



PRESS RELEASE

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Environmental Groups Praise Maine Legislature

Coalition pleased with legislative session, despite disappointment about conservation bonds

Groups applaud legislators' unity in defending Maine's conservation and energy efficiency efforts in 2015

(AUGUSTA) While this year's legislative session was filled with many astonishing moments, the state's leading environmental organizations say it's no surprise that legislators came together in support of Maine's water, land, and wildlife on almost every vote. The Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), a coalition of 31 organizations representing over 100,000 members, praised lawmakers this week for working collaboratively throughout the 2015 session to preserve many of the state's core environmental protections and create opportunities to grow Maine's energy efficiency and natural resource-based industries.

Beth Ahearn, Policy Director for the Maine Conservation Alliance and convener of the EPC, stated, "We are pleased that Maine legislators rejected most of Governor LePage's harmful proposals and political games, choosing instead to support policies that create energy security and preserve Maine's water, land and wildlife for long-term enjoyment and economic potential. This session certainly magnified the fact that the governor is out of sync with Maine people in his vision for Maine's natural resource-based economy. Maine legislators mostly got it right - common sense and forward-thinking energy and conservation policies benefit us all."

Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition announced nine priority bills early in the session. Six were decided in favor of the coalition's position, including defeating new mining rules, restoring investments in energy efficiency, protecting the safety of lake water, updating the Endangered and Threatened Species List, advancing opportunities to build Maine's solar economy, and rejecting unsustainable timber harvesting and the slashing of Forest Service resources in the governor's budget.

Metallic Mining Rules (LD 750):

Mining rules that EPC partners called "far too weak and a threat to water quality and public health" were defeated 109-39 in the House and 26-8 in the Senate.

Senator Cathy Breen (D-Cumberland) stated, "The Environment and Natural Resources Committee worked hard on the latest version of Maine's mining rules. At the end of the day, however, these rules did not adequately protect Maine's clean water. They also left Maine taxpayers vulnerable to the enormous clean-up costs of a potential mine failure. I was pleased that the rules were resoundingly rejected by the legislature."

"Brook trout and clean water -- and the thousands of jobs they support -- are worth much more to Maine than mining ever could be." said Nick Bennett, Staff Scientist for the Natural Resources Council of Maine. "Mining in Maine should only happen if it won't harm our proven job-creating industries, such as fishing, tourism, and guiding. Legislators saw that the 2015 version of the mining rules would threaten these industries, and they wisely rejected the rules by overwhelming margins."

"Maine's lakes and rivers are certainly ecologically significant, and our sporting heritage is central to our state culture," said Jennifer Brophy, president of the Maine Sporting Camp Association, registered Maine guide, and

licensed water resources engineer. "Any changes to the mining rules must protect Maine's valuable clean water resource from chemicals that leach into the ground from mining operations."

Energy Efficiency (LD 1215):

A bill to replace an erroneously omitted word ("and") in the 2013 Omnibus Energy law was passed overwhelmingly by both House and Senate. The governor vetoed the bill but the legislature unanimously overrode the veto. As a result of the correction, Maine prevented up to \$38 million in cuts to energy efficiency programs for homes and businesses.

Assistant House Majority Leader Sara Gideon (D-Freeport) sponsored the legislation that came to be known as the "clean fix bill". Gideon stated, "This is about more than the \$38 million in funding. This is about Maine families keeping warm in the winter, companies both large and small taking advantage of energy savings, predictability in our energy policy, and growing good jobs in our fledgling clean energy sector. It's about making the most of the fact that the cheapest form of energy is the energy we don't consume. Each one of us – Democrats, Republicans and Independents – was united in honoring the intent of the 2013 Omnibus Energy law."

"There is a huge opportunity to save money while we save energy," said Dylan Voorhees, Clean Energy Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine. "This decisive victory sends a strong message from the legislature to the Public Utilities Commission that Maine is serious about maximizing savings with energy efficiency."

Bob Howe, President of the Maine Association of Building Efficiency Professionals stated, "Restoring the missing 'and' could be worth \$38 million in funding for Efficiency Maine's programs. These are programs that help Maine businesses and homeowners reduce their energy costs and keep people employed in a wide range of jobs, such as performing air sealing and installing insulation in homes, replacing inefficient lighting and motors in manufacturing plants, and replacing old, inefficient heating systems with newer, more efficient ones in homes and businesses."

