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Testimony of State Rep. Stephen S. Stanley
to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources
"Elevating Local Voices and Promoting Transparency for a Potential Monument Designation in Maine"
June 1, 2016

Congressman Rob Bishop and esteemed members of the House Committee on Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to the proposed monument designation in Maine's Katahdin region.

My name is Stephen S. Stanley, and I represent Millinocket, East Millinocket, Medway, Patten and the nearby unorganized townships in the Maine House of Representatives. I am currently serving my sixth term in the Maine Legislature, having previously served four terms in the House and one in the Senate.

A majority people of my district and the surrounding region are opposed to a national monument or park. Earlier this year, the people of Patten voted by a roughly 2:1 margin to oppose the formation of either a monument or park in the Katahdin region. Last year, both Medway and East Millinocket voted by similarly overwhelming margins to reject the proposal.

During the session that recently ended, the Maine Legislature reaffirmed what the people of the Katahdin region have made clear. Maine lawmakers approved Public Law 458, also known as LD 1600, which the governor introduced and I sponsored. In its final form, the measure specifies that the Legislature does not give its consent in cases of the federal government acquiring land for the designation of the property as a national monument.

Numerous and varied concerns have led the majority of local residents, as well as many people outside our area, to oppose moving forward with the proposed monument or park. I am submitting this testimony to give voice to the concerns my constituents have raised, which I share.

One of the greatest concerns is how a monument or park would impact our region economically. Though proponents tout the potential gains, there are serious questions around whether a monument or park would be the economic driver they claim it would be.

The forest products industry is crucial to Maine's economy, and this proposal would do serious harm to the industry. It would take tens of thousands of acres of productive woodland out of play. Creating a national park or monument could have detrimental consequences on wood supply and mills across the state. Papermaking jobs are vital to the economic health of working families and communities around Maine and there are many concerns about the effect that it may have on the paper industry.

There are other questions around the dampening effect a monument or park could have on our region. Would industry-related emissions be held to a higher standard near the proposed monument or park? How would that impact businesses in the region?

Proponents counter that hundreds of jobs could be created to replace the jobs in our legacy industries. However, when we look at the example that Baxter State Park provides, it seems unlikely that these estimates are realistic. Beyond that, these jobs would be low-paying and largely seasonal.

In an area that has been devastated by the loss of more than 2,000 good-paying jobs in the past 10 years, replacing good-paying, year-round forest products jobs with these tourism jobs is not a good solution for the Katahdin region.

Right now, there is a lot of economic uncertainty in our area as plans are discussed to create a national park. Businesses do not want to locate to our area, and there is a lot of panic about what may occur if a park is created.

There are legitimate questions around whether the proposal would even bring the suggested number of tourists to our region each year. While our region is beautiful and special, it does not have a unique feature like the Grand Canyon or the geysers at Yellowstone. It can't be compared directly to Acadia National Park, which is a very different place in a very different part of Maine.

But let's assume for a moment that the tourists would come in these numbers. The region lacks the infrastructure to accommodate so many visitors each year, and we have yet to see any reasonable explanation or plan for how that infrastructure will be created.

It also seems that the type of visitor attracted to our region will differ from the visitors that bring economic activity to the area surrounding Acadia National Park. Bar Harbor and nearby communities are shopping and dining destinations with hotels and many other attractions. Here we have productive forestland. It can be enjoyed, but it would likely be by people who are prepared for an outdoor experience – not a shopping and dining experience.

Another great concern is whether or not there will be any local control. We have managed and operated the Maine woods for years now, and we know the ins and outs of the area. Many people in my area are concerned that if the national monument is established, nobody in Maine will have a say in the rulemaking.

Historically, we in Northern Maine have had access to this land. The woods in our area that was owned and operated by paper companies was able to be used for other recreational activities such as hunting, fishing and snowmobiling as well. A national monument would limit access to land we have used all our lives.

At the public hearing we had on LD 1600, the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine, the Maine Snowmobile Association and the Maine Woods Coalition, as well as many other local individuals, testified in support of the bill and in opposition to the national monument. As Anne Mitchell of the Maine Woods Coalition said, "I support LD 1600 for the freedom it returns to our state. The people of Maine deserve no less."

I have also included with my testimony a map of land that has been conserved in Northern Maine. As you can see, there is quite a lot of land, Baxter State Park being the largest that is already protected. We need the rest of the land to support the timber harvest industry. Taking away quality land will hurt jobs and negatively impact our state.

