

STATEMENT OF  
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FRIENDS OF MAINE'S SEABIRD ISLANDS  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS  
H.R. 2984, THE MAINE COASTAL ISLANDS WILDERNESS ACT of 2011  
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Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today. I am Stephanie Martin, and I live in the coastal community of Rockport, Maine, with my husband and my 5 and 2 year old daughters. I am here representing myself and the Friends of Maine's Seabird Islands, a non-profit organization whose mission is to encourage conservation and appreciation of seabirds, their nesting and coastal habitats, and to support the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge. I joined the Friends' Board of Directors 1 year ago after relocating back to the Maine coast. As a child growing up here I had no idea of the resources and beauty existing off the Maine coast, nor did I know about the conservation efforts regarding seabirds. I joined the Friend's group to help educate and share the story of seabird conservation and to help protect these islands, and thus the overall health of the Gulf of Maine.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you today about the Maine Coastal Islands Wilderness Act. I want to start by thanking Congressman Michaud for introducing and Congresswoman Pingree for co-sponsoring H.R. 2984. Maine's citizens are fortunate to have two representatives who understand not only the value that nature-based tourism plays in our economy, but whom also treasure Maine's unmatched natural beauty.

The Maine Coastal Islands Wilderness bill will provide enduring protection for 13 of the Refuge's 56 islands. These rugged islands provide Maine residents and visitors an opportunity to experience solitude and primitive recreation. Coastal real estate is economically unattainable for most of us Mainers and it is a comfort knowing that this legislation would forever protect the untamed beauty of places like Cross Island in Washington Country.

In addition to the wilderness recreation opportunities, the islands provided critical habitat to many species of wildlife and plants. Our nation's symbol, the bald eagle, nests on many of the islands including Outer Heron and Little Marshall. Outer White and John's Island are frequented by harbor seals and are birthing and nursing sites for their pups. And then there are the seabirds which are supported by the habitat on many of the islands, such as Old Man Island. Thousands of people come to Maine to see these beautiful seabirds.

Our National System of wild lands contributes significantly to the ecological, economic, and social health of our country, but this specific designation I am speaking of will support the economies of Maine's coastal communities by drawing in more individuals seeking the solitude these islands can provide.

In addition, Coastal Maine Wilderness would continue to provide a shelter for coastal wildlife, act as a living laboratory for important scientific research, and serve as a classroom for individuals and families exploring personal values in search of a unique outdoor experience while experiencing the risks, rewards, and self-reliance found only in nature.

I am here today because I want to protect the lands that are critical to scientific research for the health of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem, but also I want to set these islands aside to allow my daughters and grandchildren the opportunity to explore their personal values while experiencing the risks and rewards of nature.

I am not alone in my support for wilderness protection of these islands: over 600 Mainers submitted positive comments through emails, phone calls, and written testimony at 4 public hearings when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service presented its draft conservation plan for the refuge which included the designation of wilderness for 13 of its islands. Additionally, 99 mid-coast organizations, conservation groups, individuals, and businesses, including the Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce have signed this letter requesting Congress protect these islands and I ask that this letter be included in the official record.

Many of you are probably familiar with the slogan on Maine's license plate "Vacationland". Wildlife watching and ecotourism brings millions of dollars into Maine's economy annually supporting guides and boats bringing people to these beautiful places, as well as hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and innumerable stores that serve them. Tourism is our economic engine and wildlife and wilderness fuel that engine.

A recent report for the Governor's Council on Maine's Quality of Place states that annual spending on wildlife watching in Maine totals \$287 million. Aside from seasonal visitors, protected lands attract entrepreneurs, retirees and second-home residents who bring disposable income and job opportunities and help support local services. An Outdoor Industry Foundation nationwide study found of seven major outdoor recreation categories, viewing and photographing wildlife has grown the most over the past decade. Wilderness classification will be a thoughtful yet powerful tool in promoting the world-class resources we value in coastal Maine and will provide an integral first step toward a more robust and sustainable economy.

The Maine Coastal Islands Wilderness bill is a good thing for seabirds, recreationists, the tourism industry, and for our nation. This legislation is not in response to some immediate threat to the islands but it is appropriate Congressional recognition regarding the importance of these wild islands and the entire Maine Coastal Island National Wildlife Refuge to the people of Maine, our economy, and the countless wildlife and seabirds who depend on this important resource.

In conclusion, The Friends of the Maine's Seabird Islands urge you to support H.R. 2984, to protect these important and irreplaceable islands for our children and grandchildren to experience, just as we and previous generations have experienced. Thank you.