

# Support for Majority Report on LD 837, An Act Clarifying the Laws Establishing the Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry

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In all the discussion about the details of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Department, it's important not to lose sight of the unifying vision that's behind this merger. The overarching mission of the ACF Department is to conserve and manage Maine's land resources, in much the same way that Marine Resources oversees coastal resources and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife watches out for inland fish and wildlife populations and habitats.

Within the ACF Department, there are bureaus, divisions, boards and programs that focus on specific ways to conserve and manage public lands, farms, forests, parks, animal health and much more. Creating a management team consisting of the commissioner and four bureau directors will insure diverse expertise, healthy debate and thoughtful decision-making on the variety of land management issues that face our state. The merged ACF Department balances private land management with public land interests. It combines the knowledge, experience and resources to conserve and manage all our land resources in one department.

We think our combined future is bright and full of opportunities to advance and to innovate, including:

- Finding more resilient markets for agriculture commodities.
- Increasing support for the local food movement and greater understanding of its importance.
- Keeping Maine's forests strong and the markets for wood active, despite the great economic upheaval of recent years.
- Finding new ways to bring Maine citizens and visitors to the state's wonderful parks.
- Insuring outdoor recreation remains a vital part of rural economies.
- Continuing to seek conservation easements of forest and farm land, which provide unprecedented recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

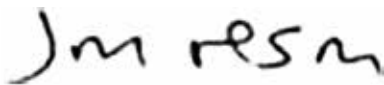
As amended, LD 837 balances public land, forestry, agriculture, and land use planning, and creates avenues to allow all voices to be heard. Conservation and commercial production are not separate or conflicting concepts. They are intrinsically linked because both are essential to the wise management of Maine's land resources. We already have concrete examples of how this approach works, such as the Bureau of Public Lands managing easements on about a million acres of private working forest land, and the public soil and water conservation districts helping generations of farmers.

The new structure addresses our common concerns about proper resource planning (i.e. LUPC and forest inventory analysis); insect and disease monitoring (i.e. spruce budworm and pesticide oversight), and, of course, fire protection. The people who perform these important services will see more opportunities as we find synergies and better utilize staff in a time of budget reductions.

Through many hours of discussion, the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee members tried very hard to address stakeholders' concerns. They were open to ideas and input from many diverse interest groups. Even though some groups elected to attack the process rather than fully participate in it, we believe the merged department will better conserve and manage Maine's land resources, and will continue to listen to stakeholders.

We've come a long way and this is not the time to turn back. We urge you to support LD 837 as amended by the majority of the Joint Select Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Thank you for your support,



Jon Olson, Executive Secretary  
Maine Farm Bureau



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Small Woodland Association of Maine



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