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Testimony of Tom Doak

Executive Director

Maine Woodland Owners

In Opposition to

LD 993

“An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine”

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Tom Doak, Executive Director of Maine Woodland Owners speaking today in opposition to LD 993, “An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine.”

Maine Woodland Owners is a statewide, member-supported non-profit organization that advances stewardship of Maine’s small woodland resources through the encouragement of sound forest management and the advocating for and supporting of Maine’s small woodland owners. We are the only statewide organization dedicated to supporting the interests and serving the needs of these 86,000 woodland owners; those owning from a few, to several hundred, acres. I am a licensed professional forester and former Director of the Maine Forest Service.

This bill would create a large, permanent advisory group which appears to duplicate existing efforts. It also seems to overlap with the role of this Committee and the Legislature as the policy making body, and it adds confusion to the role of the Maine Forest Service and the Director.

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We believe instead of one large permanent group, the more effective way to address challenges and opportunities is through small, temporary groups focused on specific issues comprised of experts and those impacted by those issues. There are numerous examples of this approach working well and efficiently. One that comes to mind is a group I previously served on: the Task Force on Creation of a Forest Carbon Program. That group of 15 members had a specific charge to develop a voluntary, incentive based program for woodland owners and practitioners to increase carbon storage in Maine. It starting meeting in February 2021 and it finished its work later that year. A second example is the group appointed by the Commissioner to advise the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife on the State Wildlife Action plan. That broad group, with broad representation, met over about a year, advised the department, and then disbanded.

We are concerned that a large permanent advisory group will inevitably takes resources away from the Maine Forest Service at a time when frankly, they are already inadequately funded. When needed, the Director or the Commissioner of the department has the authority to convene focused, temporary groups of any topic related to forestry. That model works well.

We urge you to oppose this legislation.