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 8, “An Act To Provide Training for Forest Rangers To Carry Firearms,” because it is unnecessary and costly.

The Maine Forest Service has mitigated risks associated with Forest Ranger duties to an acceptable level through extensive training, carefully selecting Ranger candidates and monitoring behaviors. Managing the risks associated with the Rangers’ law enforcement activities have been approached in the same way. Rangers are trained and mandated to avoid and defuse obvious conflict situations.

This bill contradicts the Administration’s efforts to tone down the law enforcement aspects of the Forest Ranger’s duties and focus them on protecting Maine’s forests from fire. Forest Ranger incident reports clearly indicate that the Rangers are not routinely in harm’s way during the performance of their normal duties. The Maine Forest Service has strengthened its policies to minimize the risk that Rangers will encounter dangerous situations.

LD 8’s appropriation grossly understates the costs to the taxpayers of this state. In addition to the costs of training and acquiring firearms, Maine taxpayers will bear the costs of reclassifying Forest Rangers to include their new responsibilities, all to the tune of $500,000 per year. This will add significantly to the cost of this bill, year after year. The Legislature should be honest and show the full cost of passing this bill to Maine taxpayers.

I would rather focus Forest Service time, energy and resources to ensure they hire and retain individuals who have high aptitude, possess good, sound judgment and decision-making skills, can maintain their composure under stress and treat all people with courtesy and respect.

Make no mistake, this bill is a game changer. It will forever alter the culture in the Maine woods. This bill will increase the risks to our Rangers because force likely will be met with force. Firearms will escalate the tensions between Rangers and individuals they encounter while doing their duty. The cautious use of discussion to resolve an issue will be replaced by the force of a gun or other weapon. I cannot support this.

For these reasons, I return LD 8 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Sincerely,

Paul R. LePage
Governor