



# MAINE Environment

## 2026 Legislative Priorities

The second session of the 132nd Legislature is well underway, and lawmakers seem determined to adjourn before the end of April. They have a lot of work to complete to meet this goal. Before the gavel drops for its final time this session, members of the Maine House and Senate will need to complete action on 386 bills carried over from last year and 101 new bills approved for consideration this year. They'll also need to pass a supplemental budget.

As the legislative session picks up steam, NRCM's policy experts are sharply focused on about 40 bills that provide opportunities to make a difference on issues including land conservation, water quality, climate action, toxic pollution, and renewable energy.

During the first week of January, we were pleased to see one of our priorities from 2025 become law: LD 870, which will strengthen the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) by adding, for the first time, a tribal representative, who will be appointed through a joint recommendation by the tribes in Maine. It also adds an at-large commissioner appointed by the Senate President and House Speaker and updates the qualifications for appointees to this important body that serves as the planning and zoning board for the 10.5 million acres of Maine's unorganized territories. NRCM worked with Reps. Bill Bridgeo (D-Augusta) and Jim Dill (D-Old Town), the Wabanaki Alliance, and others to secure passage of this bill.

One of our priority bills that has received early attention this year is a carryover from last year and would create a Climate Superfund program to hold the largest fossil fuel companies financially responsible for the ongoing damage to Maine caused by climate change. Another bill that had a public hearing in the first days of the session would improve access to small, portable, plug-in solar devices, helping reduce energy costs and making clean energy more affordable.

Like last year, we are working with a large coalition of lawmakers and partners to build legislative support for reinvesting in the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program, which has run out of money. We also are promoting a bill that would provide ongoing funding to help protect lake water quality and to conserve farmland in Maine.

Lawmakers this year will once again have an opportunity to pass legislation that would recognize the sovereignty of tribes in Maine, a long-overdue change in Maine law that could help address the state's tragic history in relation to the Wabanaki Nations who have inhabited these lands for time immemorial.

We are deep in the process of trying to influence the outcome of many other bills that would strengthen the safeguards for Maine's waters, woods, and wildlife, and the communities and Maine people who value a healthy environment.

We know firsthand that the legislative process is a whirlwind of activity that can be challenging to keep up with. If you're trying to stay up-to-speed on important bills, we encourage you to visit the Legislative Bill Tracking page on our website, which provides up-to-date links to legislation and our testimony.

As our team of experts spends long days at the State House, we are pleased to be working with our colleagues in the Environmental Priorities Coalition. We also work with local business owners, youth activists, organized labor, municipal officials, community leaders, and engaged members and supporters statewide. You provide us with inspiration and people power that help us win.

We greatly appreciate your support and participation in our work. If you are interested in becoming more involved, please contact us. If you have not already done so, please sign up for NRCM email updates at the Take Action page at [nrcm.org](http://nrcm.org). And please visit our social media accounts and website throughout the legislative session for further updates.

As always, thank you for your support.

—Pete Didisheim, Senior Director of Advocacy



Harry & Lyss/NRCM

Stay Up to Date on NRCM's Priority Legislation!

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## Our Experts are Working for You

NRCM's knowledge of the issues you care about runs deep. Right now, our team of issue experts is working hard for you at the Maine State Legislature and beyond. Learn more about our advocacy team at [nrcm.org](http://nrcm.org).



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SBierschwale/NRCM

Rumford Whitecap Mountain

## Continue Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program

The Land for Maine's Future (LMF) program is Maine's most popular and successful land conservation program. Part of what makes LMF so popular is that it is designed to benefit all Mainers regardless of where they live or how they spend time outdoors. LMF has funded projects across all 16 counties that conserve land directly in support of our state's local forestry, farming, outdoor recreation, and fishing economies, as well as for important wildlife habitat.

Since its establishment in 1987, LMF has helped to conserve more than 650,000 acres of land across Maine. This includes more than 330,000 acres of working forests; 9,884 acres of farmland; 158 miles of recreational trails; more than 1,200 miles of shoreline on rivers, lakes, and ponds; and 30 commercial working waterfront properties, with tremendous benefits to the wildlife who rely on these lands and waters.