Lake Water Protection (LD 568 and LD 713):

According to a study by the University of Maine, lakes contribute more than \$3.5 billion annually to Maine's economy and sustain 52,000 jobs. But there is strong evidence that the water quality of Maine lakes and ponds is experiencing widespread, measurable declines. A bill to require a 25-foot setback from the lake shore for the application of fertilizer (LD 568) was passed and became law without the governor's signature. The EPC priority lakes bill (LD 713) was carried over and the Environment and Natural Resources Committee sent a letter to the Maine Municipal Association and Maine Lakes Society urging them to create a working group to examine the causes of, and possible solutions for, non-compliance with lake protection regulations in order to preserve the health and economic benefits of Maine's lakes and ponds. The working group will report back to the committee next year.

Representative Gary Hilliard (R-Belgrade), sponsor of LD 713, stated, "I am pleased with this outcome. I believe that the study group that has been convened can have an outstanding positive effect on lake water quality going forward. The group will review compliance with Maine's Shoreland Zoning Act and provide training and support for code enforcement officers relative to those issues - at no cost to towns or the state. I believe this is another step forward to protecting one of our states great resources."

Maggie Shannon, Advocacy Director for the Maine Lakes Society, added "We asked Representative Hilliard to introduce this bill because statewide water quality declines are being accelerated by changing climate conditions. Noncompliance and inconsistent enforcement are frequently reported by lake stewards. If true, these issues need to be corrected; that's the intent of LD 713. Now, 40% budget cuts to revenue sharing with Maine municipalities leave towns holding the bag for enforcing Shoreland Zoning with even less funds to do so. Jeopardizing the people's \$3.5 billion resource is irresponsible in the extreme."

Peter Lowell, Executive Director of the Lakes Environmental Association (LEA) in Bridgton stated, "Maine lakes will benefit from this legislature's commitment to water quality protection. Maine LEA and others have been working to advance lake testing and lake science. Equally important is keeping land use standards calibrated to current conditions. This analysis of non-compliance with Maine's lake protection laws will go a long ways towards achieving that."

Endangered and Threatened Species List (LD 807):

Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species List is considered a critical tool for maintaining Maine's biodiversity and educating the public, but it hadn't been updated since 2007. Supporting the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife proposal, lawmakers added six new species to the list, including three kinds of bats.

Susan Gallo, a wildlife biologist representing Maine Audubon said in her testimony at the public hearing, "We recognize that (department) biologists are dedicated to the conservation of our state's wildlife and they know more than anyone about the status and future of each of these species in Maine. We strongly support and commend their efforts to update the Maine Endangered and Threatened Species List."

Harriet Van Vleck, a homeowner from Bowdoinham said, "Adding these endangered bats to the list will help draw attention to the bat's rapidly diminishing population and their important role in our ecosystem."

"We commend the Legislature for its support of at-risk species and the critical role they play in Maine's biodiversity," said Jenn Burns Gray, Staff Attorney and Advocate for Maine Audubon. "The Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee did an excellent job focusing on the science and then unanimously endorsing these important updates to Maine's endangered species list."

Solar Power and Energy Security (LD 1263):

The solar incentive bill became a Resolve that sets up a process for the Maine Public Utilities Commission and stakeholders to engage in ongoing discussions about Maine's solar policies. The goal is to develop and bring back to the legislature a specific solar policy that works for utilities and solar advocates while capturing the value solar power offers ratepayers.

"Maine has the potential to reap great benefits from a powerful, abundant and clean energy source: the sun. If we're going to take full advantage of solar power, we have to make best use of the rapidly evolving technology in this area," said Gideon, the bill's sponsor. "Because of the bipartisan work of the legislature, we have a way to bring together stakeholders to build a comprehensive solar policy for Maine. It's what we need to make the most of our potential."

