Maine Forest Products Council

The voice of Maine's forest economy

Testimony Neither For Nor Against
LD 1308

"Resolve, Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Establish a Working Group to Explore Opportunities to Maintain Public Access of Land"

April 2, 2025
Krysta West, Deputy Director

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I'm Krysta West of Readfield, Maine and I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Forest Products Council today 'neither for nor against' LD 1308, "Resolve, Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Establish a Working Group to Explore Opportunities to Maintain Public Access of Land."

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. While supplying much of the fiber to sustainably support an $8.1 billion forest products industry, our members also provide public access to these privately owned and managed forestlands that support Maine's $2.8 billion outdoor recreation industry[1].

While we respect the intent of the bill, we have a number of concerns to highlight as you consider this piece of legislation.

1) Maine's commercial landowners have long honored and respected our tradition of open access to private land. Although it often comes at an added cost of doing business, our members remain committed to supporting Maine's rural communities through active forest management and access to traditional recreation.

   That said, Maine's 14,000 miles of groomed snowmobile trails[2], 6,000 miles of ATV trails[3], hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking and other recreational opportunities depend on access to all types of land. This access is provided by a variety of landowner types – commercial forestland owners, small private woodland owners, ENGOs, land trusts, etc. Land access is not a north vs south issue. For that reason, we strongly believe that it would be a mistake to single out one landowner class for issues that impact all private landowner types in every region of the state.

[1] https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/sports/outdoors/outdoor-recreation-industry-maine-billions-economy/97-7a510e24-5f69-4f73-b47e-c0316c9ac198
[2] https://www.maine.gov/ifw/atv-snowmobile/snowmobile/index.html
[3] https://www.maine.gov/ifw/atv-snowmobile/atv/governors_task_force.html

2) The largest threat to commercial forestland access in Maine right now is two bills that are being considered by this committee - LD 19 and LD 341. As a representative of 8 million acres of privately managed commercial forestland, I would like to take this opportunity to again state our strong opposition to these proposals. Increasing the weight limit for oversized ATVs would run counter to the recommendations of the recent task that included representation from all sectors of the ATV community.

   If the committee does decide to move this bill forward, we would urge you to either vote 'ONTP' on those bills, or carry them over to allow time for this working group to discuss this consequential issue within the context of access as a whole.

3) While we appreciate the Department's commitment to private landowner relations, we feel strongly that any group of this kind needs to be balanced with ample landowner input and participation.

4) We question if the mission of this bill would be best served by the Landowners and Land Users Relations Advisory Board[4]. Established by statute in 2015, this board has a number of duties including to: "Propose changes to or advise the commissioner on landowner-related laws, rules, department policies and other significant landowner and land user issues." Membership of this board includes representatives from large and small ownerships, a farmer, three representatives who hunt, fish or trap, two outdoor recreationists, two environmental organizations and one member from a land trust organization.

Finally, it would make sense for DIFW to research and report on the needs and barriers to public access on private land to first determine if there is a problem before we try to solve it. Also, as a side note, MFPC and Maine Woodland Owners are co-hosting a panel discussion on the public use of private land on April 15 at our office for legislators and members of the executive branch. Panelists will include Commissioner Camuso, Matt Stedman from MSA and Jessica Leahy from UMaine's School of Forest Resources. We would encourage you all to attend!

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[4] https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/12/title12sec10157.html