

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
REGARDING
H.R. 2984, THE MAINE COASTAL ISLANDS WILDERNESS
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
ACT OF 2011**

March 29, 2012

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to submit its views on H.R. 2984, the Maine Coastal Islands Wilderness Act of 2011. The Department supports H.R. 2984, which would designate specified lands in Maine within the Cross Island National Wildlife Refuge and within the Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness, and as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS).

The thirteen Maine coastal islands proposed for designation as wilderness under H.R. 2984 are part of the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which is comprised of five individual refuges that span the coast of Maine. The five separate refuges are: Cross Island, Petit Manan, Seal Island, Franklin Island, and Pond Island national wildlife refuges. Each has separate establishment histories and refuge purposes, but collectively, they are managed as the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

The refuges support an incredible diversity of habitats, including coastal islands, forested headlands, estuaries, and freshwater wetlands. There are 56 islands in the refuge complex, many of which support habitat for colonial nesting birds, puffins, and eiders. The 13 islands proposed for wilderness designation in H.R. 2984 are wild and relatively untouched by human activity. They are mostly forested and support mature spruce-fir forest, which provides nesting habitat for bald eagles and other species. These are gorgeous islands offshore, many with bold granite coasts and large trees dripping with lichens. These 13 islands are pristine with no roads or other structures like lighthouses or helicopter pads. These islands also provide rare opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Smaller islands closer to shore with little vegetation, especially those frequented by numbers of people, do not offer the same opportunities.

The refuge complex's comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) was finalized in April 2005. The potential for wilderness designation was addressed in the CCP. There are no current human uses on these islands that would conflict with a wilderness area designation, and designation of these islands would not significantly impact any future wildlife management capability. A portion of Halifax Island, which is located within Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge, is closed to the public due to rare plant management. A campsite used by kayakers from the Maine Island Trail Association, located on one end of the island, would not be impacted by a wilderness designation. On Bois Bubert Island, which is also located within Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge, there are some private in-holdings with seasonal cabins that are specifically excluded from proposed wilderness designation referenced in H.R. 2984. Based on the public CCP process

and subsequent meetings with the landowners, the Service does not anticipate any impacts to or opposition from these landowners. Commercial fishery and Atlantic salmon aquaculture concerns are addressed in this legislation by establishing the wilderness area boundary at the mean high water mark.

The Department supports passage of this legislation, which will provide excellent opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude, and outdoor experiences, focused on wildlife-oriented activities. This designation will preserve the scenic and wild nature of these islands and fulfills the intent of the Wilderness Act.