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Testimony of Governor Paul R. LePage

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Chairman McClintock, Ranking member Hanabusa and distinguished members of the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands, I appreciate your invitation to address the Committee today. I would like to take this valuable opportunity to share the concerns of myself and most Maine citizens with regard to the recent designation of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument in northern Maine by former President Obama. I hope my testimony and recommended changes to the Antiquities Act will be beneficial to the Committee's review of this law.

Maine has a long history of prudent stewardship of its forest resources with minimal federal assistance. This is because Maine citizens and landowners show great respect for our natural resources and understand the importance of conserving it for future generations. Our state is committed to supporting the forest products industry, while at the same time strategically conserving valuable tracts of land. Maine's State Parks have been an excellent example of conserving land, while also balancing commercial recreation and resource values. Mainers understand the benefits of our 17 million acres of forests to our economy, and we have historically been able to support the industries that rely on this land without interference from the federal government.

That is why it should be no surprise that the designation of this monument on a former working forest by former President Obama is very concerning to Maine residents living in this area and around the state. The National Park Service (NPS) seemed to blatantly disregard key indicators of this opposition. In 2015, three local communities held non-binding referendums to measure the support for a National Park in the area. All three of these communities voted overwhelmingly against such as designation. East Millinocket voted 320-191 against; Medway voted 252-102 against; and Patten voted 121-53 against federal control of state land.

The Quimby family, who owned much of the land that would be proposed for a National Park, then immediately moved to Plan B, which was to lobby Washington, D.C. for the designation of a National Monument instead. In response to this change of tactic, the Maine Legislature in 2016 enacted bipartisan legislation—which I submitted—requiring legislative approval for a National Monument designation in Maine. Unfortunately, the former President and the NPS didn't let these

facts get in the way of siding with special-interest groups over the views of most Maine people and a state law.

The only major selling point to attracting visitors to this newly established National Monument is the view of Mt. Katahdin. This is somewhat ironic because Mt. Katahdin is already under conservation in Maine's premier Baxter State Park, which I would argue is one of the greatest wilderness parks east of the Rocky Mountains. This beautiful park has some interesting history. Former Maine Governor Percival P. Baxter purchased Mt. Katahdin and land around it, then donated it to the State of Maine in 1931 with the condition that it be kept forever wild. Baxter State Park has held to that condition and is now over 200,000 acres in total size and is located just west of the new Monument. Governor Baxter was a strong opponent of the federal government controlling land in the Katahdin region and for good reasons. Baxter State Park can support its current level of use while still being able to preserve its mandated mission of protecting the forest resource. I fear that when the visitors to the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument become uninspired by its portions of cut-over forest land, there will be an unmanageable surge of demand to Baxter State Park.

Not long after the President designated the Monument, Maine residents started to feel the negative effects of having the federal government as their new master. The NPS re-decked a bridge, which it has crossing rights over, with little or no notice to the owner of the bridge. The NPS also conducted culvert work on some roads without sufficient notice to the public, causing long delays for some logging trucks. There have also been reports of near collisions between passenger cars and timber trucks in the area. This land does not have adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of commercial vehicles and visitor traffic. I expect the \$40 million endowment offered by the Quimby family will need to be spent much faster than expected. As a comparison, Acadia National Park in Maine had a deferred maintenance backlog in 2015 of over \$60 million. Another impact by the monument designation is the loss of connectivity for ATV trails in the area. My Administration is working with ATV clubs and private landowners to remedy this issue as quickly as possible.

I believe, along with many other Maine residents, that former President Obama never should have designated this area as a National Monument. The original intent of the Antiquities Act was to "reserve the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management" of the land. Further, it was intended to protect endangered areas and artifacts that were immediately threatened. This cut-over forest land was not worthy of any designation—I believe it was simply the product of Washington politics.

I would like to respectfully offer some recommendations to this Committee as it reviews the Antiquities Act. I believe the law should be amended to require local approval before the President can unilaterally designate a National Monument. This support should include approvals from the state's governor and legislature. There should also be clear evidence that such a designation is needed to protect endangered areas or areas of historic or scientific interest, which is what the original purpose of the Antiquities Act was. These kinds of checks and balances will ensure a good relationship between states and the federal government.

In conclusion, I hope the issues I have raised today are helpful to Committee members during your review of the Antiquities Act. I would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee may have.