We certainly hope not, but time will tell.

We are pleased that constituent pressure helped ensure that the LMF bonds that the governor held hostage for 10 months—an action that no other governor has taken in Maine history—were approved by the Legislature, sent to the voters, and enacted overwhelmingly at the ballot box. That should have been the end of the story. Voters should not have been forced to contact their legislators through phone calls, emails, and meetings throughout the fall to insist that the funds actually be spent.

One of our top priorities is to secure bipartisan support for a strong, new solar energy policy. Currently, Maine is lagging behind other New England states that are aggressively pursuing solar energy to create clean energy jobs, increase energy independence, reduce climate-disrupting carbon pollution, and cut fossil fuel use. Maine’s failure to enact a pro-solar energy policy has been a hot topic at the State House for the past two years. NRCM has been centrally involved in a stakeholder process that’s been meeting over the past six months to hammer out a plan. At this point, we are cautiously optimistic about the prospects for a good outcome, but stay tuned.

We also will be working hard this year on a bill to improve Maine’s solid waste policies. Lawmakers seem interested in passing a bill that would boost composting of food scraps, create a new grant program for recycling projects, and add new containers to Maine’s bottle bill, among other provisions. We also hope the bill will encourage additional diversion of usable food away from landfills and toward hunger relief programs.

As always, NRCM’s policy experts will work hard to defeat bills that would weaken Maine’s environmental laws. We are particularly concerned about four bills that would 1) divert funding that the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) provides for energy efficiency improvements 2) create barriers to towns that seek to regulate pesticides 3) remove incentives for Maine people and businesses to report small oil spills, and 4) allow a proposed development project in a high-value wetlands site in Gray to be exempted from key environmental laws.

During the months ahead, we will keep you informed and let you know how and when to contact your elected officials as priority bills move through the process. You can also visit our website for detailed updates. In addition, I encourage you to register for our annual Citizen Action Day in Augusta, to be held Tuesday, March 1, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. If you have never come to Augusta to speak with your elected officials about legislation that matters to you, please consider doing so this year. You can make a big impression, and you’ll have a good time learning about key issues, meeting other environmentally concerned citizens from across the state, and enjoying a free lunch, too! Your elected representatives need to hear from you about the bills that will affect the future of Maine’s environment. I hope to see you here!

As always, thank you for your support.

—Pete Didisheim, NRCM Advocacy Director

JOIN US FOR CITIZEN ACTION DAY TUESDAY, MARCH 1

Make your voice heard! Help protect the nature of Maine! (See page 4)
NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL OF MAINE  2016 PRIORITY BILLS IN THE LEGISLATURE

Boost Solar Power in Maine
A solar power revolution is underway around the world, and Maine needs to catch up with it. Maine has an excellent solar resource, but we are not tapping into the power of the sun as much as we could. Maine is lagging far behind other states in our region. Vermont and Massachusetts each have 10 times more installed solar per capita than Maine does!

Right now, Maine doesn't have the right policies in place to promote access to solar energy, create more good-paying solar installation jobs, and reduce pollution that threatens our climate. Last year, members of the Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee heard extensive testimony in support of a comprehensive solar energy bill sponsored by Representative Sara Gideon (D-Freeport). By a margin of 40-7, witnesses at the hearing urged support for the bill (LD 1263). The governor's energy director and Maine's electric utilities led the opposition.

In the end, committee members rewrote the bill to authorize the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to convene a stakeholder group charged with developing a new solar energy policy for Maine, with the goal of reporting back to the Legislature by January 30, 2016. The House and Senate enacted the amended bill over a veto by the governor.

For the past five months, NRCM Clean Energy Project Director Dylan Voorhees has been deeply involved in the PUC stakeholder process—providing detailed proposals of solar policies that would benefit Maine. As of this writing, the stakeholder process has not finalized its work and reported back to the Legislature. Late in the process Central Maine Power started advocating for positions that seemed designed to sabotage the process. Utilities have taken similar approaches in other states. NRCM is working hard to translate momentum created over the last year into a strong solar bill that can be enacted this session.

We are working closely with a broad coalition of solar businesses and installers, workers, conservation and public health groups, municipalities, and homeowners who support a pro-solar policy. We will be posting updates in the weeks ahead.

Protect the Right to Regulate Pesticides

Over the past two decades, Mainers have increased the home use of pesticides by 700 percent. A growing number of towns are concerned about this exponential growth in pesticides, which can be poisonous to pets, humans, fish, and wildlife.

More than two dozen communities throughout Maine have adopted ordinances to protect their citizens from pesticides, and additional communities are considering similar measures. These efforts would be sharply constrained by a bill (LD 1543) introduced by Rep. Jeff Timberlake (R-Turner) and supported by pesticide manufacturers and applicators.

