

LD 1124 - An Act To Amend the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant Process

Testimony in Opposition

March 25, 2019

Good Morning Senator Dill, Representative Nadeau and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

My name is Tom Abello with the Governor's Office.

The Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund (also known as MOHF) was established in July, 1995 after a citizen's initiative to add a conservation game to the state lottery generated more than 53,000 signatures. Due to the strong support among Maine residents, the Legislature enacted the proposal into law, by-passing the need for a vote in the November, 1995 election.

The fund is for the sole purpose of maintaining, improving and expanding state and local natural resource conservation programs and associated compatible public uses. It supplements sources and levels of funding appropriated and allocated by the Legislature to natural resource agencies. Revenue is generated exclusively by a dedicated \$1 instant lottery ticket distributed by the Maine State Lottery.

Natural resources agencies may contract with nongovernmental organizations and individuals. These partnerships are strongly encouraged and are enforced by the funds scoring process.

Funds are expended in four general categories:

- 1: Fishery, wildlife, and habitat (35%);
- 2: Acquisition and management of public lands, parks, wildlife conservation areas and public access and outdoor recreation sites and facilities (35%)
- 3: Endangered and threatened species (15%);
- 4: Natural resources law enforcement and protection of public health (15%)

The board consists of 7 members. The Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the Coordinator of the Natural Areas Program are permanent members. The Governor appoints the remaining 4 members.

The Board's voting practice is consistent with generally accepted practices among other state agencies including the Land for Maine Future's Board. In 2002, a review from the AG's office concluded there is no conflict of interest for public board members to vote on an agency project.

Applicants are non-profit conservation organizations, universities, and state agencies whose proposals must be sponsored by a designated natural resource agency. Applicants may submit their proposals independently or in partnership with other entities. Partnerships are strongly encouraged as demonstrated in the scoring process.

In addition to our state agencies receiving funding, scores of non-governmental organizations have received funding from MOHF. The impact of these grants reaches well beyond the scope of these agencies alone.

Over the past twenty-three years, the Heritage Fund has awarded approximately \$20 million to over 145 different organizations not including state agencies. Since 2008, Of these awards 56% has been awarded to private organizations and 44% to state natural resource agencies. Attached in your packet is a copy of the latest annual report of the fund.

The program clearly has provided a great impact on Maine's conservation and wildlife and the process has worked very well encouraging partnerships between non-governmental organizations and state agencies. This was the original intent of the program and it has worked extremely well over the years. A change to the process as suggested in the bill would reduce the amount of funding for wildlife and conservation projects initiated by state agencies by over 50% as well as discourage the partnerships that the program has promoted since 1995.

It is because of this, that we are in opposition to this bill.

Thank you for your time. Please let me know if you have any questions.