Despite its success, LMF has run out of money, which has spurred lawmakers to explore a range of legislative strategies for continuing the program. Sen. Russell Black (R-Franklin) has sponsored a bill (LD 593) that would provide an ongoing \$10 million general fund appropriation to LMF. He also has introduced a \$50 million LMF bond. Sen. Teresa Pierce (D-Falmouth) has proposed a bill (LD 1312) that would provide funding to LMF from the interest on the state's budget stabilization fund. Whatever the strategy, the important message to lawmakers is to urge them to support additional funding for the LMF program this year to continue this successful program.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Contact your legislators to urge their support for additional funding this year for the Land for Maine's Future program.



JCaldwell/NRCM

Wabanaki Alliance State House Day

## Recognize Tribal Sovereignty

Over the past several years, lawmakers have considered multiple bills that would recognize the inherent sovereignty rights of the Wabanaki Nations in Maine by implementing consensus recommendations of the 2019 Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

This year, lawmakers will have an opportunity to vote on a bill (LD 785), introduced by Sen. Rachel Talbot Ross (D-Cumberland), that has the strong support of the Wabanaki Alliance, the advocacy organization led by the Mi'kmaq Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation.

NRCM supports the tribal sovereignty bill, which would implement recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act that have not yet been implemented. NRCM staff are working with the Wabanaki Alliance alongside countless other organizations and individuals to secure passage of this bill. Hundreds of Maine people have submitted testimony in support of tribal sovereignty legislation. The time is long overdue to address injustices toward Wabanaki Nations by recognizing their inherent sovereignty.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Contact your Representative and Senator to urge their support for LD 785 to recognize the inherent sovereignty rights of the Wabanaki Nations in Maine.



Town of Bristol

## Make Polluters Pay for Climate Damage

Polluters should be held accountable for the impacts caused by the pollution they generate. This principle is fundamental to the Superfund program that holds responsible parties accountable for paying the clean-up costs for sites they have contaminated with toxic pollutants. The same concept should be applied to address the damages caused by climate change through the creation of a Climate Superfund program.

Climate change is already causing significant harm to our neighborhoods and towns statewide. The winter storms from two years ago caused \$90 million in damage to Maine's public infrastructure alone. The damage to private property is likely significantly higher.

In a 2020 "the costs of doing nothing" report, the Maine Climate Council estimated that Maine could easily experience tens of billions of dollars' worth of damage from projected climate change in the decades ahead.

The cost of addressing climate damage should not be borne by Maine taxpayers alone. That's why we're working to pass a bill (LD 1870), introduced by Sen. Stacy Brenner (D-Cumberland), that makes polluters pay through creation of a Climate Superfund program. The bill requires the state to produce a report of the financial impact of fossil-fuel-related climate pollution, then identify the companies responsible for that pollution and require compensation in proportion to their share of emissions. LD 1870 would assess fees on the largest and most profitable fossil fuel companies in the world, which have benefited tremendously from externalizing the damage their products have created in communities – like those across Maine – for decades.

These companies have known for more than 50 years that the source of their profits is the primary cause of climate change. The time has come to pass a Climate Superfund law, as Vermont and New York State have already done, to hold these companies accountable.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Contact your legislators to urge them to support the Climate Superfund bill (LD 1870) that will hold oil companies responsible for the damages caused by climate change.



NRCM File

## Increase Access to Affordable Solar Energy

Imagine if you could purchase a small plug-in solar energy generation device at your local hardware store to place in your yard or on your balcony and generate power that saves you money by reducing how much electricity you need to purchase from the grid. And what if the device, consisting of one, two, or three solar panels, plugged easily into a standard wall outlet and had a payback period of three years or less?

Such systems have been widely adopted in Europe but are generally not available in the United States. Utah passed a bill last year to remove barriers for these portable plug-in solar appliances. Now, here in Maine we're working to pass legislation to similarly empower Mainers with this option for reducing their energy bills. For the average household in Maine, a 1,200-Watt system could cut electricity bills by 21 percent, or more than \$400 a year.

Introduced by Sen. Nicole Grohoski (D-Hancock), the bill, LD 1730 – as amended prior to an early January public hearing – would update Maine rules to create a new class of plug-in solar devices, establish appropriate safety and consumer product standards for these devices, and clarify that plug-in solar generation is not eligible for net energy billing.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Contact your legislators and urge them to support LD 1730 to increase access to plug-in solar energy that makes electricity more affordable.



