

OPPOSE

LD 1249 – An Act To Require the Land for Maine’s Future Fund To Expend Funds for Deer Wintering Areas

Sponsor: Senator THOMAS of Somerset

Co-Sponsors: Representatives Cray of Palmyra, Davis of Sangerville, Dunphy of Embden, Gifford of Lincoln, Long of Sherman, and Senators Martin of Kennebec and Thibodeau of Waldo

Summary: This bill requires 25% of the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) Fund to be used for the purchase and maintenance of deer wintering areas.

Explanation: This bill would mandate that 25% of LMF funds be used for a single type of land purchase, regardless of the land conservation priorities and opportunities reflected in proposed applications. This restrictive earmark would be contrary to the way LMF has successfully worked for almost 25 years.

Currently, LMF announces a “Request for Proposals” when it has available funding. All types of conservation projects are eligible to compete, including projects that would achieve the following goals: protecting recreational access, conserving wildlife habitat, protecting working forests, preserving trails, and protecting lands with other high public values. LMF has a scoring system that awards points for the particular values that a project aims to protect. The greater the number and types of public benefits provided by a particular project, the more points the project will receive, and the higher the probability of securing funding.

Over the years, LMF has protected more than 15,000 acres of deer wintering areas, along with 532,000 acres of conservation land (which can provide summer range for deer,) and 1,150 miles of shoreline (often used as travel corridors by deer.) LMF also has protected working farms, working forests, working waterfronts, snowmobile trails, and water access sites.

LMF is overseen by an independent board that scores projects based on their public benefits. Protecting deeryards and deer habitat already is part of what the LMF board considers. Mandating that 25% be expended for deeryard purposes, however, would crowd out other valuable projects, potentially skew the selection of projects that otherwise would not receive support, and open the door to other future earmarks that could drastically limit the LMF Board’s ability to make the best decisions for the use of scarce resources on behalf of the people of Maine. One additional concern: it is not even clear that there are willing sellers and potential projects for deer wintering areas for 25% of LMF’s funds on an ongoing basis.

LMF has served the public well for 25 years and should not be changed as suggested by this bill.

NRCM opposes LD 1249.