

TESTIMONY OF R. ALEC GIFFEN
DIRECTOR, MAINE FOREST SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
IN SUPPORT OF
LD 1914

AN ACT TO EXTEND THE TIME ALLOWED FOR OUTCOME-BASED FORESTRY
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE
ON AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

DATE OF HEARING: 30 May 2007

PRESENTED BY: Senator Nutting (Governor's Bill)

Senator Nutting, Representative Pieh, members of the Committee, I am Alec Giffen, Director of the Maine Forest Service, and I am testifying in support of LD 1914.

During the forest policy ferment of the 1990's, the Legislature enacted An Act to Promote Outcome-based Forest Policy. This law called for MFS to engage with landowners and evaluate the feasibility of outcome-based forestry - that is, "a science-based, voluntary process to achieve agreed-upon economic, environmental and social outcomes in the state's forests, as an alternative to prescriptive regulation, demonstrating measurable progress towards achieving statewide sustainability goals and allowing landowners to use creativity and flexibility to achieve objectives, while providing for the conservation of public trust resources and the public values of forests".

This legislation specified a sunset date which the 122nd Legislature extended for one year, to July 1, 2007. Our previous reports to this committee provide greater detail about our experiences to date. At an earlier meeting, Jill provided you with our most recent report, which we submitted in January.

We have had some success in recent discussions with a large landowner, and we hope we are very close to drafting an agreement. In fact, if you enact this legislation, we hope to have an agreement in place by the end of this year. We also have had productive discussions with another landowner, but we are still in the early stages and cannot forecast an outcome on these discussions. As required by statute, we intend to engage our technical working group on this topic before finalizing an agreement.

Aside from the extension of the sunset date, the one significant change we propose to the existing statute is to eliminate the acreage cap on agreements. The current statute limits agreements on a single area to 100,000 acres.

All of the landowners we have talked to are interested in managing all of their lands under one management system, not two. These landowners consider it inefficient to establish a separate agreement governing management of a relatively small percentage of their ownerships. Based on our discussions, we consider it unlikely that we will be able to close a successful agreement if the acreage cap remains in place. We ask that you support this change.

We hope that you will give this bill favorable consideration.

I would be happy to try to answer any questions you have either now or at work session.