The 2018 legislative session is well underway. This is the “short session” of the Legislature, which means the pace is fast as lawmakers attempt to adjourn by the end of April. It is also an election year for every House and Senate seat, and it is Governor Paul LePage’s final year in office, adding an extra layer of partisanship and drama to the mix.

NRCM staff members are tracking more than 40 bills this year, with top attention focused on six bills that comprise the common agenda of the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), a group of 34 organizations that come together each year around a set of priority bills. With our EPC partners, we announced our agenda in mid-January at a briefing and news conference at the State House.

One of our top priorities this year, as in the past two years, is to pass a solar energy bill. This year’s legislation would block the worst provision of an anti-solar rule adopted by Maine’s Public Utilities Commission (PUC). The PUC is poised to impose a radical and unfair new fee on solar customers, charging them for power they generate and use on site—electricity that never touches the electrical grid. The bill also would help spur larger community solar projects, allowing up to 50 people per project to participate.

We also strongly support passage of a $50 million clean water bond proposed by Maine’s Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Maine has made significant progress over the past 20 years in treating and cleaning up wastewater before it flows into our rivers and coastal waters, but we still have a long way to go. This bond would improve water quality in Maine waters and leverage $71 million in additional funds. Right now there is a $1 billion funding backlog for water infrastructure, which affects 120 Maine towns.

Working closely with legislators, we are aiming to pass a bill focused on reducing food waste in Maine. Carried over from last year, the pending bill likely will be amended to focus primarily on state agencies and to reduce the estimated 75,000 pounds of food waste produced each year in Maine schools.

As in prior years, NRCM staff members are devoting considerable attention to the task of defeating “rollbacks”—bills that would move Maine in the wrong direction on the environment and clean energy. Since January 2011, when Governor LePage entered office, with your help, NRCM has helped defeat more than 100 rollback bills.

This year, the governor supports a bill that would tax owners of electric and hybrid vehicles, penalizing them for reducing their dependence on fossil fuels, and thus reducing gas tax payments. Hence, the new tax. We will work to defeat that bill and other proposed rollbacks, including bills to block upstream passage of alewives, weaken Maine’s Bottle Bill, subsidize old and inefficient biomass plants, and weaken Maine’s renewable energy portfolio standard.

We greatly appreciate your help with establishing state policies that protect our environment. We couldn’t do our work without you. If you are interested in becoming more involved than you’ve been in the past, please contact us. We are here to help. The back page of this publication describes some ways you can get involved. If you have not already done so, please join the NRCM Action Network at the Take Action Page on our website (nrcm.org). As a member of the Action Network, you’ll receive updates about progress on legislative priorities, and learn when and how you can help make a difference. As always, please be sure to visit our website throughout the legislative session for further updates. Thank you again for all you do to help protect Maine’s environment! —Pete Didisheim, NRCM Senior Director, Advocacy
Boost Solar Power in Maine

Once again, Mainers from throughout the state are trying to convince the Legislature to pass a bill to help Maine get out of last place in solar energy installations in New England. A solar power revolution is underway around the world, and Maine is barely participating. Maine has an excellent solar resource, but we are missing out on the jobs and clean energy it could bring because we don’t tap the sun as much as we should. Solar in Maine lags far behind other states in our region: Vermont and Massachusetts each have 10 times more installed solar per capita than we have here Maine!

For the past two years, a strong bipartisan majority in the House and Senate have passed constructive solar bills, only to see those initiatives defeated by Governor LePage. In 2016 and 2017, lawmakers fell just a few votes short of the two-thirds needed to override the governor’s vetoes.

This year’s legislation (LD 1444) would strike down the worst provision of a Public Utilities Commission (PUC) rule that is slated to begin on May 1. LD 1444 also would allow as many as 50 people to participate in a community solar project by lifting the current nine-person limit.

Under the PUC’s anti-solar rule, utilities would charge solar customers for power they produce and consume themselves on site. Mainers who own solar arrays would be forced to install an additional meter and pay utilities for every kilowatt of solar electricity generated, even when it never enters the power grid, and even during blackouts, when the grid goes down.

Central Maine Power (CMP) would raise electricity rates for all Mainers by millions of dollars to cover its cost for installing the systems and equipment required for this new, unfair tax. The additional profits made by the company, which is a monopoly utility, would go primarily to its shareholders overseas.

We are extremely concerned that the PUC is putting utility earnings ahead of hard-working Maine people. The PUC has failed to consider these costs and is stepping on the rights of Mainers to generate their own power. This anti-solar provision needs to be blocked, and we need to increase the number of people who can participate in community solar projects.

