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Testimony of Bill Williams

Deputy Executive Director

Maine Woodland Owners

In Support of LD 349,

An Act to Establish a Mattress Stewardship Program

Senator Saviello, Representative Tucker and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Bill Williams and I am here today representing the Maine Woodland Owners, testifying in support of the intent behind LD 349, An Act to Establish a Mattress Stewardship Program.

The Maine Woodland Owners is a landowner resource organization formed in 1975. We provide support to woodland owners owning a few acres up to a few thousand acres including providing information and education relative to forestland ownership and advocacy on issues that could potentially affect Maine landowners.

Before coming to Maine Woodland Owners, I was a forest ranger for 23 years and the state's chief ranger for another 10 years. Since rangers were often called upon to respond to landowner complaints of illegal dumping, I saw my share of items left by others on private land. The list included trash, tires, old vehicles, white goods, and furniture, and yes, mattresses.

We have made great progress in Maine regarding recycling and reducing waste, which is a good thing. Although, some of the policy changes, however well intended, have led to the creation of other problems. Maine has one of the most, if not the most, open lands policy in this country. Essentially, in this state unless told otherwise – you can access a person's woodland for free. In most other states, you must have the permission of the landowner to be on their land, and pay for that privilege. The outdoor economy of Maine (hunting, snowmobiling, atv

riding, bird watching, etc. is based on this free access to private land. The number one landowner complaint, and the most common reason woodland owner's post their land is illegal dumping. Particularly troublesome for woodland owners are the items that cost to dispose of: tires, white goods, televisions, mattresses and even pay per bag programs all contribute to the problem. For a certain population, it is easier and cheaper to dispose of items that they would have to pay to get rid of, by dumping them on someone else's woodland. Not only do landowners now have the waste, but they have to pay the disposal fee at the transfer station to dispose of these items. The logical solution to dumping issues for a landowner is the posting of land or closing of trails, which threatens the outdoor economy of Maine that relies on that access to private land.

In each of the last four years, there has been an official Landowner Cleanup Day coordinated by the Departments of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. This effort only deals with a fraction of the problem and doesn't include all the work by individual landowners or organizations that help woodland owners with cleanup problems. Still, the annual cleanup day fills more than 30 30-yard dumpsters with items dumped on woodland owner's property and collects 500-1,000 tires.

Although there has been some success with enforcement of dumping that does occur on private land, we believe that any solution should have not only an enforcement component, but, perhaps more importantly, a prevention plan as well. As you examine ways to recycle and reuse waste products we urge the committee to consider ways that do not end up encouraging people to dump their waste on other people's property. We are not sure the mechanisms suggested in this bill are the right ones, but we hope you will look for ways that reduce overall waste and reduce the dumping of waste on woodland owner's property.