

OPPOSE

LD 55 - An Act to Restore Hunting Rights in the Katahdin Lake Region

Sponsor: Rep Paul Davis of Sangerville

Consporsors: Reps. CELLI of Brewer , CLARK of Millinocket, CRAFTS of Lisbon, FREDETTE of Newport, GIFFORD of Lincoln, LONG of Sherman, and Wood of Sabattus; and Senators THOMAS of Somerset and TRAHAN of Lincoln.

Summary

This bill would direct the Baxter State Park Authority to allow hunting on the lands in the park at Katahdin Lake. This bill would reverse a carefully crafted agreement reached five years ago, overturn decades of autonomy for Maine's Baxter State Park Authority, and threaten other ongoing negotiations affecting public access in the area.

Explanation

In 2006, following months of intense negotiations, an agreement was reached to trade scattered State lands in exchange for public acquisition of more than 6,000 acres adjacent to Baxter State Park. Many generous private donors contributed millions of dollars toward this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity based on the understanding that the lands around Katahdin Lake would be managed in trust as sanctuary within Baxter State Park.

Because part of this complex real estate transaction included swapping public lots for the Katahdin Lake lands, the Maine Legislature had to approve the transaction. During the legislative deliberations, the Baxter State Park Authority made it clear that if the 4,119 acres at Katahdin Lake were donated to the Park unencumbered, those lands would be managed consistent with the original Deeds of Trust as sanctuary, where all wildlife is protected from hunting, consistent with Governor Percival Baxter's original vision for the area. Another 1,975 acres abutting Baxter State Park acquired at the same time were transferred to the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands to be managed for multiple-uses, including hunting.

Since the completion of this exchange five years ago, additional land purchases and swaps have taken place in the region in order to guarantee the future of an important snowmobile trail and crossing of the East Branch of the Penobscot River. This bill would unravel this very complex and fragile arrangement, which is still being implemented with additional land sales and swaps pending final closure. This bill is inconsistent with Governor Baxter's original vision and, by undoing the subsequent transactions, would also harm hunters and snowmobilers.

Baxter State Park does not receive any money from the State of Maine's general fund. Gov. Baxter foresaw the need for the Park to be autonomous. He endowed trusts that still provide more than two-thirds of its operating budget. User fees, revenue from the Scientific Forestry Management Area and donations provide the balance of the Park's revenue.

NRCM opposes LD 55.