

OPPOSE

2016/17 Biennial Budget for the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

Sponsor: Governor LePage

Summary: Governor LePage's 2016/17 Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF) Budget proposes to break apart the Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) and slash by 90 percent the capacity of Maine Forest Rangers to enforce our logging and water quality laws.

Explanation: The proposed DACF budget moves Public Lands, which is currently housed within the Bureau of Parks and Lands, to the Bureau of Forestry. It also proposes to significantly decrease Forest Ranger staffing and drastically reduce enforcement of Maine's forestry and water quality laws. NRCM has significant concerns with both aspects of the proposed budget.

Public Lands

Maine's 600,000 acres of Public Lands include the iconic Bigelow Preserve, the vast Nahmakanta Public Reserved Lands, and the breathtaking Cutler Coast. By law, Public Lands are managed for multiple uses: recreation, wildlife habitat, and sustainable forestry. Since the 1970s, the Public Land Managers have done an exemplary job managing Public Lands for all of these uses.

Moving Public Lands to the Bureau of Forestry threatens this important multi-use management approach. The Bureau of Forestry's objectives are radically different than those at the BPL. The Forestry Bureau serves private landowners whose objective is to maximize financial returns from their forest lands. If Public Lands is housed within the Bureau of Forestry, then uses such as recreation and wildlife habitat likely will be overshadowed by the goal of increased logging on public lands.

This proposed change appears to be part of a larger effort by the LePage Administration to unsustainably increase timber cutting on Public Lands. Last year, the governor tried to drastically increase cutting without scientific justification and to divert funds to unrelated programs (by law, revenue generated from harvesting on Public Lands goes into a dedicated account used to fund Public Lands programs). This idea came from the Bureau of Forestry, not from the BPL, and the Legislature rejected it because they recognized that Maine's Public Lands are not an ATM to generate cash for government programs. Public Lands are, by law, managed for the benefit of Maine people.

Forest Rangers

Maine Forest Rangers play an indispensable role in protecting Maine's environment. They are the boots on the ground, inspecting harvesting operations across Maine's 18 million acres of forest land for compliance with the Forest Practices Act and water quality laws. In 2014, Forest Rangers performed more than 5,000 compliance inspections.

The proposed DACF Budget proposes to reduce the number of positions that can enforce essential environmental laws from 74 to 7. This is a 90% decrease. Under this proposal, laws that protect Maine's woods, waters, and wildlife will not be enforced nearly to extent that they are today. This could allow poorly harvested forests and degraded water quality of our lakes, rivers, and streams to go unnoticed, and uncorrected.

NRCM Opposes the Proposed 2016/17 DACF Budget.