

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 12, 2015

The Honorable Jason Weller
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Weller:

We are writing in support of an application for Fiscal Year 2016 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding submitted by a partnership of The Trust for Public Land, Maine Audubon, American Forest Foundation, and the New England Forest Foundation. Their proposal would tap into multiple Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs in order to support private landowner efforts to improve critical fish and wildlife habitats in western Maine between the White Mountains in New Hampshire and Moosehead Lake.

The proposal seeks to leverage previous land conservation investments by focusing on private landowner incentives aimed at improving wildlife habitats. In addition, the U.S. Navy's Redington SERE School, which is situated in the proposal's geographic focus area, has recently attracted over \$4 million in Readiness and Environmental Preparedness Initiative Base Buffer and Challenge Grant funding, and opened the prospect for Sentinel Landscape designation.

A primary goal of the project is to increase financial and technical assistance available to private forest owners through NRCS programs. Under the RCPP proposal, landowners will use two NRCS programs: the Healthy Forest Reserve and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Together, they would allow project partners to conserve crucial working forests, to provide landowner incentives for managing forests for habitat diversity, and to fund physical improvements to impaired riparian habitats and stream crossings.

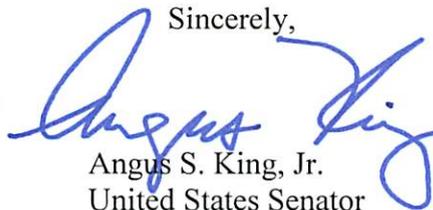
Ultimately, the Trust for Public Land and its partners seek to tie conservation successes with valuable outcomes for private landowners, such as maintaining forests, increasing the productivity and flow of goods in working forests and local economies, and protecting important ecological spaces. This region of Maine is an important focus area that has attracted federal, state, local, and private funding support. The RCPP funding would enhance these ongoing investments.

Given that this is Maine's only submission for RCPP and a project in the state was not funded in the last round, we are encouraged that NRCS agreed to advance this project from the pre-proposal to the full proposal stage this year. We respectfully request it be given careful consideration, subject to all applicable laws and regulations, and ask that you notify Katie Seelen (Senator Collins) at (202) 224-2523, Adam Lachman (Senator King) at (202) 224-5344, and Sam Warren (Congressman Poliquin) at (207) 784-0768 when a final decision is made.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress