

EXPAND MAINE'S ECOLOGICAL RESERVE SYSTEM

LD 736 will preserve biodiversity and help meet Maine's climate goals by growing our ecological reserve lands.

As Maine faces growing threats from development, pollution, and climate change, it is more important than ever to protect rare, threatened, and endangered species and to ensure ecosystems remain intact.

- Maine's ecological reserve system was created by the Legislature in 2000 to maintain effective examples of all the different habitat types found in the state, serve as scientific research sites, protect biodiversity, and provide low-impact recreation opportunities.
- State-owned ecological reserves cover less than 1% of the state, yet they protect some of Maine's most spectacular and characteristic landscapes, including the Cutler Coast, Nahmakanta, and the Mahoosucs. No timber harvesting is allowed, giving trees the chance to grow big and old and creating hard-to-find habitat for fish and wildlife.

Even when privately-held lands are included, the goal of protecting all of Maine's habitat types is out of reach because the 20-year-old law limits the size of the state's ecological reserve system.

- The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands manages 19 ecological reserves that encompass about 96,000 acres, but the arbitrary cap of 100,000 acres is limiting their ability to adequately conserve even more vulnerable habitats.
- Most of the gaps in the ecological reserve system are in Southern Maine, where the majority of the state's population lives. This region would benefit from increased access to public lands.
- There is an urgent need to protect Maine's land and waters because at least one-third of all plant and animal species and their habitats in Maine are affected by climate-related threats.

Updating the state's ecological reserve law will help meet Maine's climate goals through nature-based carbon sequestration and storage.

- On average, ecological reserves store 30% more carbon than other lands in Maine on a per acre basis. Expanding ecological reserves is a critical step to meeting the state's climate goals, specifically to conserve 30% of Maine land by 2030 and to focus conservation on high biodiversity areas that support habitat connectivity and ecosystem health.
- LD 736 would allow the Bureau of Parks and Lands to acquire additional ecological reserves and to lead by example, demonstrating that the protection of land and biodiversity can be achieved while supporting our natural resource-based economy and acting on climate change.



Photo © Gregory Szybor

Support LD 736. Advance biodiversity, conservation, and nature-based climate solutions by expanding Maine's ecological reserve system.

For more information, please contact

Melanie Sturm, Natural Resources Council of Maine, at (207) 430-0109 or msturm@nrcm.org; or
Eliza Donoghue, Maine Audubon, at (207) 712-4359 or edonoghue@maineaudubon.org.

Environmental Priorities Coalition

Maine's **Environmental Priorities Coalition** is a partnership of 37 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations representing over 120,000 members who want to protect the good health, good jobs, and quality of life that our environment provides.

We are counting on Maine policymakers to take the important steps needed to protect Maine's extraordinary environment so all Maine people and Maine communities can thrive.