The bill would require municipalities to create costly new boards to oversee any pesticide ordinances. Because this provision would apply to towns that already have adopted a pesticide ordinance, passage of LD 1543 could retroactively invalidate those protective ordinances unless the municipality quickly complied with the bill's onerous requirements.

Pesticides are inherently dangerous, which is why many communities seek to protect people from excessive and unnecessary use. Maine law says, "It is the policy of the State to work to find ways to use the minimum amount of pesticides needed to effectively control targeted pests." NRCM staff will work to defeat this bill.

Increase Composting and Recycling
Maine is not meeting its goal of recycling 50 percent of our solid waste, as called for in Maine’s 1989 solid waste law that NRCM helped write. Instead, we have been stuck at about 40 percent for years. Legislators considered several bills in 2015 aimed at boosting programs to “reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost,” which are the top tiers of Maine’s solid waste hierarchy. Those bills failed except for one, which was carried over to the 2016 legislative session to serve as a placeholder bill.

During the fall, members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee met several times to study options for Maine’s solid waste policy. They developed a draft bill with many provisions, some of which we like and some of which we oppose. As of this writing, it appears that the public hearing will happen in mid-February. We are particularly supportive of provisions in the bill that would require large generators of food waste (e.g. food processors, grocery stores) to divert those materials toward composting programs. This composting requirement is important and would bring Maine more in line with other New England states.

We also believe Maine could be doing a much better job of diverting usable food toward hunger relief programs. As explained by NRCM Sustainable Maine Project Director Sarah Lakeman, “We should be doing everything possible to reduce food waste, feed the hungry with food that has reached its ‘sell by’ date, and require those businesses and facilities that generate large volumes of food scraps to participate in composting programs.”

Safeguarding High Value Wetlands

The owners of the narrow gauge railroad and museum that operates in Portland are interested in moving to Gray to a site that contains high-quality wetlands, supports abundant wildlife, and performs valuable flood control functions. Supporter of the project have introduced a bill (LD 1478) that would exempt the project from requirements of Maine’s shoreland zoning law and Natural Resources Protection Act—two of our cornerstone environmental laws.

If this bill were to pass, it could throw the door open to countless other proposals for exemptions to Maine’s environmental laws. The bill also could result in serious harm to a prized and valuable wetland. Advocates from Gray claim the railroad would provide economic benefits to their community. NRCM and many others who testified against the bill believe a different site should be found for the project—one that would not require exemptions from Maine laws.

Status: At press time, the Environment and Natural Resources Committee voted 9-3 in opposition to LD 1478.

Stay Up to Date on Our Work This Legislative Session
Bookmark (and visit often) our Legislative Bill Tracking Page: http://wp.me/P728DF-7nN
Join our online Action Network: www.nrcm.kintera.org/ActionNetwork

Like Us on Facebook  Follow us on Twitter

2016 Legislative Priorities for Protecting Maine’s Environment
LAND FOR MAINE’S FUTURE: A Win for Maine People

By any measure, the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program has been Maine’s most important and popular land conservation effort. Since 1987, LMF has protected more than 315,000 acres of working forestland; more than 1,200 miles of shoreline; dozens of lakes, ponds, and mountains; and hundreds of miles of trails throughout Maine for residents and visitors alike to enjoy.

This record of success helps explain why so many people were angry to learn last March that Governor LePage decided to block the release of $11.5 million in voter-approved LMF bonds. Through one of his commissioners, he announced at an LMF Board meeting that he would hold LMF funds hostage until lawmakers agreed to his proposal to radically increase logging in Maine’s Public Reserved Lands and divert the logging revenue toward other purposes.

In response to this unprecedented move, Senator Roger Katz (R-Kennebec) last year introduced a bill (LD 1376) to force the governor to release the voter-approved bond funds. The bill passed the House and Senate by the two-thirds margin needed to override a veto by the governor. However, when the bill returned to the House for the veto override vote, six Republican House members switched their votes in response to pressure from the governor’s office and Republican leadership. LD 1376 was defeated.

This left more than 30 conservation projects in limbo, with the host organizations wondering whether they would ever receive the funds that the LMF Board had promised for each of these projects.

Over a five-month period, from July through December 2015, people and organizations across the state, including NRCM and many of our members, flooded their legislators with messages urging them to overturn the governor’s LMF position when the Legislature convened in January. The legislators who switched their votes in response to political pressure became the target of political ramifications if the governor’s position prevailed much longer. Anxious legislators communicated those concerns to their Republican leadership and directly to the governor.

But even during the opening days of the legislative session, the outcome of a vote to overturn the expired $6.5 million in LMF funds was uncertain. The governor’s office suddenly told lawmakers that he would only support a short-term extension, preferably only six months. This would have created an opportunity for the governor to withhold the funds again, creating yet another crisis for LMF.