**SUPPORT LD 1444 for solar energy.**

Protect Maine Waters

Maine’s economy depends on clean water. Our lakes generate more than $3.5 billion in economic activity annually and help sustain 52,000 jobs. More than 650,000 Mainers depend on clean lakes for their drinking water, and clean water is essential for Maine’s fishing and tourism industries—two of Maine’s largest economic sectors.

Maine has come a long way in the last 50 years in cleaning up our inland and coastal waters. Through strong, bipartisan policies and investments, we have drastically reduced direct discharges of pollution to rivers, lakes, streams, and the ocean. But we still have plenty of work to do. That’s why NRCM strongly supports a $50 million clean water bond that would help replace aging wastewater infrastructure that allows far too much water pollution to enter Maine’s waters.

Maine communities continue to rely on outdated wastewater systems that, in some cases, have century-old pipes. In 2016, 25 communities discharged more than 470 million gallons of untreated stormwater and sewage into our waters because of overwhelmed sewer overflows. This pollution went into Casco Bay and Frenchman Bay, and into the Androscoggin, Kennebec, Machias, St. Croix, and Saco Rivers.

Some communities have drastically reduced, or even eliminated, the discharge of untreated sewage during storm events. But Maine still has a $1 billion backlog of known wastewater upgrade projects. These projects need steady attention and investment, yet Maine has not provided funding for such projects since 2010.

LD 1510 would provide a $50 million water bond, which would leverage an additional $71 million in state and federal funds, and support or sustain more than 2,100 jobs. We also support a $5 million bond proposal (LD 178) to protect lakes, streams, and coastal waters from polluting runoff from poorly designed camp roads. This bond would leverage $10 million in additional funding and create jobs, too.

**SUPPORT LD 1510 and LD 178 for clean water.**

Working for You at the State House and Beyond

Advocacy staff at the Natural Resources Council of Maine work long hours throughout the session for laws that protect Maine people, places, and wildlife—and against attempts to weaken protections. Meet our State House advocates:

Nick Bennett, **Staff Scientist and Healthy Waters Project Director**

Sarah Lakeman, **Sustainable Maine Project Director**

Pete Didisheim, **Senior Director of Advocacy**

Sue Ely, **Climate and Clean Energy Policy Advocate and Staff Attorney**

Dylan Voorhees, **Climate and Clean Energy Project Director**

Cathy Johnson, **Forests and Wildlife Project Director and Senior Staff Attorney**

Ryan Parker, **Sustainable Maine Policy Advocate**
At a time when many Mainers do not have enough to eat, too much food is being wasted. Maine ranks first in New England in food insecurity, with one of four Maine children not getting enough to eat on a regular basis. At the same time, about 28 percent of what is in our garbage bags is wasted food, much of it still edible, costing municipalities and businesses millions of dollars in disposal fees.

Wasted food ends up in landfills, using up limited space and producing carbon dioxide. Although Maine farmers, restaurants, grocery stores, and large facilities like schools and hospitals currently do a lot to direct food toward useful purposes, much more can be done—and these entities would like to do more.

Other states are doing a better job than Maine is, and we would like to change that. Last year, Representative Craig Hickman (D-Winthrop) introduced a bill that proposed many changes to Maine law as a way to help address the food waste problem in Maine. An “Act to Address Hunger, Support Maine Farmers, and Reduce Waste” was carried over to 2018 to allow lawmakers more time to consider the provisions.

As an initial step this year, members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee are interested in focusing on food waste reduction by state agencies and in schools. If these measures are enacted, there appears to be interest in considering further measures next year, including legislation to change that. Last year, Representative Craig Hickman (D-Winthrop) introduced a bill that proposed many changes to Maine law as a way to help address the food waste problem in Maine. An “Act to Address Hunger, Support Maine Farmers, and Reduce Waste” was carried over to 2018 to allow lawmakers more time to consider the provisions.

