



Committee on Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

April 10, 2023

RE: LD 1227, An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1227, An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation, on behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members and supporters.

Maine Audubon supports this legislation because it will progress the recommendations of the Agricultural Solar Stakeholder Group convened by the Governor's Energy Office (GEO) and the Department of Agricultural, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), of which Maine Audubon was a member. We also support the bill because it will advance a number of strategies in Maine Won't Wait, the state's four-year climate action plan published in December 2020, including "develop[ing] policies . . . to ensure renewable energy project siting is streamlined and transparent while seeking to minimize impacts on natural and working lands and engaging key stakeholders."

Maine Audubon is a strong supporter of renewable energy development, including solar. Rapid deployment of new renewable energy resources is critical to reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and avoiding the worst impacts of climate change—the leading threat to Maine's wildlife and wildlife habitat, the conservation of which is central to Maine Audubon's mission. At the same time, new renewable energy development, like any new development, if not thoughtfully sited, can displace wildlife habitat and negatively impact Maine's natural resources, including agricultural resources. Currently, there is a robust interest in solar development in Maine.

Policies that allow for the continued rapid deployment of renewable energy while encouraging projects that avoid, minimize, and/or compensate for Maine's finite agricultural and critical natural resources are key to Maine's current and future agricultural productivity, biodiversity, and climate resiliency. We believe that this bill is a positive step towards adopting such policies.

Maine Audubon supports Section 3. Section 3 would create a publicly-accessible database of developed energy projects in the state that would allow the GEO, natural resource agencies, and the public to identify land use and other energy trends. Maine agencies, including the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and DACF, have some data, but it is incomplete. For example, the Maine Natural Areas Program, part of DACF, tracks projects that have requested acreage reviews, but does not have access to information on projects approved for development. It is critical that the state work collaboratively with municipalities to collect this information, because not all projects require a state permit and thus are “trackable” by the state. With this information, the state can track trends and tailor policy development, should it be necessary, accordingly.

Maine Audubon supports Section 4 as proposed to be amended by Representative Pluecker in a correspondence that was shared with the Committee and interested parties on Friday, April 7. Section 4 represents the first step towards the creation of a dual-use pilot program. Locating solar alongside agricultural production is a win-win. However, more information is needed to understand how to maximize agricultural productivity while maintaining low energy costs and efficiencies. Section 4 is the first step toward gathering that information.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. We strongly encourage the Committee to support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eliza Donoghue".

Eliza Donoghue, Esq.
Director of Advocacy