

Conserving Maine's North Woods for future generations by ensuring the integrity of the Land Use Regulation Commission

Maine's North Woods are a treasure that is central to our state's economy, identity and way of life. They are the largest remaining forest in the east, vast enough to provide wildlife habitat, timber for the forest products industry, and myriad tourism and recreation opportunities including hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, paddling, snowmobiling and white-water rafting.

The LURC reform panel wisely backed away from *abolishing* Maine's Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC), the agency charged with planning, permitting and enforcing standards to protect what is special about Maine's North Woods. Yet some of the panel's proposals could *significantly weaken* protections for the North Woods, depending on how the details are worked out.

The LURC reform proposal would allow county commissioners to appoint themselves to a board with statewide responsibilities, without the normal process of gubernatorial nomination, legislative committee hearing, and Senate confirmation. No other Maine State regulatory board has members elected by local constituencies because inevitable conflicts arise between pressures to respond to local politics and the legal duty of LURC commissioners to make decisions based exclusively on the law and facts in a legal record.

Furthermore, the proposal would allow counties to "drop out" (opt out) of the unified system that consistently applies to the entire North Woods. LURC currently provides consistent, one-stop land use planning, zoning, permitting, and enforcement in the region. County 'drop-outs' could create inconsistent, fragmented complicated systems that are far more unpredictable, inefficient, and expensive than the existing LURC approach. In addition, divergent county standards would increase unpredictability for applicants, inequity for landowners, and confusion for the public while failing to manage the North Woods as a whole.

Maine's North Woods is a region of statewide significance because it is the anchor of our forest products and tourism economies and our natural outdoors heritage. The Legislature should ensure that any LURC reform proposal creates a more efficient and effective state agency that continues to provide a statewide approach that is sensitive to local and regional needs, while representing the interests of all Maine people

The Legislature should make changes to the LURC Reform Committee's proposals to ensure that they achieve the goal of making measurable improvements to the way we guide development and protect the heritage in Maine's North Woods.