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The Honorable Neal Kurk, Chairman
Committee on Finance
New Hampshire House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building, Room 210
33 North State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Chairman Kurk and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to express the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests support for the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program. As you know, the Governor's proposed budget provides \$3.5 million for LCHIP in FY 2018 and FY 2019. As the Finance Committee works to finalize the next state budget, we would urge you to include this full funding in the budget.

Since its first grant round in 2001, the program has provided significant benefits to our state. Its 372 grants have helped to preserve nearly 200 historic structures and sites and to conserve more than 278,000 acres of land for food production, water quality, ecological values, timber management and recreation including hunting and fishing. What is equally noteworthy is how the \$39 million of state money has been matched by \$244 million in funds from other sources. However, LCHIP's impact goes beyond specific projects. The program highlights the deeper question of why our state should continue investing in land conservation and cultural resources.

As you recall, in 2014 the New Hampshire Legislature established and convened a Joint Legislative Study Committee to review the status of land conservation in New Hampshire and the State's role in encouraging voluntary land protection. In its final report, the Committee discovered that almost 70 percent of critical lands in New Hampshire remain unprotected. Yet these non-conserved areas provide natural goods and services are essential to our economy and quality of life. In fact, for every \$1 invested in land conservation by the state, \$11 in natural goods and services are returned to the state's economy in natural goods and services. Conserved lands also support the outdoor recreation, tourism, and forest and agriculture industries, as well as thousands of jobs. The committee's research highlighted several examples of the importance of land conservation to the New Hampshire economy:

- The forestry, agriculture, and commercial fishing industries depend on maintaining forests, farms, and water quality. Forestry, agriculture, commercial fishing, and related processing activity generate \$2.5 billion in output and support 18,500 jobs in New Hampshire.
- Outdoor recreation generates \$4.2 billion in annual consumer spending, \$293 million in taxes, and 49,000 jobs in New Hampshire.

- In 2011 alone, 228,000 anglers and 56,000 hunters spent \$272 million throughout the state. In addition, 630,000 residents and visitors spent \$281 million on wildlife watching activities.

Moreover, according to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, two-thirds of the land critical to maintaining clean drinking water remains unprotected. The costs of constructing and operating water treatment facilities would be an enormous financial burden to cities and towns, if critical drinking water supplies are developed.

The study committee's first recommendation was to fully fund LCHIP. Fortunately, the Finance Committee supported this view and approved \$3.5 million for the program in FY16 and FY17. We would appreciate your continued backing for its full funding by including \$3.5 million in both FY 2018 and FY 2019. Such a step would reaffirm the long-standing principle that the protection of New Hampshire's unique natural assets is essential to safeguarding the state's economy and character for today's population and for future generations. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

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