



Environmental Priorities Coalition

NEWS RELEASE

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Background materials available here: <http://www.protectmaine.org/maine-epc/>

Environmental Coalition Unveils Legislative Priorities

*Call for collaborative efforts to lower energy costs and build
Maine's natural resource-based economy*

(AUGUSTA) Calling Maine's water, land, and wildlife the key to economic growth and prosperity, the state's leading environmental organizations are asking lawmakers to look beyond partisan politics and focus on ways to grow Maine's natural resource-based industries while reinforcing core environmental protections.

At their annual breakfast with legislators this morning, the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), a partnership of 31 organizations representing over 100,000 members, unveiled a six-part legislative agenda they say offers a collaborative and common sense approach to lowering energy costs and supporting good jobs in Maine.

The EPC proposal to work together in ways that benefit Maine's environment and economy comes as Governor Paul LePage begins his second term in office and the Maine Legislature kicks off a two-year session under divided control. Maureen Drouin, Executive Director of the Maine Conservation Alliance, acknowledged that there won't be agreement on all issues in the months to come, but that there is one point everyone can agree on.

"Maine's competitive advantage is our environment, our people, and our way of life," said Drouin. "We must look to the heart of what makes us all Mainers, and that's the shared belief that our water, land, and wildlife matter. We don't have to choose between protecting our environment and growing our economy because they go hand-in-hand. Let's not miss the opportunities before us to help Maine families and businesses prosper."

People from all across Maine gathered at the State House to have breakfast with their legislators and discuss their environmental priorities. At the press conference that followed, speakers included a solar installer, a

home weatherization volunteer, a commercial fisherman, a municipal road commission, a homeowner, a lifelong Maine sportsman, and a third-generation lobsterman.

The coalition's six priority bills include proposals to lower home energy costs, build Maine's solar economy, improve the water quality of Maine lakes and ponds, repair stream crossings that keep roads and wildlife safe, protect endangered wildlife, and secure land and natural resources for generations to come.

Maine lakes generate \$3.5 billion in annual economic activity, support 52,000 jobs, and provide drinking water for half of the state's population. But recent studies by the University of Maine and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection indicate a widespread decline in water quality. Representative Gary Hilliard, a Republican from Belgrade, has introduced a bill to improve Maine's lake protection law.

"The water quality in Maine lakes and ponds is declining," stated Peter Swallow, a lifelong sportsman from Farmington and a board member for the Porter Lake Association. "One reason is the uneven application of shoreline zoning rules. Developers get no consistency, neighbors get frustrated, and our lakes and ponds deteriorate before our eyes. We need to improve Maine's lake protection laws and better understand the causes of non-compliance at the local code enforcement level. Clear clean lakes are a tremendous economic asset for our state - we would be short-sighted to ignore the warning signs. We must not let another year go by without stepping in to protect this important resource that supports our good health, good jobs, and Maine way of life."

Senator Dawn Hill from York County has proposed a bond that would build on Maine's successful efforts to lower energy costs and create new jobs by improving the energy efficiency of Maine homes.

"Weatherizing our homes is a common sense solution that I've seen firsthand improve peoples' homes and lives in my area," said Linda Woods of Oakland who volunteers with Sustain Mid Maine Coalition, a grassroots organization that has helped weatherize more than 200 homes in Central Maine. "Communities, individuals, businesses, and Efficiency Maine are all working together to generate real results for people, and it's time to intensify all of our efforts to improve the energy efficiency of Maine's housing."

Another priority for the coalition is to support the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife proposal to update Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species List. The list is considered a critical tool for maintaining Maine's biodiversity and educating the public, but it hasn't been updated since 2007. Based on scientific research, the Department is proposing to add six at-risk species to the list.

Harriet Van Vleck, a homeowner from Bowdoinham stated, "As a homeowner who has worked to help bats thrive on my property, I strongly support the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's bill to amend the state's Endangered and Threatened Species List, including the addition of three bat species. Adding these endangered bats to the list will help draw attention to their rapidly diminishing population and their important role in our ecosystems."

