



NEWS RELEASE

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Environmental Coalition Unveils Legislative Priorities

34 Maine organizations call for bipartisan action to protect clean water, support energy independence, ensure public health, and build natural resource-based economy

AUGUSTA – This morning, environmental organizations and community leaders from across the state asked lawmakers for bipartisan collaboration and action to protect Maine’s public health, natural resources, and way of life, while growing our clean energy and natural resource-based economies for a better future.

At their annual breakfast with legislators, the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), a partnership of 34 organizations representing over 100,000 Maine people, unveiled a six-part legislative agenda they say offers crucial protections for clean water, promotes solar energy, and reduces transportation emissions and food waste across the state.

“This year marks the final Environmental Priorities Coalition Legislative Agenda under Governor LePage,” said Beth Ahearn, Program Director of Maine Conservation Alliance. “Over the past seven years we have learned how to collaborate better than ever to defend our environment, way of life, and public health for future generations. Together, the EPC and the Maine State Legislature have proven that the environment is not a partisan issue and that the environment and our economy can go hand-in-hand. At a time when the federal government supports regressive and pro fossil fuel policies, it is more important than ever to do all that we can to protect our air and water on the state and local levels.”

People from across Maine gathered at the State House for a zero-waste breakfast – made entirely of donated, local and organic ingredients – with their legislators to discuss their environmental priorities. At the press conference that followed, speakers included an engineer, teacher, hybrid vehicle owner, and water pollution and solar power experts.

The coalition’s six priority bills include proposals to protect clean water, promote solar power, reduce food waste while helping local farms, support Maine fisheries, and encourage low-emission vehicles.

This year, the EPC will be advocating for two clean water bonds that will leverage other funding, protect and restore Maine waters, and create jobs. The first of the bonds, LD 1510, will address deteriorating wastewater treatment infrastructure in towns across the state to ensure that untreated sewage is not polluting water.

“Wastewater treatment and protecting our beautiful and amazing water resources benefit everyone in Maine,” said Mac Richardson, Superintendent of the Lewiston-Auburn Water Pollution Control Authority. “This bond proposal, the first for investing in our aging wastewater infrastructure since 2010, will keep us moving forward in protecting human health and keeping our lakes, rivers and oceans clean and available for everyone to enjoy.”

The second clean water bond, LD 178, aims to stop pollution caused by stormwater runoff by making much needed improvements to road infrastructure in small towns around Maine.

“This \$5 million bond will prevent stormwater runoff from polluting Maine’s water bodies, which is the greatest threat to our state’s high quality waters,” said Garrison Beck, Director of Water Conservation at Midcoast Conservancy. “This money will leverage matching funds, provide local jobs for contractors to fix failing infrastructure, and relieve burdens on local taxpayers across the state.”

After last year's solar bill lost by just 3 votes in a veto override vote late into the session, the EPC will continue to advocate for solar power with a much more modest bill in 2018. This year's bill, LD 1686, stops the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) from imposing a new fee on power that never touches the electrical grid, eliminates the need for costly new equipment, and carefully reduces barriers for community solar. It also requires the PUC to analyze the facts behind changes to net-metering, but it does not prevent the PUC from scaling back net-metering.

"Maine cannot afford to let political ideology and the financial interests of utility companies leave Maine in last place for solar," said Dylan Voorhees, Climate & Clean Energy Director at Natural Resources Council of Maine. "Maine people and businesses deserve the right to produce and use their own energy, and solar power now makes that possible. This bill does little more than prevent the Public Utilities Commission from imposing a new fee that infringes on that right."

The Food Waste Recovery Bill is another priority for the coalition. This bill, LD 1534, would help schools develop waste reduction programs and support local farms that donate or discount food that would otherwise be wasted. One in four Maine children do not get enough to eat on a regular basis, but the EPC believes this bill can help solve that problem while supporting our local economy.

"Caring for the community and the local environment are part of the Sebago Elementary School experience from the time a student starts school," said Ted Bridge-Koenigsberg, science teacher at Sebago Elementary. "We are faced with an involved problem, the two-pronged issue of food insecurity coupled with food waste. As one child said in December, 'We have a problem, food waste!' Students are working on every aspect from measuring the amount of waste to designing solutions and educating each other. The students know this is not just our school's problem, but one that effects everyone – and we can be another model for other schools. We see this bill as a great opportunity for an elementary school to get guidance and support from the state to make progress on a real problem."

The EPC is also focused on supporting Maine's fishing industries in 2018. They will be advocating against LD 1667, in hopes of allowing alewives and other sea-run fish into Sheepscot Pond to preserve this critical food source for many species of birds, mammals, and ground fish. Native sea-run fish are currently being blocked from Sheepscot Pond based on the unscientific belief that they are a danger to freshwater game fish.

"My family has owned a camp on Sheepscot Pond for generations," said Mark Jordan, Professional engineer. "Professionally, I specialize in water resources and environmental engineering. I oppose LD 1667, which would continue blocking sea-run fish from Sheepscot Pond. Allowing native, sea-run fish into the pond will improve water quality and help build a more diverse and healthy fishery. When sea-run fish can carry out their natural life cycles, everyone benefits."

The final priority highlighted by the EPC is to reject taxes of fuel-efficient cars and trucks. The EPC believes that Maine drivers shouldn't be taxed for choosing fuel-efficient vehicles that reduce gasoline imports, use locally-produced energy, create less carbon pollution, and keep more money in the state's economy.

"When Maine drivers choose clean, efficient cars, they take control of their transportation expenses and make important contributions to our state's health, economy, and environment," said Kathleen Meil, Policy Advocate for Acadia Center. "We absolutely need sustainable transportation funding mechanisms, but penalizing these drivers isn't the solution."

"Our jobs, our health, our way of life, and our children's future will all be impacted by the choices made at the Maine State House this year," said Beth Ahearn. "We need to be smart, look for ways to find common ground, and work together so that every community in Maine – large and small, rural and urban – reaps the benefits of our clean water, healthy fisheries, fertile farmlands, and renewable energy technology."

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Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC) is a partnership of 34 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.