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April 2, 2019

The Honorable Suzanne Smith, Chair
NH House Committee on Resources, Recreation & Development
The State House
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

Chairwoman Smith and Members of the Committee:

The Forest Society strongly supports Senate Bill 269-FN and encourages the Committee to recommend its enactment.

The State of New Hampshire is itself the second largest landowner in the State. The Department of Natural & Cultural Resources (DNCR) manages more than 200 forest reservations, totaling 169,000 acres. These reservations include all state forests and state parks. Through a cooperative agreement with the Fish & Game Department, DNCR also manages 53,000 acres of Wildlife Management Areas. These public lands are part of what is referred to as The Public Trust, a legal classification for natural resources owned and stewarded by the State on behalf of its citizens. In addition to public lands, The Public Trust also includes lakes and ponds of more than 10 acres, rivers, groundwater, wildlife, and perpetual conservation easements held by and stewarded by the State.

The appropriation contained in SB 269-FN will enable the DNCR's Natural Heritage Bureau to develop an assessment tool that will significantly enhance the State's capacity to effectively steward distinctive natural areas within the State's public land ownership. Much like medical technology has developed tools to better identify and treat diseases and abnormalities in the systems that make the human body work, natural scientists are developing diagnostic tools to help land managers identify and manage lands with ecological characteristics that are desirable to sustain. The Upland Ecological Integrity Assessment is such a tool.

One primary application of this tool will be to better understand how natural forest communities work, and to assess how a matrix forest ---a forest made up of multiple types of distinct natural communities --- can be conserved. The tool can also help natural scientists understand how a forest matrix will respond to natural and man-made disturbances. By understanding these complex interactions within a matrix forest, land managers will be able to apply this new knowledge to inform decisions about how to best manage the land and its natural resources over time.

Attached is a copy of the DNCR webpage that describes what natural communities are and how DNCR's Natural Heritage Bureau has developed a classification system for the variety of natural communities that occur in the State. This information can also be found at <https://www.nhdfi.org/Natural-Heritage/Natural-Communities>.

DNCR identifies its mission in these words: *To protect, preserve, promote and manage the State's natural and cultural resources, supporting New Hampshire's high quality of life and strengthening the experiences of our residents and guests. *

The appropriation requested in SB 269 will advance this mission by expanding the toolbox available to public land managers to better protect and preserve natural communities on public lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will Abbott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Will Abbott
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