

OPPOSE

LD 1397, An Act To Establish the Affordable Heating from Maine's Forests Fund

Sponsor: Representative TIMBERLAKE of Turner (GOVERNOR'S BILL)

Co-sponsors: Senator EDGECOMB of Aroostook and Representative KINNEY of Knox

Summary: This bill diverts funds away from Maine's Public Reserve Land management programs to a new fund administered by the Efficiency Maine Trust for programs that reduce residential heating costs. The fund receives revenue from the sale of timber from Maine's Public Reserved Lands.

Explanation: LD 1397 raises significant concerns. The proposal is undoubtedly connected to the governor's plan to significantly increase harvesting on Public Reserved Lands. The Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee has strongly opposed increased harvesting. Furthermore, diverting funding from Public Reserved Lands would create a bad precedent, and would subject management to undue financial pressure.

The Bureau of Parks & Lands (BPL) manages 600,000 acres of Public Reserved Lands for multiple public uses: wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and sustainable forestry. Public Reserved Land units are some of Maine's most beautiful and loved places, including the iconic Bigelow Preserve, the Kennebec Highlands, and the breathtaking Cutler Coast. BPL is statutorily mandated to manage their forests sustainably. Experts agree that there is no scientific justification for further increasing the annual allowable cut, which was already recently increased based on scientific data. The LePage Administration has proposed to increase the annual cut by 30% or more over the next 20 years, which would conflict with the lands public uses.

Maine's Public Reserved Lands have been held in public trust since 1820. Under current law, revenue generated by timber harvesting must be used to fund Public Reserved Land management—the *only* funding stream for this purpose. It is a bad precedent for the Legislature to violate the public trust and divert funds from one dedicated funding source to an unrelated program.

BPL's funding has been below optimum level for at least the past 5 years. Program expenditures have been curtailed or unfunded. Money is needed to improve fisheries and deer wintering habitat, maintain boundary lines, acquire deeded right-of-ways, and invest in public recreation improvements such as hiking and motorized trails, parking areas, and boat access. Maine must continue to invest in our Public Reserved Lands, so they can remain a haven for outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and exemplary forestry practices.

The governor's desire to divert funds for home heating efficiency is a distraction from his own actions that pose an enormous threat to existing efficiency programs for homes and businesses. The Governor recently proposed \$10 million in cuts to Efficiency Maine and has blocked efforts to prevent an inadvertent \$40 million cut (LD 1215), putting at risk Maine's *entire* home heating efficiency effort. For reference, Efficiency Maine's budget this year includes over \$9 million for its Home Energy Savings Program, as well as \$5 million specifically for low-income homes. The proposed fund diversion in LD 1397 is either very small (hundreds of thousands of dollars) or based on an unsustainable harvest level. It is not worth the bad precedent, violating the public trust, or diverting funds away from much-needed BPL programs to produce a small amount of funding for energy efficiency, when other bills and actions supported by the governor put so much more in jeopardy.

NRCM Opposes LD 1397.