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Testimony for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee
on National Parks
S. 4784: Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Access Act
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Good morning and thank you Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks. I'm honored to be with you today and excited to talk with you about Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and the pragmatic, necessary and critical legislation that you are considering.

But before I start, I need to offer my sincere appreciation to Sen. Angus King and Sen. Susan Collins for their support and advocacy for Maine and for the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, specifically. Since its creation in August 2016, our Senators have worked diligently through the appropriations process to improve the monument, increase staffing, protect its resources and make it more accessible to visitors. Thank you, Senators.

My name is Steve Richardson. I was born and raised in Patten, Maine, which is in the Katahdin region, and I live in Shin Pond, not far from the northern areas of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. I'm the vice president of the Friends of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, the former CEO of Katahdin Trust Co. and the current chair of the board of directors. I'm a very silent partner in my family's hardware store, which I'm proud to say is successfully run by my son.

I'm here today to provide testimony on S. 4784, The Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Access Act, which is sponsored by Chairman King and co-sponsored by Sen. Collins.

To me, Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and this important legislation – is about the future. It's about making it possible for our kids to stay in the region and in Maine.

Millinocket, which is south of the monument was once home to the largest paper mill in the world. Families made their living in the woods and in the mills, and there were good jobs, with benefits for anyone willing to work hard. But that changed, through no fault of the good men and women of the Katahdin region. Our communities have had to adapt to a new reality, and take new approaches to our natural resources and to our economy.

Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument is an important part of that transition. The monument is a beacon of hope – drawing new people, more visitors and increased investment to our communities while also protecting a very special place for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Our region's woods and waters have always been our competitive advantage. They brought the mills and the industry, and now as the economy has changed they are drawing the visitors that are helping our economy and businesses to grow.

The legislation before you does three things. First, it allows the National Park Service to acquire land from willing sellers to improve access to the monument. Second, it allows the National Park Service to work collaboratively with local communities to secure space for a monument headquarters, staff housing, visitor contact stations and other important facilities in gateway communities. And third, it protects and preserves access for traditional recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, snowmobiling and the gathering of fiddleheads for personal consumption.

Just in case you aren't sure what a fiddlehead might be, it's a fern collected in the spring and a sought-after dish on many dinner tables in Maine and eastern Canada. Fiddleheads taste a bit like a cross between green beans, broccoli and asparagus although I'm not sure that really does them justice, and I'd be proud to share mine with any of you who might care to visit the Katahdin region next spring, see the monument and try some delicious fiddleheads.

When Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument was created, we knew our work wasn't complete. We needed to focus on creating road access from the south that would be closer to towns such as Millinocket, East Millinocket and Medway so that visitors from those communities could get into the monument more easily and that the economic benefits of monument visitation would be spread more evenly and through more communities.

Not so long ago, southern parts of the Katahdin region were part Maine's industrial heart. Patten, where I'm from, was more agricultural, and there was sometimes a not-so-healthy rivalry between our communities. I'm here to say today, that is in the past. For our region to be successful, to attract new people and new businesses and to enjoy the full potential of the national monument, we must work together. And we are. We know that we will rise or fall together.

Southern access into the national monument is imperative to those gateway communities, for visitors and for the monument's continued growth and development. Sens. King and Collins have recognized a need and found a solution that is broadly supported in the region and statewide. It will help the national monument to grow to its fullest potential.

When it was created, Katahdin Woods and Waters also came with a promise. Private philanthropy would ensure the monument got off to a good start by investing private dollars to stand up important infrastructure. I'm pleased to report to you: That promise has been kept.

Nearly \$20 million has been raised from donors, including nonprofits, businesses, community groups and individuals to construct a new visitor contact station inside the monument and to improve the visitor experience, and more than \$8 million philanthropic dollars have been invested to improve roads, bridges, trails, scenic views and campsites. And there is a privately

funded endowment along with annual donations that help to offset the operational costs to the National Park Service.

The National Park Service also has made significant investments to enhance visitor enjoyment in the Monument. Some include improvements to the Haskell and Big Spring Brook Huts used by backcountry skiers, hikers and mountain bikers; a new kiosk and signage in the north of the monument; restroom facilities; road and bridge improvements; improved viewpoints and trails.

All of this has happened in a relatively short period of time and with strong community support. Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument is a unique and successful partnership between local communities, the private sector, philanthropic partners, and the National Park Service.

There's one other element of this collaboration that I have to mention. It's called the Katahdin Learning Project. Led by staff from the Friends of Katahdin Woods and Waters and in cooperation with local schools and educators, and the National Park Service, about 9,000 students have had the opportunity for outdoor learning, place-based and service-learning projects, and trail crew opportunities. Seventy-seven groups of students, accounting for nearly 1,600 young people, have visited the monument to learn about the flora and fauna and the history of the area. The monument is helping kids in our region connect with nature, with their own history and with the woods and waters that surround them. It's fitting to mention this program, because this legislation is all about connecting more people to the monument and all it has to offer by improving access from the south.

Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument has been recognized as the first International Dark Skies Sanctuary on the eastern seaboard, and it sits on the path of totality for the April 2024 total solar eclipse. We are also working closely with the Wabanaki people, the original stewards of this land, and particularly the Penobscot Nation, to make sure their voices and history are heard in connection to the land that is their ancestral home.

Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument has built incredible momentum, and it's paying off for the communities in the region. As a personal story, my son recognized that with the creation of the monument, the hardware store had an opportunity to serve new types of customers. It was a risk, but he believed that once people learned about the beauty of our region and about the monument, they would come. He started stocking kayaks and canoes. We'd never sold anything like that before. I'm happy to say that he was correct. Every year, the store sells more than the year before, and we've added an upstairs section to sell additional outdoor sporting equipment.

It's not just my family's store, it's true for many businesses in the region that have seen their bottom lines grow as more people have come to take advantage of the incredible outdoor recreational resources we have to offer and recognize that our communities are open for business and a great place to live and work.

There's a need in our community to improve access to Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. The legislation from Sens. King and Collins protects traditional, recreational uses, allows the National Park Service to work with willing sellers, promotes greater investment in our region and will help businesses and working people.

I appreciate their support on this matter and ongoing support for Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and hope the Senate will support this bill as well.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you for the opportunity to tell the story of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and what it means to my community.