Jayne Winters

Sebec Lake

## Protect Maine Lakes and Conserve Farmland

Maine lawmakers have an opportunity this year to enhance the protection of the water quality of Maine lakes, and to stem the loss of farmland through conservation measures – two high priority areas of investment to protect Maine’s character, economy, and environment.

Maine lakes contribute more than \$14 billion annually to the state’s economy through property values, tourism, recreation, and jobs, yet the water quality of lakes throughout Maine is declining. Farms and farmland also are vital for Maine’s economy, yet less than five percent of Maine’s farmland is currently protected, and more than 82,000 acres of farmland fell out of production between 2017 and 2022.

To help address these challenges, Sen. Brenner (D-Cumberland) and Rep. Bill Bridgeo (D-Augusta) have introduced a bill (LD 2141) that would provide \$2 million annually to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and \$2 million to the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program. Funding would come from a revenue source comprised of unclaimed deposits on beverage containers that are accumulated when people put bottles and cans in the trash or a recycling bin or otherwise don’t return them for redemption.

Currently, as much as \$17 million in unclaimed deposits is kept by beverage companies and not used to serve the public good. NRCM has long felt that this is the public’s money and should not be claimed by beverage companies that make tens of billions annually in net profits.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Contact your legislators to urge their support for LD 2141 to protect Maine lakes and Maine farmland through funds that will be redirected from unclaimed beverage container deposits.



NRCM File

## Expand Battery Recycling and Stewardship Program

Over the years, Maine has implemented many product stewardship programs that require product manufacturers to share in covering the costs of end-of-life management of waste associated with their products. Maine’s program for the recycling and stewardship of batteries, however, is outdated and ineffective.

Enacted in 1991, Maine law only requires manufacturers of rechargeable nickel cadmium batteries and small lead-acid batteries to provide a system for recycling their batteries. The law does not require a recycling program for non-rechargeable consumer batteries, such as the ones used in flashlights, toys, and small appliances, and no stewardship program has been put in place for lithium-ion batteries. As a result, critical material resources present in batteries are not being recovered, and lithium-ion batteries are causing fires at landfills, transfer stations, and recycling facilities.

NRCM has supported expanded battery recycling and stewardship legislation in the past, but this year may be our best opportunity yet for establishing such a program. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) developed a draft bill as part of its Annual Product Stewardship Report, and the Environment and Natural Resources Committee seems poised to report out a bill for consideration in a public hearing. The legislation would require battery manufacturers to help fund an expanded battery recycling and stewardship program.

**ACTION NEEDED:** Contact your legislators to urge their support of a bill to update and expand Maine’s existing battery recycling program to include modern rechargeable and non-rechargeable consumer batteries, with funding for the program paid by battery manufacturers.

## Other Bills NRCM Supports

Below are a few of the many additional bills that we will be supporting this session.

**Maintain Maine’s Involvement in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative** Rep. Chris Kessler (D-South Portland) has introduced a bill (LD 2037) that authorizes Maine to continue participating in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which has been one of Maine’s most successful energy efficiency and climate programs. Between 2009 and 2024, Maine received more than \$246 million in funding from the RGGI program, most of which has been invested in energy efficiency programs managed by Efficiency Maine. In 2023 alone, RGGI investments saved more than \$130 million in avoided energy costs for Maine households and businesses.

**Provide a Right to Repair for Electronics** Sen. Tipping (D-Penobscot) has introduced an electronics right to repair bill (LD 1908) aimed at protecting the rights of Maine people to repair electronic devices that they own. Many manufacturers prefer to create consumer products that cannot be repaired. Planned obsolescence increases profits for companies at the expense of consumers. LD 1908 requires manufacturers of digital devices doing business in Maine to provide repair materials that they already provide to repair partners to device owners and independent repair specialists. Doing so would save money and reduce waste for Maine people by extending the life of electronic devices.



