29 June 2017

The 128th Legislature of the State of Maine
State House
Augusta, ME

Dear Honorable Members of the 128th Legislature:

Under the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of the State of Maine, I am hereby vetoing LD 586, “An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study the Public Reserved Lands Management Fund.”

This bill will place significant burdens on the Bureau of Public Lands (BPL) and will create uncertainty for logging contractors with the state. Maine’s public lands are certified as well-managed by two independent, third-party forest certification standards. Our BPL managers are dedicated public servants who carry out their responsibilities in a professional manner every day they show up to work. This bill sends a message to these hard-working people that they are not doing a good job. I strongly disagree with this assumption, and that is why I am vetoing this bill.

There are many sections of this bill I would like to address. The requirement to complete a forest inventory every five years is unnecessary. BPL completed a forest inventory in 2016 that verified BPL’s harvest targets.

My primary concern in this bill is the attempt by the Legislature to micromanage and curtail BPL’s road-building efforts without any good reason. The bureau recently changed the way it contracts out logging services. The new system of contracting for logging services has been a net benefit to the state and is more transparent to the public compared to road-building costs that were hidden in lower stumpage price payments to the bureau. The new system brings in more revenue, which pays for everything else that Maine people like about our public lands, such as trails, accessibility and campsites. If no roads are built, then there will be less revenue for the state to pay for these important things.

LD 586 also taps into the Public Reserved Lands Management Fund to create an educational grant program for forestry and logging training. While I support the logging industry, it is not appropriate to take funds from public lands to pay for it. The Legislature just recently allocated money to create a new logger-training program in the community college system. Since that program is just getting started, we should wait to see if it is working before we spend more money.
Studying areas of insufficient access is unnecessary; BPL already addresses these issues when a problem arises. The bureau is also working to consolidate its ownerships that are held in common with others. This creates more land that the public can enjoy.

The bill directs BPL to develop a list of recreational infrastructure and ADA projects and provide it to its oversight committee for review. This duplicates work already done by BPL to gather public input and address issues locally as resources permit. This bill substitutes the committee’s judgement over that of the local public who use the public lands. BPL listens to the people in the field every day, and this bill will replace this policy with a centralized process that requires people to travel long distances to Augusta to make their case to the committee. In addition, the appropriation in this bill will not be enough to do the work properly.

Finally, the bill directs the BPL to review its bid process. This is duplicative and unnecessary; the bureau has already worked out the contracting process with the Bureau of Purchases. There is nothing to gain from another review.

The uncertainty and red tape that is in this bill will have negative impacts BPL’s ability to properly manage public lands. We need to let the experts at the bureau continue their careful stewardship of our precious natural resources without the micromanagement of legislative committees.

For these reasons, I return LD 586 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Sincerely,

Paul R. LePage
Governor