Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony in Support of LD 379
"An Act to Protect Wildfire Planning and Preparedness Data"

February 27, 2025
Krysta West, Deputy Director

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the ACF Committee. My name is Krysta West. I live in Readfield and am testifying today on behalf of the Maine Forest Products Council in support of LD 379, "An Act to Protect Wildfire Planning and Preparedness Data."

For 65 years, the Maine Forest Products Council has served as the voice of Maine's forest economy, representing more than 300 members from all facets of the forest products industry. Our members include pulp and paper mills, sawmills, secondary wood processors, foresters, loggers and truckers. We also represent commercial landowners managing more than 8 million acres of forestland.

As a side note, if you would like to learn more about our members, and the innovative products they are manufacturing from Maine's forests, you are invited to join us on March 18 at our office across town for a breakfast expo event. Legislators are welcome to come and go between 7-8:30 am. We will have products ranging from wood fiber-based firefighting foam to drum sticks on display. There will even be a logging truck! Please join us to speak directly with our members and to learn more about the future of the forest products industry in Maine. An invitation is attached to my testimony.

The bill before you today, LD 379, is important because it protects information necessary for the Maine Forest Service to swiftly and effectively respond to wildfires. In Maine, 94% of the forest land is privately owned[1], making access to private information essential for MFS to carry out its mission of "protecting Maine's forest resources from the effects of fire, insects, disease and misuse.[2]" When there is a significant forest fire in Maine, loggers, truckers, road construction operators, foresters and landowners work closely with the Maine Forest Service as a team to prevent the dangerous escalation of fires.

Information provided to the Maine Forest Service for wildfire planning and response efforts includes gate combinations, points of contact, equipment ownership information, proprietary business information and more. It also includes personal contact information for local emergency responders, contractors and land managers and proprietary information about management plans. This information, which is provided on a voluntary basis, is critical for emergency response planning purposes. Those providing that information, whether it be private landowners, municipalities, fire departments, etc., should have the assurance that this information is protected from public requests under the Freedom of Access Act. There is no reason for the public to have access to information of this nature.

We would like to thank the Maine Forest Service for bringing this proposal forward. It highlights their commitment to collaboration and its sensitivity to the handling of confidential information. Please vote 'Ought to Pass'. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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[1] https://www.maine.gov/ifw/programs-resources/outdoor-partners-program/explore.html#:~:text=Roughly%2094%25%20of%20Maine's%20forest,is%20open%20to%20the%20public.
[2] https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/about/index.shtml