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**SUPPORT LD 1534 to reduce food waste.**

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**NRCM: Teaming with You on Federal Issues**

Threats from the Trump Administration and Congress are coming fast and often without warning. Our Federal Project team will keep you informed and ready for action. Find the latest federal threats to Maine’s land, air, waters, and wildlife at the Washington Watch section on our website: www.nrcm.org/projects/federal/
Tips for Citizen Engagement

Democracy is not a spectator sport: It’s a contact sport, and we want to encourage you to participate! Every action can help make a difference, from sending an email or making a phone call to your elected officials to attending a meeting with your legislators, writing a letter-to-the-editor, or testifying at a hearing. We welcome your help to protect Maine’s environment! Here are a few suggestions:

Learn the issues Visit NRCM’s website www.nrcm.org/projects/state-house/legislative-bill-tracking/ to learn more about the top environmental issues being considered in Augusta and Washington, D.C. Develop your position on the issues and stay informed. Knowledge is power. Facts matter. Personal stories make your point. Equipped with this information, you can make a big difference by sharing your view with your elected representatives in government.

Contact lawmakers Know who your state representative and senator are. Write down the contact information for all of your elected representatives, including members of Congress, some place handy to your phone or computer. Contact them with letters, emails, and phone calls. They are supposed to work for you; to do so they need to hear from you. Make sure you explain how the issue of concern affects you, your family, Maine, and future generations.

Host or attend a meeting There’s no better way to influence your legislator than by meeting with him or her. With state legislators, you can set up a meeting near your home, where you can get together with friends and neighbors to discuss important issues. You can also come to Augusta to meet with your state representatives on days when the Legislature is in session. For members of Congress, you can request a meeting with their in-state staff.

Encourage others to engage There’s power in numbers. Now more than ever, we need as many people as possible to help protect the nature of Maine. Through Facebook, emails, conversations in your community, or a meeting in your home, encourage others to become engaged. Together, we can all play a part in defending the laws that protect Maine’s environment, and press forward for clean energy and better stewardship of our precious natural resources.

Important Contact Information

State Lawmakers

State Representative Contact Information:
http://legislature.maine.gov/house/townlist.htm

State Senator Contact Information:
http://legislature.maine.gov/senate-home-page/find-your-state-senator

Members of Congress

Senator Susan Collins
Washington, DC: (202) 224-2523
Augusta: (207) 622-8414
Biddeford: (207) 283-1101

Senator Angus King
Washington, DC: (202) 224-5344
Augusta: (207) 622-8200

Rep. Chellie Pingree
Washington, DC: (202) 225-6116
Portland: (207) 774-5019

Rep. Bruce Poliquin
Washington, DC: (202) 225-6396
Bangor: (207) 942-0583

SUPPORT OUR WORK: BECOME A MEMBER!

Attacks on our environment come from all directions, at the state and federal level. Your support is needed more today than ever. Help leave a legacy of clean air and waters, vibrant forests, and healthy wildlife populations by donating in support of our work. Your gift today will go a long way!

www.nrcm.org/donate/membership/

RAFFLE!

Win a Stay at Mt. Chase Lodge in Maine’s Spectacular North Woods

You could win a two-night stay for two near Katahdin Woods & Waters National Monument! This dream vacation includes two nights, two dinners, two breakfasts, and a picnic lunch, courtesy of beautiful Mt. Chase Lodge, located near Maine’s new National Monument. Bring your own bikes or skis and the rest will be provided, including maps and expert advice. Tickets are $40 each—get yours quickly, only 300 will be sold. The winner of the grand prize (valued at $450) will choose from several dates throughout 2018. The second place winner will receive original artwork of the Allagash River Waterway (valued at $750) by Nancy Keenan Barron. Three runner-up prizes include a book of Neil Welliver prints, a Tom Hennessey print of Katahdin Country, and a DD Tyler wildlife print. All proceeds from this raffle will be used to support NRCM’s work to protect our treasured North Woods. Tear off and return the slip below by Monday, May 7th, 2018, for the May 11th drawing, or purchase your raffle ticket online: www.nrcm.org.

Name: ____________________________
Address: __________________________
City, State Zip: _____________________
Email: ____________________________
No. of tickets: _______ x $40 = _______

Per IRS regulations, raffles are not tax-deductible.

CONNECT TO PROTECT

Be a part of Maine’s most effective and exciting “social scene” of people like you who care about our land, air, waters, and wildlife—Like us on Facebook and Follow us on Twitter and Instagram to stay up to date on the latest news and events.

TUNE IN TO OUR NEW PODCAST

We’ve just launched our “Maine’s Environment: Hot News Now” podcast to bring you the latest on our high-priority environmental issues, direct from NRCM staff. Episode 1 features Senior Advocacy Director Pete Didisheim providing the scoop on actions at the State House, while Federal Project Outreach Coordinator Kristin Jackson shares what’s happening with federal challenges that could have an impact on Maine.

TUNE IN AT www.nrcm.org/our-maine/podcast/

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