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The Honorable Norman Major
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 202
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Chairman Major:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on HB 359. The Forest Society appreciates the sponsors' efforts to enhance local conservation efforts. Unfortunately, this legislation will have the unintentional effect of undermining LCHIP's beneficial impacts. As you consider HB 359, we would urge you to keep in mind the fundamental purpose behind the establishment of LCHIP. Specifically, as stated at NH RSA 227-M:1, the program is needed for the "careful protection of the state's most important natural, cultural, and historical resources."

It is, in other words, a state-wide program designed to protect those resources which best represent the values we cherish in New Hampshire. HB 359 appears to shift LCHIP away from this state-wide focus without bringing meaningful resources to municipalities. For example, under the bill many communities may receive only a small amount of money back on an annual basis and likely not enough to undertake a conservation project. However, by decreasing the funding available to LCHIP, the bill would reduce the program's ability to respond to the demonstrated demand for LCHIP's assistance. In addition, the Committee should also remember that not all municipalities have a conservation fund. In those cases, where would the funds the bill would divert go? Questions like those highlight the uncertainty HB 359 would create.

The true power of LCHIP rests with how it can leverage its state investment with other public sources, as well as local and private monies, to bring about meaningful regional and state conservation projects. Given the often large costs to undertake these kinds of projects, LCHIP's ability to encourage, support and incentivize local communities to take action to protect significant resources is critical. It is a partner in these efforts. We would urge the Legislature to focus on steps that will promote this partnership and not undercut it. Given these concerns, we would respectfully ask the Ways and Means Committee to vote this bill Inexpedient to Legislate.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our concerns.

Sincerely,

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