

November 12, 2004

The Honorable Patrick McGowan
Department of Conservation
22 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0022

Dear Commissioner McGowan;

The members of the Maine Forest Products Council are very interested and supportive of the ongoing Governor's "Task Force on Traditional Uses and Public Access." At the recent Board of Directors' meeting we discussed the plan of work you have outlined for the Task Force and we wanted to provide some constructive feedback on the process and describe our position on public access.

The MFPC membership has been very supportive of voluntary efforts that maintain the unique Maine tradition of public access and recreational use on private lands. This tradition exists nowhere else in the U.S. at the level we enjoy in Maine. In the MFPC Recommended Forest Policy Guidelines several of the tenets that support public access include:

- ***Mindful of the Public Resources*** - Forest policies of Maine should promote cooperative, outcome based stewardship of the public resources of air, water, fish and wildlife.
- ***Conducive to Public/Private Cooperation Regarding Recreational Access*** - Maine forest policies should support traditional recreational opportunities and respect landowners' rights to manage recreational use and to control access to their forestlands.
- ***Respectful of Private Landowner Rights*** - Maine public policies should support the landowners' ability to achieve ownership objectives and should respect and uphold private forestland ownership.

We are hopeful that the Governor's Task Force can accept these fundamental principles as well.

Over the past few years, many positive programs have been developed that have successfully kept public access and use of private forest lands a huge success. A partial list of ongoing and very successful efforts includes: the open lands policies of many large landowners; the North Maine Woods and KI/Jo Mary Gate Systems; Project LandShare; and the ongoing trend of public access and land use easements. These policies and programs are the outcome of years of

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experience in working with public access issues in Maine and they have withstood the majority of changes in landownership that have occurred. It is the Board's hope that these highly successful voluntary programs will be given every consideration as opportunities to maintain and even enhance public access and use.

The recent popularity of land access and use easements purchased from forest landowners underscores the public's understanding that these landowner rights exist and have value. The Council believes that the purchasing of such rights on a voluntary basis should also be supported by the Task Force.

Collaboration with recreational user groups has been the standard operating procedure for the forest industry, and challenges have been resolved through strong, ongoing, two-way communication among organizations like the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, the Maine Snowmobile Association, the Maine Guides Association and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. In fact these organizations meet regularly to discuss mutual concerns through the Sportsman's Forest Landowner Alliance. We would encourage you to investigate the effectiveness of the Alliance in dealing with current and future issues of public access.

The MFPC is available at any time to share our thoughts on how best to resolve access and use conflicts. You and your staff are always welcome at the Council to discuss such matters of mutual interest. Patrick Strauch is planning to attend future task force meetings and will be available to represent the broad perspectives of the Maine Forest Products Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Griffin". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Linda Griffin
President

Cc: John Cashwell, Seven Islands Land Company
Gordon Gamble, Wagner Timberlands
MFPC Executive Committee