Responding to the widespread deterioration of Maine culverts as well as the strain placed on local budgets for their repairs, Representative Jeff McCabe from Skowhegan has proposed the Stream Crossings Bond. Investments from the bond would keep Maine roads and the public safe while helping wildlife stay connected to their natural habitat. The bond would support the local construction jobs needed to repair old and ineffective culverts.

Ward Bredeau, the road commissioner for the Town of Phillips stated, "Additional funding is needed to support municipalities' efforts to improve their stream crossings. As a fisherman, I know how important it is for fish to be able to move up and down stream. As the road commissioner for the town of Phillips, I also know how expensive it is to install the right sized culverts. Without help in funding for small municipalities such as ours, one project can wipe out our entire budget. The benefit of installing a properly sized culvert is that it can last a long time. Phillips just installed a 20' box culvert replacing a 6' pipe on a 20' stream. The culvert will last 100 years and improve sensitive fish habitat on the Sandy River where my son and I fish. Towns all over Maine need funding to help do this important work."

By many accounts, Maine is falling behind in building its solar capacity and solar economy - missing opportunities for job creation and energy security. Representative Sara Gideon of Freeport has introduced the Solar Power for Maine bill. The bill is designed to spur investment in solar by reducing the financial and regulatory barriers for homeowners and businesses to generate their own solar power.

"The rural communities in Maine are in desperate need of good paying careers that retain our youth and increase the resiliency of our local economies," said Vaughan Woodruff, owner of Insource Renewables in Pittsfield. "Across the United States, the solar industry has shown its ability to create these types of jobs. Last year, solar jobs grew at 20 times the national employment rate. States across our region have recognized that strong solar policy positions them for a stronger future and leverages significant and immediate private investment within local economies. Maine is really missing the boat on this issue. Unless tangible steps are taken in Augusta over the next two years, we are going to miss a prime opportunity to develop a lasting industry that supports a positive economic future for the state of Maine. "

The Land for Maine's Future Program has a history of broad support among lawmakers and a strong record of success in protecting working forests, farms, and waterfronts for the continued economic and recreational opportunities they provide. Senator Roger Katz of Augusta is proposing a bond that would support additional conservation investments.

Wayne Davis, a Davis Wharf lobsterman from West Tremont stated, "My brother and I are third generation fishermen who own a wharf that has provided commercial fishing opportunities to the family since the early 1950s. We are proud to have been part of the Land for Maine's Future Program's preservation of working waterfront access so that our children and grandchildren can also make a living by the sea. Passage of this bond by the Legislature will benefit other fishermen whose access otherwise may be lost to coastal development."

Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition is a partnership of 31 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations representing over 100,000 members. This is the eleventh year the coalition has introduced a slate of priority bills for conserving and protecting Maine's water, land, and wildlife.

"These six priority bills offer us a collaborative and common-sense path forward," added Drouin. "They will help grow Maine's economy; support good jobs in our energy, construction, and natural resource-based industries; and protect our water, land, and wildlife for generations to come. Maine people, Maine's environment, and Maine's economy can thrive. Let's work together to make it happen."

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Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition is a partnership of 31 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations representing over 100,000 members who want to protect the good health, good jobs and quality of life that our environment provides for all of us.

2015 Organizational Members of the Environmental Priorities Coalition

Acadia Center • Appalachian Mountain Club • Atlantic Salmon Federation

Bicycle Coalition of Maine • Conservation Law Foundation • Environmental Health Strategy Center

Environment Maine • Friends of Casco Bay • Islesboro Island Trust

Maine Association of Conservation Commissions • Maine Audubon

Maine Center for Economic Policy • Maine Conservation Alliance • Maine Council of Churches

Maine Council of Trout Unlimited • Maine Interfaith Power and Light • Maine Lakes Society

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association • Maine People's Alliance • Maine Rivers

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