ETheberge/NRCM

Sandy River

**Increase Protections for Maine Waters** Every three years, the DEP is required to review the water quality data of rivers, lakes, streams, and coastal waters across Maine and recommend upgrades in the “classification” level of specific waters if they have reached a higher level of water quality. These classifications establish the water quality standards that waterbodies must meet under the Clean Water Act and help to determine what pollution discharges are allowed within them. A

package of reclassification recommendations is then reviewed by the Board of Environmental Protection and submitted to the Legislature for approval. This year’s reclassification proposals include increased protections (classification upgrades) for Abbott Brook in Oxford County, several tributaries to the Sandy River in Franklin County, and the Pleasant River in Piscataquis County. We support the passage of these upgrades by the Legislature and are also encouraging them to upgrade the stretch of the Androscoggin River from Lewiston-Auburn to Lisbon Falls.

**Reduce Stormwater Pollution** Stormwater is one of the leading sources of pollution to Maine’s waters. When it rains, the water that flows off our streets, buildings, and lawns collects pollutants like bacteria, nutrients, sediment, and toxic chemicals. When these pollutants eventually enter our waterways, they can cause issues like the closures of beaches and shellfish areas, the growth of harmful algae, and the contamination of drinking water sources. Rep. Art Bell (D-Yarmouth) introduced a bill (LD 646) to establish a commission to study unregulated stormwater pollution. The bill was enacted last year but did not receive the necessary funding. It appears that private funding has been identified to fund this effort, which should allow this bill to become law.



Beth Comeau





Sebago Lake

**Municipal Funding to Enforce Shoreland Protection** Since the early 1970s, Maine has been a national leader in protecting water quality by establishing the Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act, which requires municipalities to adopt shoreland zoning ordinances that meet minimum state guidelines. But this and other laws that protect Maine waters are only as effective as their enforcement. In recent years, several municipalities have

attempted to address high-profile, egregious violations of shoreland zoning, incurring significant litigation expenses to hold the violators accountable. To help towns enforce laws that protect Maine waters, Sen. Tim Nangle (D-Cumberland) introduced a bill (LD 1904) to create a \$100,000 legal defense fund. Towns would then be required to reimburse the fund within six months of settling violation cases, enabling the fund to be sustained into the future.

**Response Fund for Private Wells Impacted by Toxic Pollution** More than 50% of Maine people depend on private wells for their drinking water, which is a higher rate than almost any other state. But Maine wells have faced significant toxic pollution problems, such as caused by the large spill of PFAS-containing firefighting foam at the former Brunswick Naval Air Station in 2024. Rep. Dan Ankeles (D-Brunswick) has introduced a bill (LD 2115) to create a Well Contamination Response Fund that would have \$1 million to help cover the costs for testing, remediation, filter treatment systems, and bottled drinking water for individuals impacted by hazardous substances that contaminate their private wells.




  

  
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## How You Can Get Involved

Maine's environmental laws exist because of the work and involvement of people like you who value our natural resources. NRCM's goal is to encourage as many people as possible to participate in the process. Every action can help make a difference. Together, we can protect what we love.

Visit NRCM's website at [nrcm.org](http://nrcm.org) to:







-  Stay up to date on priority bills on our Legislative Bill Tracking page.
-  Visit our events page to sign up for online and in-person events to learn about the legislative process and how you can become more involved.
-  Contact our outreach team who is hard at work organizing a series of virtual and in-person events aimed at giving you the skills you need to get involved.
-  Get tips and resources for participating in the legislative process in our **Take Action Toolkit**, including:
  - ✓ How to find your Maine state legislators
  - ✓ Tips for contacting your legislators
  - ✓ Video on how to testify via Zoom
  - ✓ Video on how to write and deliver testimony
  - ✓ Tips on writing a letter-to-the-editor

## Love Maine? So do we.

Protecting Maine's environment takes real resources — and NRCM relies on the generous support of its members to get results. Help strengthen our voice on behalf of Maine's people, wildlife, and natural places.

Members enjoy exclusive legislative and policy updates, newsletters, special event invitations, sporting camp and bookseller discounts, and the satisfaction of knowing you're making a difference.

As an NRCM member, you'll receive:

-  Exclusive legislative and policy updates
-  Action alerts that amplify your voice
-  Invitations to member events and webinars
-  A subscription to our Maine Environment newsletter and a copy of our Nature of Maine calendar
-  Discounts to sporting camps and with select booksellers
-  Access to a community of people who care about Maine as deeply as you do

**Join us today!**



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