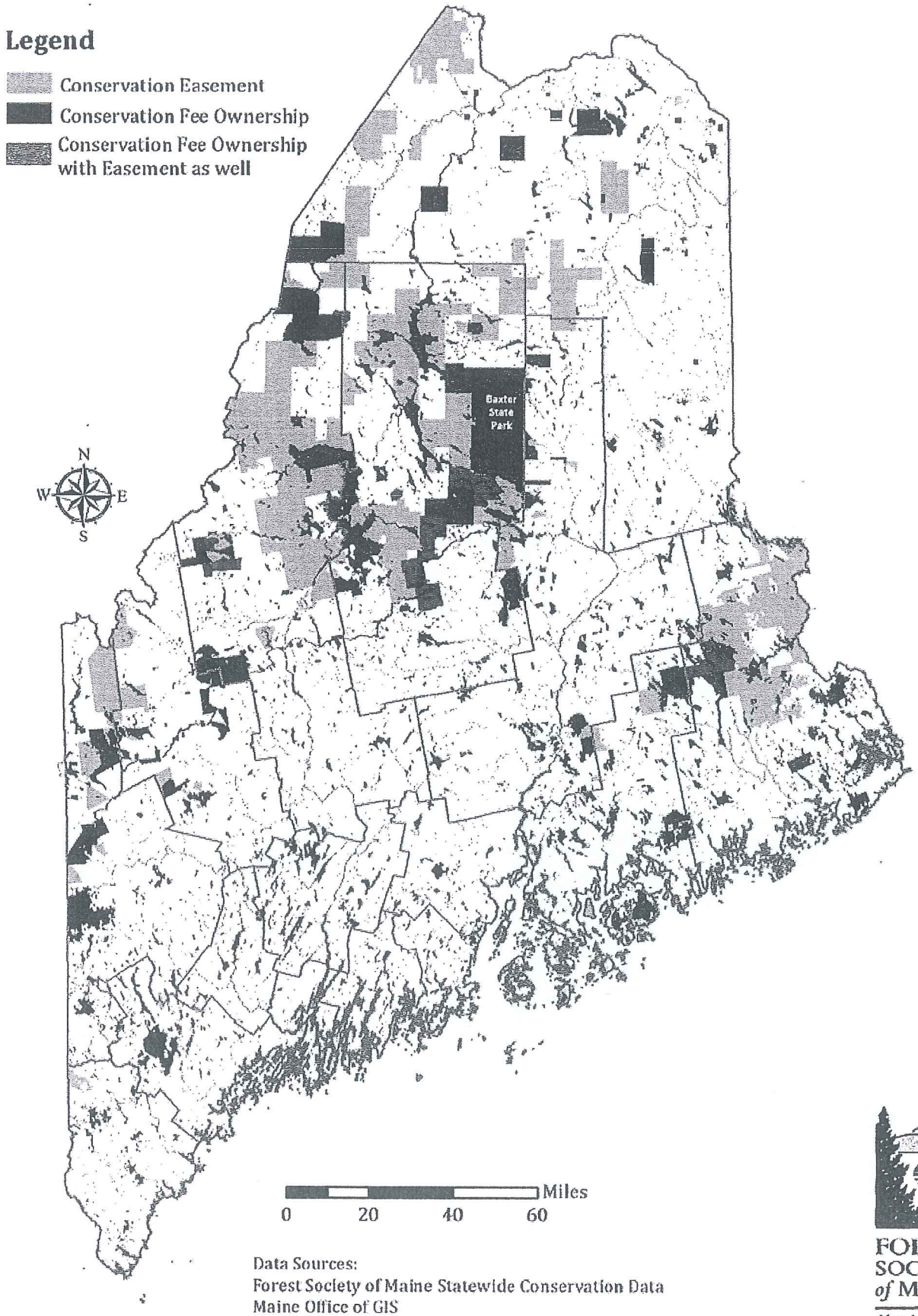
To some, a national monument or park might sound like an easy fix for the economic challenges our region faces. But the solution to the problems we face needs to come from within our community, not from outside our community without our support. The people of the Katahdin region need to come together to work toward driving growth that is homegrown and sustainable. There is no magic solution, especially not one that's driven by outside forces.

I am currently working with economic development folks, organizing leadership trainings and inviting speakers from around the country who have had similar situations in their area. This is a very divisive and complicated situation and could greatly hinder economic development in our area. I need to be sure it is the right decision before it moves forward.

