



Testimony in Support of LD 1156

An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development and Maintenance of Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Active Transportation

April 27, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of LD 1156.

My name is Kristina Cannon. I grew up in North Anson on a large dairy farm, and I have been a trail user since I could walk. My sister and I rode our snowmobiles to school, and we loved four-wheeling and walking our dog Buddy on wooded trails. These days I cross-country ski, look forward to annual backpacking adventures with my sister, and mountain biking has become my new favorite pastime. My husband and I ride local trails, but we also travel to Vermont to ride the Kingdom Trails each year, and we spent several days riding in Moab, Utah, this past fall.

While trails have played a major role in my personal life, their importance has taken on a whole new meaning in my career.

I'm in my eighth year as the Executive Director of Main Street Skowhegan. My organization is a nonprofit working to revitalize Skowhegan. In 2016 we led a community-wide effort to develop the Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation. The plan's goal is to make our town a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents enjoy a high quality of life. One of our Economic Transformation Strategies is to enhance recreation and promote our natural resources.

As a result, we are doubling down on this vision. We are investing in outdoor rec infrastructure and providing free outdoor activities and gear to our local community members.

In addition to building Maine's first whitewater park with the Northeast's ONLY adjustable surf wave in our downtown river gorge—a project that currently awaiting environmental permits—Skowhegan is planning for 50 miles of multi-use trails accessible via our commercial district.

We are in the throes of developing a trail master plan that will provide a roadmap for new construction and current trail maintenance. Once complete, our municipality and local nonprofits will use this plan to fundraise for trail projects. Having the opportunity to apply for trail funding via this bond would help Skowhegan continue to realize our vision for becoming an outdoor recreation mecca.

Even though construction has not yet begun on these projects, we have already seen positive economic impact. In January, the Bangor Daily News reported \$650 million in investment in Skowhegan anticipated over the next few years. High Tide Capital is in the middle of a \$15 million historic mill redevelopment; Maine Grains is planning for a multi-million-dollar expansion; and we have a number of local, young developers who are investing in properties and businesses. This is because people KNOW that outdoor recreation infrastructure will attract new talent, businesses, residents, and tourists—all of whom will support their investments. AND, they believe in Skowhegan.

Skowhegan has strategic direction and a great group of community leaders who have been bootstrapping for years to realize this vision. Like other small, rural towns, we just need more capital to bring our goals to fruition.

I urge the Committee and the Maine Legislature to approve this bond and send it to the voters in November. Like Skowhegan, the State of Maine needs to double-down on outdoor recreation infrastructure investment as a tool for economic development.

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