



May 23, 2023

54 Portsmouth Street
Concord, NH 03301

Tel. 603.224.9945

Fax 603.228.0423

info@forestsociety.org

www.forestsociety.org

The Honorable Kevin Avard, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
New Hampshire State Senate
The State House, Room 103
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Senator Avard and Members of the Committee:

Please accept this testimony from the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests in support of House Bill 221, legislation designed to strengthen New Hampshire's Agricultural Land Preservation (ALP) Program.

Our interest in this bill is because the protection of important agricultural land is one of land protection priorities. In addition to that key goal, we also focus on these important outcomes:

- The protection of productive forest land to ensure the continued viability and improvement of the state's forest resources and forest products industries, especially including historically well-managed forestland.
- Protection of important agricultural land.
- Protection of water supply lands and important aquatic resources.
- Protection of important wildlife habitat areas and the natural ecosystems on which native wildlife and plants depend.
- Protection of places with special scenic, recreational, scientific, cultural, and/or educational value to communities.

The proposed changes to NH RSA 432 in HB 221 will improve the ALP. Currently, RSA 432 requires the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food to manage and oversee the entire ALP program and to hold, monitor and enforce the conservation easements that arise from ALP. The DAML is challenged right now due to staffing and resource constraints to administer ALP, and to take on the additional responsibilities of managing and monitoring the easements in the program.

Fortunately, New Hampshire has a capable land trust community who have protected thousands of acres of NH farmland. These organizations have the expertise and capacity to take on the responsibilities of protecting and stewarding the agricultural land here.

In addition, the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides matching funds to help protect farmland. The funds available through the ALP's budget could leverage a 1:1 match from the federal government. Typically, land trusts apply to NRCS and then seek matching funds from other local and state sources like LCHIP.

The passage of HB 221 will align ALP so that it meets the requirements to be compatible with other funding sources such as NRCS. Often times, land protection projects require multiple funding sources so

adding ALP into the this toolbox of support programs will mean better outcomes for the protection of our state's agricultural and farming community.

Thank you again for your consideration of HB 221. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Leahy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matt" and last name "Leahy" clearly distinguishable.

Matt Leahy, Public Policy Director
Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests