



**Statement of Jody Jones, Maine Audubon wildlife ecologist
September 23, 2008**

Good morning. I'm Jody Jones.

I'm speaking today on behalf of my organization, Maine Audubon, the state's largest wildlife conservation organization. Maine Audubon represents 11,000 members and supporters.

I am a wildlife ecologist with more than 25 years of professional experience

My Maine Audubon science colleagues and I use the best data available to help minimize and prevent the ways humans can degrade various habitats in Maine that wildlife needs to thrive—and, in some cases, simply to survive.

It is a privilege to do this work in Maine, where so many people—our residents and our millions of visitors—truly appreciate the value of wildlife.

This morning, Maine Audubon is here to urge LURC commissioners to spare Lily Bay's wildlife from harm that would be caused by extensive residential and commercial development proposed by Plum Creek.

Opening the way for Plum Creek to cut, clear, and pave in this remote area on the east side of Moosehead Lake would devastate a unique area cherished by Maine people for its wildlife and affordable recreation.

From a scientific and ecological perspective, it is stunning that LURC staff and consultants have not recommended protecting Lily Bay.

By far, the Lily Bay peninsula is more ecologically important than much of the land now proposed for conservation within Plum Creek's proposal.

It is a certainty, documented by Maine Audubon scientists and other experts, that a 404-unit subdivision, resort, and associated commercial facilities at Lily Bay would adversely affect wildlife.

Very briefly, here is a sample of how developing the Lily Bay peninsula would create numerous adverse impacts for wildlife:

1) First, biological data and research show that the development proposed would destroy habitat for rare Canada lynx that are part of the last population of lynx in the East. We presented extensive evidence that Lily Bay's lynx population will either disappear or be dramatically reduced, and that lynx also will be at risk in other areas around Moosehead Lake.

It is alarming that the most-recent recommendations from LURC staff and consultants suggest—in contrast to current rezoning standards—that this clearly documented threat to Canada lynx is too limited to be of concern.

2) Expert biologists also have presented comprehensive evidence that development at Lily Bay could threaten rusty blackbirds, one of the rarest blackbirds in North America. Habitat for the birds could be lost and degraded, reducing the breeding rate of a species already in precipitous decline.

But current LURC recommendations have relegated decisions about this vulnerable bird to “later” in the development process—even though decisions “later” could be made too late to make any real difference for these birds.

3) Current traffic on Lily Bay Road, roughly a yearly average, is 630 vehicles per day at Lily Bay. Low-ball estimates by Plum Creek's own traffic consultants show that after development is completed, that per-day number jumps to 3,528 —five times current traffic near Lily Bay State Park. The vast majority of that increase will be from Plum Creek's developments.

It is a scientific fact that increased road traffic would dramatically increase animal deaths.

And, potentially, runoff and sedimentation from roads would degrade the water quality of Moosehead's excellent native brook-trout streams—the nationally renowned streams that draw thousands of anglers every year. Silt fills in rock crevices that fish need to spawn successfully.

4) Just this month Maine Audubon learned that Plum Creek submitted new information documenting seven additional vernal pools in the proposed Lily Bay development area. Vernal pools increase the area's wildlife value because they are important breeding and feeding habitat for a variety of amphibians, birds, and other wildlife.

5) Finally, it is startling to realize how much the LURC staff/consultants' recommendations don't say about impacts on wildlife known to inhabit the Lily Bay area. Numerous species simply are not mentioned, as if they don't exist.

In the matter of Plum Creek's proposal to develop the Moosehead Lake region, there have been pages and pages of documentation by LURC staff. There have been hours and hours of testimony by experts. And there have been hundreds and hundreds of letters and comments from the public.

Now there are two days for LURC commissioners to act in the best interests of Maine people and wildlife—and not in the best interest of a Seattle-based company that would like to dramatically profit from Maine’s natural heritage.

Maine Audubon urges LURC commissioners to reject the LURC staff/consultant recommendation that the public will benefit from approving development at Lily Bay in exchange for purchasing conservation easements elsewhere.

There is still time to concentrate development near existing communities and leave the upper east side of the lake alone. This is the way for LURC commissioners to build on the state’s earlier investments by creating one interconnected network of conservation lands stretching from the shores of Moosehead Lake to the Roach Ponds, Nahmakanta Public Reserve Lands, the Debsconeags, and Baxter State Park.

This is a precedent-setting decision—one that Maine can still get right.