

NEWS RELEASE



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Environmental Groups Map Out Priorities for Lawmakers Resource Protection, Air Quality, Clean Energy, and Chemical Exposure Targeted for Action

AUGUSTA – Maine lawmakers received a compass and a trail map from Maine’s Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) today to help them navigate the numerous bills being considered in Augusta this year. The EPC is a partnership of 26 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations in Maine representing over 100,000 members. Coalition partners spoke passionately about Maine’s environment and the critical role it plays in Maine’s economy and in the lives of Maine people. They delivered a vision for Maine’s future and what legislators can do today to protect Maine’s natural heritage.

Maureen Drouin, Executive Director of Maine Conservation Voters, urged lawmakers to think long-term. She stated, “Maine people identify with our beautiful environment. Who we are, what we value, what we do for work, and what we do for fun all have their roots in our environment. We need strong leadership in Augusta to make sure we preserve this key to our way of life. That starts with supporting these eight priorities.”

For the sixth straight year, the EPC has produced its Common Environmental Agenda. The seven priority bills include efforts to protect forests and stream crossings, prevent exposure to dangerous chemicals, ensure healthy air for all Maine people, and encourage energy-efficient development. The list includes an eighth priority that is not a bill but a standard for the Legislature to follow: no weakening of current environmental protections.

Matt Prindiville, Toxics Project Director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine was there to talk about a priority bill that would create new opportunities to get hazardous materials out of community landfills. Prindiville stated, “Maine’s product stewardship laws for electronic waste, mercury thermostats and lamps are innovative success stories that are now national models. Expanding our partnerships with manufacturers of consumer products supports responsible recycling in our communities. This is good for families, good for towns, and good for our environment.”

Landis Hudson, Executive Director of Maine Rivers, spoke about the importance of Maine’s fisheries to Maine’s economy. Hudson stated, “Maine rivers are part of the foundation of our way of live and our shared prosperity as a state. There should be no delay in adopting the important new rules regarding fish passage that will ensure these resources are protected for generations to come.”

Steve Taylor, Campaign Director of the Environmental Health Strategy Center, alerted the legislature to one of the priority bills that addresses a weakness in Maine’s public health laws. Taylor stated, “Maine led the nation by phasing out toxic brominated flame retardant chemicals from everyday products. Unfortunately, the chemical manufacturers of the DECA flame retardant have continued to push new uses for their deadly product, which is now being added to plastic shipping pallets. DECA is still dangerous and unstable, and continues to build up in the food chain and harm our children. It’s time to close the loophole that allows DECA to be introduced into additional products.”

In another attempt to close an unintended environmental loophole, EPC is supporting a bill that would prevent wildlife habitat from being developed without adequate review. Barbara Charry, Maine Audubon Biologist, stated, “Our water quality and wildlife habitat provide important economic value to our state and our communities. We need to close the loopholes in our laws that allow road expansion into sensitive environments without review.”

This year’s priorities include two bills related to air quality and clean energy. Ellen Hawes, Policy Analyst for ENE (Environment Northeast), identified new guidelines for development as being a top priority for lawmakers. Hawes stated, “Everyone wins when we invest in a climate-friendly future. Passing guidelines for efficient building and site design means we’ll waste less energy, minimize unnecessary forest loss and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. This is about building smart today and creating jobs for the future.”

A second priority bill designed to improve air quality would reduce sulfur pollution from the burning of heating oil. Edward Miller, VP for Health Promotion and Public Policy of the American Lung Association of New England stated, “Clean and healthy air is considered to be part of Maine’s brand – one of our many assets that draws tourists and supports our economy. Yet Maine’s actual air quality is less than healthy due to our location in relation to the many industrial polluters to the west of us. Unhealthy air can lead to serious health effects, especially for those with lung disease or heart disease. It also results in visibility loss, which makes our many scenic parks and lands less enjoyable for visitors. We need to do everything we can to reduce our in-state sources of air pollution and that’s why the American Lung Association supports this measure to limit dangerous sulfur emissions.”

Heather Spalding, Deputy Director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, advocated for streamlining Maine’s pesticide notification system. Spalding stated, “Everyone benefits when there is a simple system for land managers and neighbors to communicate about pesticide spraying. The amendments proposed will make the system more manageable, help the public understand what to expect from pesticide-spraying neighbors, and make enforcement easier for administrators. Working together can make the system work better for everyone.”

The Environmental Priorities Coalition is an influential voice at the Maine State House and has a strong track record of success. Since 2007, 14 of the EPC’s 16 priority bills have been passed by the Maine Legislature and signed into law. In addition, several partner organizations draw on the Common Environmental Agenda to inform their legislative scorecards.

Drouin added, “Protecting and preserving Maine’s environmental legacy takes vision and vigilance. Maine lawmakers have an important role to play and we’re counting on them to support our Common Environmental Agenda and help preserve our extraordinary environment so Maine people and Maine’s economy can thrive.”

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Background:

Maine’s Environmental Priorities Coalition is a partnership of 26 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations in Maine representing over 100,000 members. Its goal is to provide lawmakers with a roadmap for protecting Maine people and promoting prosperity for today and future generations.

Fact sheets on priority bills are attached.

The Environmental Priorities Coalition includes:

- American Lung Association of New England
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Atlantic Salmon Federation
- Bicycle Coalition of Maine

Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental Health Strategy Center
Environment Maine
Environment Northeast
Friends of Casco Bay
Maine Audubon
Maine Center for Economic Policy
Maine Congress of Lake Associations
Maine Council of Churches
Maine Council of Trout Unlimited
Maine Conservation Voters Education Fund
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Maine People's Alliance
Maine Rivers
Natural Resources Council of Maine
Northern Forest Alliance
Physicians for Social Responsibility, Maine Chapter
RESTORE: The North Woods
Sierra Club, Maine Chapter
Ocean Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
Toxics Action Center