If Elliotsville Plantation and supporters of the monument/park proposal want to be a part of those efforts, I hope they will start by listening to the people of my community. I believe there are other ways to move forward that would not be so controversial or potentially harmful to our area. Let's put the divisive question of the national monument or park proposal behind us so we can work together for a better future in the Katahdin region.

PATRICK STRAUCH Forest Products Council

Maine Conservation Lands 2014



Data Sources:
Forest Society of Maine Statewide Conservation Data
Maine Office of GIS

FOREST SOCIETY of MAINE

Map: 11/4/2014

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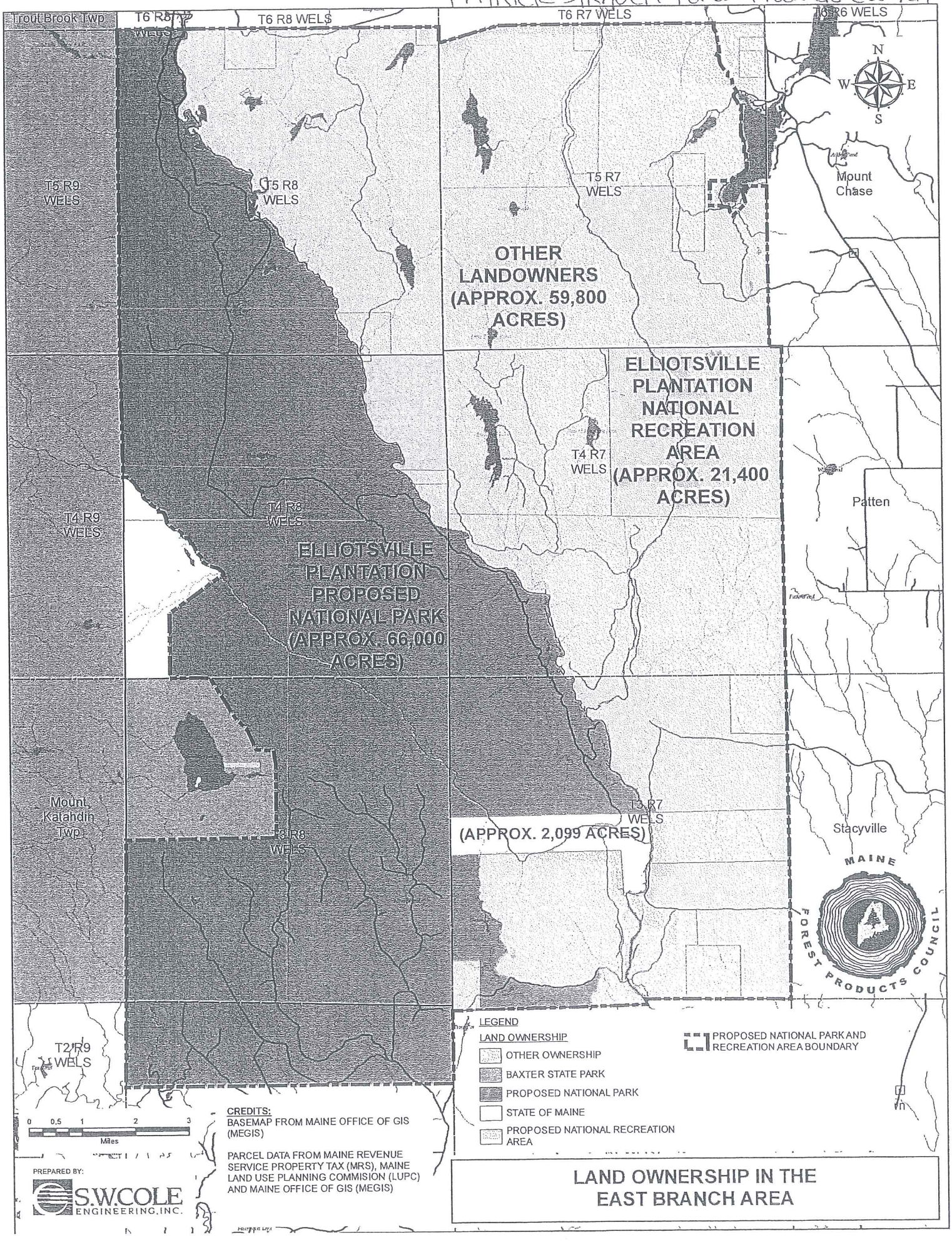

LAND OWNERSHIP IN THE EAST BRANCH AREA