In mid-December, Governor LePage suddenly announced that he would release $5 million in 2012 LMF bond funds. He also said he would release $5.5 million approved by voters in 2010, but which expired in November. Because those funds expired, the Legislature needed to reauthorize the funds, as allowed by the Maine Constitution. The governor’s about-face occurred because Republican legislators were worried that the firestorm the governor created would have political ramifications if the governor’s position prevailed much longer. Anxious legislators communicated those concerns to their Republican leadership and directly to the governor.

But even during the opening days of the legislative session, the outcome of a vote to reauthorize the expired $6.5 million in LMF funds was uncertain. The governor’s office suddenly told lawmakers that he would only support a short-term extension, preferably only six months. This would have created an opportunity for the governor to withhold the funds again, creating yet another crisis for LMF.

**Other Important Issues**

**Sea-Level Rise Impacts** Representative Mick Devin (D-Newcastle) introduced a bill (LD 795), carried over from last year, that would require sea-level model predictions to be taken into account in the design phase of any development project on the coast or in a flood zone if more than 10 percent of the total funding for the project is State funding. Regrettably, the bill is heading toward defeat and will be replaced by a letter from the Environment and Natural Resources Committee to the DEP requesting that they review existing laws and regulations to see if they are adequate to address threats posed by sea-level rise.

**Logging on Public Lands** A legislative study commission that met during the fall has rejected the governor’s proposal to unnecessarily increase timber cutting on public lands and divert the funds toward unrelated purposes. Members of the study commission will be presenting their recommendations to the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, which will be reflected in a bill. We support the recommendations, including the strong conclusion that revenue generated from harvesting on Public Reserved Lands should only be spent on management of Maine’s Public Reserved Lands and public access to those areas.

**Stream Crossing Bond** Many of Maine’s culverts, which allow streams to pass under roads, are old and ineffective. They get blocked easily or fall entirely, creating public safety hazards and cutting fish and wildlife habitat into separate, isolated segments. Representatives Jeff McCabe (D-Skowhegan) is proposing a $10 million “Stream Crossing Bond” (LD 1069) to help communities repair and replace old stream crossings, which will restore fish and wildlife habitat and enable sea-run fish to reach inland spawning habitat.

**Weatherization Bond** Senator Dawn Hill (D-York) introduced a bill (LD 1341) that would provide a $30 million bond for home weatherization and energy efficiency investments, of which $7 million would go toward improving the energy performance of low-income housing. The funds would retrofit 30,000 housing units with insulation, air sealing, and/or high-efficiency heating equipment, saving Maine people $200-$450 million on energy bills and creating 400 direct building jobs.
NRCM is raffling off a dream vacation to Maine’s spectacular Katahdin region, with the grand prize a three-day stay for two in and near the proposed National Park lands! It includes a guided tour through the park lands, two nights at beautiful Mt. Chase Lodge (www.mtchaselodge.com) and one night at beautiful, our forests healthy, and our air clean. Join online at www.nrcm.org or use the enclosed envelope. Membership makes a difference!}

**WE LOVE MAINE’S NORTH WOODS and want to share it with you!**

NRGCM staff members are well respected in the halls of the State House, but time and time again we hear from legislators that meeting face-to-face with the people they represent makes a big difference. Concerned Mainers like you can have a big impact on the outcome of important legislation here in Maine. Come hear firsthand from NRCM staff members about our priority bills and tips for speaking with your legislators. Then take a short walk across the street to the State House, where you can meet with your elected officials. We’ll provide a light breakfast in the morning and lunch in the afternoon. Mark your calendar and plan to join us at our headquarters for this important event. Learn more and register at www.nrcm.org.

**Have you gotten your copy? NRCM produced “Portland: Connected by Nature” to highlight sustainability efforts underway in Maine’s largest city. It celebrates the people and organizations that are working together to craft a future that’s in balance with the nature of Maine. Available at www.nrcm.org or by emailing nrcm@nrcm.org.**

**Working for You at the State House**

Our advocacy staff works day and night throughout the legislative session to represent you and your interests, working for laws that protect Maine people, places, and wildlife. To keep us on the frontlines of environmental protection in Maine, please use the enclosed, postage-paid envelope to donate today. Your donation supports the most effective team working for Maine’s environment:

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- **Sarah Lakeman**, Sustainable Communities & Waste Reduction
- **Cathy Johnson**, Senior Staff Attorney, and North Woods & LMF
- **Pete Didisheim**, Senior Advocacy Director
- **Eliza Donoghue**, North Woods & LMF
- **Nick Bennett**, Staff Scientist, and Rivers & Wetlands

**TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 8AM-1PM**

**for Citizen Action Day**

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