



March 18, 2015

The Honorable Chris Christensen, Chairman
Committee on Resources, Recreation and Development
NH House of Representatives
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Chairman Christensen and the Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, The Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, and the Appalachian Mountain Club, we thank you for this opportunity to register our strong support for Senate Bill 38, which would establish a commission to produce a comprehensive land conservation plan for the State of New Hampshire.

Our support for this legislation is rooted in Section I of the bill, which states that "... adequate protection of New Hampshire's natural assets is essential to maintaining and safeguarding the state's economy and character for today's population and for future generations. Continued and increased state investment in land and natural resource protection is not a luxury item in the state budget but is essential to our state's continued prosperity."

Last year, 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 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. 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 illustrative examples of the importance of land conservation to our 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.

Fortunately, according to a 2012 UNH poll, the vast majority of residents in our state strongly support land conservation and believe the state should fund such efforts. Importantly, members of both the House and Senate share this view, as shown by the enactment of the Joint Legislative Study Committee legislation last session. Establishing a commission to develop a land conservation plan represents a critical opportunity to closely consider and ultimately put into action many of the recommendations of the Joint Study Commission.

We look forward to working closely with the Land Conservation Plan Commission once it is established and we thank the members of the committee for their support. Please do hesitate to contact us with questions or for additional material.

Sincerely,

Matt Leahy, Society for the Protection of NH Forests
Jim O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy
Rodger Krussman, Trust for Public Land
Susan Arnold, Appalachian Mountain Club