

Maine Environmental Organizations Announce Priorities for Legislature *Children Among Maine Citizens Speaking at News Conference About Six Key Issues*

AUGUSTA, Maine, January 16, 2007—School children and teachers who traveled three hours by bus were among the Maine residents who spoke out today at the Maine State House about key environmental issues that 22 diverse groups are urging the 123rd Maine Legislature to prioritize.

“Even at their young ages, these kids already know what it’s like to explore and love Maine’s land,” said John Emery, a fifth-grade teacher who accompanied students from Andover Elementary School in Maine SAD 44. “They wanted to be here to say that today.”

On behalf of the coalition of environmental organizations that met today with legislators and held a news conference at the State House, Susan Farady of the Ocean Conservancy said, “Significant and timely issues top our list for Maine lawmakers, from concerns about toxic threats and rollbacks of environmental safeguards to opportunities to conserve land, protect endangered species, and revitalize riverfront communities.”

She said that for three consecutive years Maine environmental groups have undertaken a comprehensive process to determine shared legislative priorities. “After months of review and analysis, when an issue emerges as a priority among these multiple groups, it means we’re confident that it’s the right time for the Legislature to take action on the issue—action that will create tremendous benefits statewide.”

The 22 environmental organizations, which represent nearly 100,000 members and supporters, announced six priorities of equal importance that affect Maine people, wildlife and natural resources: 1) no weakening of current environmental protections, 2) adding to Maine’s list of endangered and threatened species, 3) cutting global-warming pollution by increasing energy efficiency, 4) phasing out toxic flame retardants in people’s homes, 5) funding the Land for Maine’s Future program, and 6) revitalizing riverfront communities.

“As a volunteer who helps the state protect piping plovers on Maine’s beaches, I’ve seen firsthand that if these birds weren’t listed on Maine’s endangered and threatened species list, and protected by the state, they would be extinct in Maine,” said Ted Allen of Brunswick. “It’s essential that Maine maintain an up-to-date list that’s based on good scientific data.”

Bill Houston of Kingfield, an outdoor resources instructor at Skowhegan Regional Vocational Center, is concerned about global warming’s effect on traditional recreational activities. “As a professional guide, I know Maine’s climate is a part of our heritage and our economy. Where I live, skiing, snowmobiling, ice-fishing—they’re a way of life. We should be taking responsibility to help prevent global warming before the activities and the businesses we love disappear.”

Amy Graham of Farmington is worried about the effects on Maine children of Deca, a toxic flame retardant found in televisions, other electronics and upholstered furniture. Deca is a form of polybrominated diphenyl ethers, or PBDEs, which are linked to learning, memory and behavior problems in people, and have been found in breast milk, wildlife and the environment. In Maine, they’ve been measured in fish, household dust and sewage sludge.

“As a mother of young children, I see a lot of kids with learning disabilities and other unexplained problems that may be linked to toxic chemicals in our environment,” Graham said. “We need to make Maine a safe place for our children. That should be everyone’s top priority.”

Ginger Kelly of Bethel, a retired teacher, said her 22 grandchildren are “22 reasons” she supports consistent funding for the Land for Maine’s Future program. “You only have to hear the name of this program to understand why it’s so popular with people across the state,” she said. “It is a wonderful way for my generation to support land conservation now, before it’s too late and the land is parceled off.”

A resident of Eddington who grew up along the Penobscot River, Sally Gilbert said, “I want current and future generations to have the opportunity to experience and enjoy clean Maine rivers, and to live in thriving communities along their shores. Maine’s rivers are intertwined with our state’s history and identity, and the Clean Water Act and other ecological restoration efforts have allowed us to refocus our attention on them. Clean rivers are a valuable source of economic opportunity and regional tourism—both of which benefit the social fabric in our communities.”

Participating Organizations:

Appalachian Mountain Club
Atlantic Salmon Federation
Bicycle Coalition of Maine
Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental Health Strategy Center
Environment Maine
Environment Northeast
Friends of Casco Bay
Maine Audubon
Maine Council of Churches'
Environmental Justice Program

Maine Council of Trout Unlimited
Maine League of Conservation Voters
Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Assoc.
Maine Rivers
Natural Resources Council of Maine
Northern Forest Alliance
Physicians for Social Responsibility
(Maine chapter)
RESTORE: The North Woods
Sierra Club
The Ocean Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
Toxics Action Center

Contact information for issue experts and citizen spokespeople:

Endangered and threatened species list—*Expert:* Jenn Burns, Maine Audubon, (207) 781-2330, ext. 224, jburns@maineaudubon.org; *Citizen spokesperson:* Ted Allen, Brunswick, (207) 729-8661, beanallen@verizon.net

Global warming and energy efficiency—*Expert:* Dylan Voorhees, Natural Resources Council of Maine, (207) 622-3101, dylan@nrcm.org; *Citizen spokesperson:* Bill Houston, Kingfield, (207) 474-2151, kbhous@tdstelme.net

Deca, toxic flame retardants—*Expert:* Amanda Sears, Environmental Health Strategy Center, (207) 772-2181 or (207) 939-7333, asears@preventharm.org; *Citizen spokesperson:* Amy Graham, Farmington, (207) 778-3805, abhaslam@gwi.net

Land for Maine’s Future—*Expert:* Jenn Burns, Maine Land Coalition, (207) 781-2330, ext. 224, jburns@maineaudubon.org; *Citizen spokespersons:* Ginger Kelly, Bethel, (207) 824-2686, gk@mahoosuc.org; John Emery, Andover, (207) 392-3161, emeryj@sad44.org

Revitalizing riverfronts—*Expert:* John Burrows, Atlantic Salmon Federation, (207) 725-2833, asfjb@blazenetme.net; *Citizen spokesperson:* Sally Gilbert, Eddington, (207) 989-3114, sally.gilbert@umit.maine.edu