

SUPPORT

LD 852 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Support Maine's Natural Resource-based Economy

Sponsor: Senator Katz of Kennebec

Co-Sponsors: Senator Alford of Cumberland, Representatives Cain of Orono, Duchesne of Hudson, Fitts of Pittsfield, Flodd of Winthrop, and Senators Goodall of Sagadahoc, McCormick of Kennebec, Rector of Knox, and Saviello of Franklin

Summary: This bill authorizes a \$48 million bond issue to support the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program and to provide funds for the development of natural resource-based infrastructure.

Explanation: The Land for Maine's Future program is the Maine's primary land conservation program. Since the program was established in 1987, it has protected: 532,000 acres (by acres, it is 55% conservation easements, and 45% full fee acquisition); more than 15,000 acres of deer wintering areas (deer yards); 1,150 miles of shoreline; more than 1/4 million acres of working forests; 29 working farms; 158 miles of snowmobile routes; 50 water access sites; and 17 working waterfronts (where more than 1,000 fishing families work)

The LMF program has committed all of its funds (except a small amount of water access funding) and there will be no funding available for new projects, no matter how worthy. This bond would enable LMF to continue its excellent work of protecting land.

The bond also provides important funds for capital improvements at Maine's state parks, and for infrastructure in the forestry, farming, working waterfronts and tourism sectors. To take full advantage of the economic opportunities that conserved lands offer, investment in natural resource-based infrastructure is needed.

Maine's state parks have a backlog of millions of dollars of capital improvements that are needed because maintenance has been deferred for many years.

The bill provides a total of \$48 million dollars:

Funds to LMF - \$36 million: \$28 million for traditional conservation projects; \$4 million for farmland conservation; and \$4 million for working waterfront conservation (totals \$36 to traditional LMF type projects)

Infrastructure funds - \$12 million: \$4 million to the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) to maintain existing State Park infrastructure; \$2 million to BPL for new tourism recreation infrastructure projects; \$2 million to the Department of Agriculture for agricultural infrastructure projects; \$2 million to the Department of Marine resources for commercial fishing infrastructure projects; \$2 million to the Maine Forest Service for forestry infrastructure projects.

The bill also includes provisions directing the Department of Conservation and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to solicit projects to protect deer wintering areas and give those projects extra points in the LMF scoring process.

Once passed by the Legislature, the bond question would be voted on by the public during a statewide election.

NRCM supports L.D. 852.