"Maine remains the only state in New England without a specific policy on solar, thanks mostly to opposition by the Governor and electric utilities," said Voorhees. "However solar power is rapidly becoming an irresistible energy choice with multiple benefits for energy security, jobs and the environment. Now is the time for stakeholders to sit down and agree on a solar policy for Maine before we fall further behind."

Forest Rangers and Public Lands (LD 1019):

The governor's proposed budget would have decreased the number of forest rangers with law enforcement authority by 90%, meaning that essential environmental laws and regulations that protect Maine's forests and water would have gone virtually unenforced. The governor's budget also would have merged the Bureau of Parks and Lands with the Maine Forest Service – agencies with very different management objectives. The legislature rejected these provisions in the governor's budget.

"Time and time again this session, Democrats, Republicans and Independents came together to support good policy," said House Majority Leader Jeff McCabe, D-Skowhegan. "We rejected the governor's efforts to overcut public lands and divert their resources towards unrelated purposes. We protected the independence of the Bureau of Parks and Lands and the ability of forest rangers to enforce laws around sustainable forestry. We stood up for conservation, natural resources-based jobs and rural Maine because we, as a legislature, understand their importance to our state."

Eliza Donoghue, North Woods Policy Advocate and Outreach Coordinator stated: "Hats off to the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee for working together to nearly unanimously reject the Governor's proposed budget. Our Public Reserved Lands are an incredible asset to Maine people and wildlife and should not be managed for maximum financial extraction. The Committee saw straight through the Governor's proposal and came together with a truly admirable, bipartisan budget that protects the values held by the EPC."

The governor's refusal to release Land for Maine's Future bonds was one of the biggest environmental battles of the session. The bonds were approved by voters in 2010 and 2012 but have been used repeatedly as a bargaining chip by the governor. Senator Roger Katz (R-Kennebec) submitted a bill (LD 1378) to clarify that the governor's role in issuing bonds is simply to affirm the will of the voters. Katz's bill was passed by an overwhelming majority but subsequently vetoed by Governor LePage.

On the last day of the session the Senate voted to override the governor's veto of LD 1378 but the House fell five votes short of an override amidst rumors of threats, intimidation, and misinformation being conveyed by the administration. Lawmakers did pass a separate bill (LD 1454) in both the House and Senate directing that the Land for Maine's Future funds be released for three dozen projects that are currently in limbo because of the governor's inaction.

Ahearn added, "The LePage administration has continually attempted to roll back conservation policies, dismantle departments, and undermine our renewable energy economy while missing opportunities to take full advantage of Maine's great natural resource potential. The governor's environmental agenda this year was certainly more of the same. But Maine people spoke up strongly and legislators listened, united, and voted against these attacks. We are pleased that lawmakers continue to show strong non-partisan stewardship of our water, land, and wildlife that can move Maine forward thoughtfully and responsibly. We owe that to our children and grandchildren."

Three EPC priorities – all bonds - have been carried over until the 2016 legislative session. If passed by the legislature in 2016, Maine voters will decide whether to invest in improving the energy efficiency of Maine's aging housing stock (LD 1341), repairing old and often dangerous stream crossings (LD 1069), and supporting new conservation opportunities through the Land for Maine's Future Program (LD 1248).

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Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition is a partnership of 31 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations representing over 100,000 members who want to protect the good health, good jobs and quality of life that our environment provides for all of us.

2015 Organizational Members of the Environmental Priorities Coalition:

Acadia Center • Appalachian Mountain Club • Atlantic Salmon Federation • Bicycle Coalition of Maine • Conservation Law Foundation • Environmental Health Strategy Center Environment Maine • Friends of Casco Bay • Islesboro Island Trust • Maine Association of Conservation Commissions • Maine Audubon • Maine Center for Economic Policy • Maine Conservation Alliance • Maine Council of Churches • Maine Council of Trout Unlimited • Maine Interfaith Power and Light • Maine Lakes Society • Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association • Maine People's Alliance • Maine Rivers • Maine Wilderness Guides Organization • Natural Resources Council of Maine • Physicians for Social Responsibility-Maine Chapter • RESTORE: The North Woods • Sierra Club, Maine Chapter • The Ocean Conservancy • The Trust for Public Land • The Wilderness Society • Toxics Action Center • Upstream • 350 Maine