maine's Future Plan

## LMF Trust Fund

### LMF Trust Fund Sources

- Remaining 2021 LMF funds
- Future GF appropriation (see LD 1285 below)
- Private voluntary contributions
- Compensation to meet Site Law (see LD 1881 below)
- Investment income
- Exploring other sources . . .

### LMF Trust Fund Expenditures

#### Land Acquisition Grants

- Existing LMF Priorities
- Conservation and Recreation
  - Water Access
  - Working Waterfront
  - Farmland

- New LMF Priority
- Land Management – new competitive grant program focused on investments in public outdoor recreational areas and wildlife habitat management

#### LD 1285: LMF Authorization Sen. Black

Would fund LMF in FY 25/26 and FY 26/27 at \$10 million/year from General Fund, effectively extending current \$40 million appropriation by \$20 million and two years.

#### LD 1881: Mitigation Rep. Landry

New wildlife habitat compensation funding program for solar, wind, and transmission corridor developers to meet existing Site Law compensation requirements related to wildlife habitat. New authority for compensation related to solar development of high value ag lands.