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GOVERNOR

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AUGUSTA, MAINE
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July 13, 2021

The 130th Legislature of the State of Maine
State House
Augusta, Maine

Dear Honorable Members of the 130th Legislature:

By the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of the State of Maine, I am hereby vetoing L.D. 1549, *An Act to Establish the Maine Forestry Advisory Board*.

L.D. 1549 would create a 21-member Forest Advisory Board to advise the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (Department) on a variety of forestry issues, conditions, and trends, and to provide input on the state forest action plan.

While the goals of this bill are admirable, in practice, it is redundant to the work and stakeholder engagement already conducted by the Department.

Maine is fortunate to have a variety of strong, diverse stakeholders engaged in forestry, silviculture, conservation, wildlife, and recreation. These conservation-oriented nonprofits, academics, agencies, and other interested parties have a proven track record of working collaboratively on issues of common concern. The Department currently works with many of these entities in dozens of councils, advisory groups, research projects, and boards across the State. The Department greatly values these ongoing opportunities for engagement and relies on the expertise of its partners regularly.

A good example is the Spruce Budworm Task Force, which was formed to prepare the State for the impending spruce budworm outbreak. Over a series of months, this diverse group developed a sound plan to respond to an outbreak in Maine's forest community.

It is not clear what new value, protections, or benefits L.D.1549's new advisory board would offer, nor is it clear what specific issue it needs to solve. This uncertainty is reflected in the Committee Report (7-6 ONTP) and the lack of consensus on floor votes in the House and Senate.

This bill would also have a fiscal impact on the Department to staff, manage, and facilitate meetings, and yet the fiscal note was eliminated before enactment. The Department does not have the additional capacity or discretionary funds to support activities as described in the bill. By



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comparison, Minnesota has a similar Board to that which is envisioned in L.D. 1549. The Minnesota Forest Resource Council has five full-time staff members and an annual budget of \$847,000. If the Legislature wishes to establish new programs and services, it must also provide the funding they will require.

It is important to note that Maine has a comprehensive set of forest practices laws that address sustainable forestry, clearcutting, shoreland harvesting, liquidation harvesting, and other activities that have resulted in an abundant, well-managed forest resource. In addition, more than half of Maine's forest lands are certified to one or more major forest certification standards; landowners implement Best Management Practices on close to 90 percent of timber harvests monitored annually; and Maine now has a forest inventory system in place that tracks the condition of the forest in close to real-time. These are significant improvements over the forest practices that were in place in the 1990s.

The goal of having Maine's forest practices be transparent, informed by experts, and conforming to state-of-the-art procedures is one I share. However, the formation of a new board that duplicates existing functions is inefficient, expensive, and simply not necessary. For these reasons, I return L.D. 1549 unsigned and vetoed. I urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Respectfully,



Janet T. Mills
Governor



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