

My name is Gary McGrane. I am a Franklin County Commissioner. I have served as a County Commissioner for 23 years.

Commissioners, as the counties' chief elected officials, are ultimately responsible for the fiscal operations and policy decisions affecting county government. Additional duties include municipal tax abatement appeals and hearings on maintenance of town roads. We also serve, in effect, as municipal officials in Maine's many unorganized territories. Unlike municipal planning boards County Commissioners do not handle land use issues. We do not review or provide permits for development projects, nor do we do zoning, we do not adopt ordinances and we do not enforce laws, ordinances or regulations in the unorganized territories. This has been a function of State Government and LURC and from my perspective has worked well for all of Maine's taxpayers.

However, LD 1798 would strip the state of its responsibility and allow County Commissioners---in the 6 counties with the most unorganized townships within their borders---to appoint themselves or their designee to LURC. I think that is a bad idea. LURC is a very important state agency that provides uniform standards that protects Maine natural resource, its forest, wildlife habitat, lakes and streams, which is so crucial to our outdoor recreation industry. Therefore we want the very best people on LURC. County Commissioners may not necessarily be the best LURC Commissioners.

I think it would be good if County Commissioners made suggestions to the Governor for who might be on LURC, but I think all LURC Commissioners should go through the same process of being nominated, vetted by the Governor, reviewed by the Legislative Committee and confirmed by the Senate. LURC is a very important agency and has served Maine people well. I don't think we should take short cuts in the process of appointing its members.

I am also concerned about the conflict of interest that could arise if County Commissioners were also serving on LURC at the same time. As County Commissioners, we are elected by the residents of the County and are subject to local interests and pressures. As LURC Commissioners, our responsibility would be to apply state law to the record established for specific applications before us. Those two responsibilities could frequently

be in conflict. I don't think someone should be able to serve as LURC Commissioner and a County Commissioner at the same time.

I am concerned about the politicization of LURC. Elected officials may not be the best candidates to oversee the protection of our natural resources or the development of nearly 10 million acres of unorganized territories. There were probably good reasons why elected officials were not originally self-appointed overseers in 1971 when LURC was first formed. I think this would politicize LURC in ways that would not be good for the forest products industry, recreation or economic development.

Finally, I am concerned about the provision that would allow counties to opt out of the LURC system after a few years. This would lead to inconsistent standards across the North Woods, causing confusion for both businesses and ordinary landowners. It's really the same as abolishing LURC one county at a time. And equally important from my perspective as a county commissioner, it would be more expensive for the taxpayers in my county. Taxes in Franklin County would have to rise substantially in order to pay for the planning, permitting, zoning and enforcement.

While I think that some of the provisions of this bill are good, including improving staff training and regional planning done in a partnership between LURC and our regional agencies, passage of this bill as it stands today would be a big mistake.