



The 2014 Agenda of Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition

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Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition brings together 28 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations that speak for over 100,000 Mainers. For the past decade, the Coalition has identified a handful of bills to target during each upcoming legislative session. At times this has meant supporting new initiatives such as a bill passed in 2013 to increase investment in energy efficiency. At other times, the Coalition has pushed back against efforts to weaken existing environmental regulations – such as the attempted roll back in the spring of 2013 of Maine rules protecting wild brook trout. This year, the Coalition has selected six legislative priorities – all of which have bipartisan support – in order to reinforce the sustainability of Maine's food supplies, water resources, and energy sources, and thereby protect the state's economy and quality of life.

Nutrition and Food Supplies

Two of the Coalition's priorities deal with the food Mainers eat and produce.

- Senator Chris Johnson has offered a bill to support Maine's local foods economy and enhance school nutrition. With no fiscal mandates or recurring costs, this proposal is a cost-effective way to create new economic opportunities and improve the health of children in Maine. This initiative will also permit Maine to reduce its current 90% dependence for food on industrial agriculture based outside the state by shifting toward more use of local produce for school meals and other public institutions.
- Another priority is a bill by Representative Michael Devin intended to help protect one of Maine's largest food industries: shellfish. Ocean waters off the coast of Maine are becoming more acidic causing juvenile clams literally to dissolve; and initial studies indicate that juvenile lobsters will develop thicker shells in response to the growing acidity, which stunts their growth. Oyster hatcheries on the West Coast have already lost 60-80% of their catch due to ocean acidification. This legislative proposal would fund a study of the problem to identify solutions and develop a plan to mitigate the damage. In the words of Dave Cousens of the Maine Lobstermen's Association, "we need to get on top of this now before our kids inherit this problem and it's too late to fix it or adapt."

Protecting Maine's Water Resources

Three other legislative priorities for 2014 would help to better protect Maine's rivers, lakes and groundwater.

- Representative Jeff McCabe has proposed an act to authorize a general fund bond of \$50 million to allow investment in natural and human-constructed infrastructure projects critical to Maine's economy and quality of life. Cost-effective investment in these assets will insure an abundance of high-quality drinking water across the state and allow communities to more effectively prepare to prevent disruptions from extreme storms and floods, while at the same time creating and preserving jobs in various sectors of the economy including construction, engineering, fisheries and tourism.
- To protect water quality, the Coalition also favors revision of the rules recently adopted by the state's Board of Environmental Protection for metallic mineral mining. Mining for metals in sulfide deposits creates sulfuric acid and toxic runoff that can devastate water quality and kill aquatic life. The type of mining now proposed for Maine has never been operated successfully without polluting nearby waters, and the "new technologies" that mining advocates claim will protect Maine's waters have never been tested. The risks are too high to allow out-of-state mining corporations to use Maine as an "experiment" for unproven mining techniques that could force Maine taxpayers to pay for wastewater treatment and allow mining companies, which can be readily dissolved, to avoid paying for the messes they make. The Coalition favors, instead, requiring mines to operate with cleanup plans projected to take ten years or less.

- A fifth Coalition priority focuses on the protection of Maine lakes, which generate at least \$3.5 billion in economic activity and provide more than 52,000 jobs across the state. Maine once had one of the strongest lake protection programs in the nation; now the water quality of our lakes is deteriorating, attributable in part to poor Department of Environmental Protection oversight due to a reduction in staff, resources, and programing. Senator McCabe has proposed a bill that will strengthen the Department's lake protection program, enhance training for code enforcement officers, create a new certification program for landscape contractors, and develop strategies to reduce runoff from roads and the application of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides that threaten the water quality of our lakes.

Energy and the Environment

The Coalition's last priority seeks to promote both a healthier environment and energy independence through 'home-grown' renewable energy.

- The Coalition supports a bill sponsored by Senator Eloise Vitelli to support solar energy development. Maine has been falling behind the region in developing solar power, a pollution-free energy source that promotes clean air, a healthy environment, and reduction in carbon emissions, known to contribute to ocean acidification and other costly environmental problems. Although solar power can be produced for free, installation requires up-front capital outlays that had been subsidized by Maine's small solar incentive program, which has now expired. This bill would reinstate the program with potential cost-savings to Mainers and direct the Public Utilities Commission to set goals allowing Maine to recapture its lead in this industry.

Citizen Support for the Way Forward

As the facilitator of the Environmental Priorities Coalition, the Maine Conservation Alliance, on whose board I serve, fully endorses the adoption of these six Coalition priorities. Together, these valuable measures would significantly reinforce the sustainability of the state's food, water, and energy resources. All Maine citizens should consider these legislative initiatives and – if they, like the Coalition, find them worthy – contact their state legislators to encourage their passage. Only by making the environment a legislative priority can we protect Maine's economy and our quality of life.