

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

IN SUPPORT of L.D. 1308

“Resolve, Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Establish a Working Group to Explore Opportunities to Maintain Public Access of Land”

**Presented by Senator BALDACCI of Penobscot.
Cosponsored by Representatives BRIDGEO of Augusta, DILL of Old Town**

DATE OF HEARING: April 2, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Tim Peabody, Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in support of L.D. 1308 a Resolve, Directing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Establish a Working Group to Explore Opportunities to Maintain Public Access of Land.

The Department relies on public access to private land for carrying out the mission of the Department. Using hunting and trapping as part of our overall wildlife management strategy we rely on public access to private land to carry out that strategy. The Department’s statewide fisheries management program relies on the same access to provide fishing opportunities for the public in thousands of lakes, ponds, rivers, brooks and streams. The economics of recreational vehicle trails across the state additionally relies on this same access.

Changing land ownership policies, and concerns of maintenance costs for general public access, coupled with more powerful and frequent storm events that damage roadways, bridges and culverts on private land across the state creates a challenge for all. How do we maintain some of the traditions we have enjoyed as costs for landowners to maintain private access roads for land stewardship and harvest operations have increased?

The idea of a public-private partnership in this bill is already in place on a small scale with the Department’s Landowner Relations Program and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, Bureau of Parks and Lands, ATV and snowmobile programs. Both examples invest public funds into private land that in a small way support the use of private land by the public.

We can have these discussions without a bill, but the Department views L.D. 1308 as an opportunity to speak with landowners and others in a focused organized manner about the future of access on private lands. As this discussion moves forward, we do ask that the reference to “commercial landowners” in the bill be expanded. We feel there needs to be a broader discussion because the landowners’ chosen use of the land is not necessarily the reason the public wants access.

As stated previously, the future of access to private lands across the state is a concern of the Department and we welcome the opportunity to have this discussion.