

February 17, 2021

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The Honorable Norman Major, Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
New Hampshire House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building, Room 202
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests appreciates this opportunity to express our opposition to HB 621, legislation to allow the registers of deeds to retain up to 10 percent of the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program surcharge.

As your committee considers HB 621, we would urge you to review the statute which specifies the duties of the registers of deeds. RSA 478:1 states that the maintenance and care of the county records is the duty of each county and, furthermore, the cost of that work is at the expense of the county. It would appear the obligation to restore and archive the official county land records should rest with the counties and not with LCHIP.

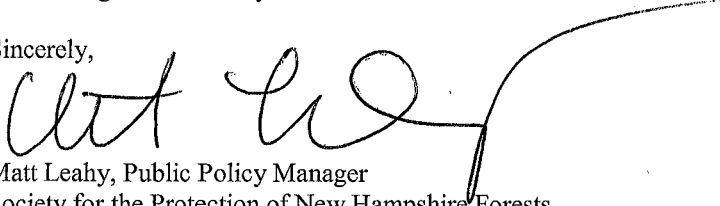
As you know, LCHIP's mission, as noted in NH RSA 227-M, is to "conserve and preserve this state's most important natural, cultural, and historic resources through the acquisition of lands, and cultural and historic resources, or interests therein, of local, regional, and statewide significance, in partnership with the state's municipalities and the private sector, for the primary purposes of protecting and ensuring the perpetual contribution of these resources to the state's economy, environment, and overall quality of life."

While we recognize how important the archival restoration of the official land record is to the counties, placing the burden on LCHIP to accomplish that undertaking does not meet the statutory purpose of RSA 227-M and therefore is an inappropriate use of the program's funds.

Furthermore, according to bill's fiscal note, HB 621 will divert between \$364,000 to \$468,000 away from the program each year. Given that the unmet need and demand for LCHIP assistance continues even 20 years after the Legislature established the program, the loss of that level of funding would be significant. In fact, over the last 10 years, 177 out of the 505 total applications received were not funded. Reducing the resources available to the program by up to \$468,000 a year would only exacerbate this unmet need and greatly undermine LCHIP's mission. The loss of those funds is especially concerning given that every \$1 LCHIP invests in communities around the state leverages another \$4.75.

Because of these concerns, we would ask the Committee to find HB 621 Inexpedient to Legislate. Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,


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