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Remarks of Maine Governor John E. Baldacci

November 26, 2003

- In the last 10 years, the transition to a global economy has brought significant economic, demographic and social changes to the Maine Woods. The scope and degree of these changes compel us to take bold action. We have before us an all-too-brief opportunity to conserve the natural heritage of the Maine Woods in a way that supports diverse economic opportunities for Maine people and leaves an unparalleled legacy to the next generation. We can achieve these twin goals 'the Maine way' with hard work and collaboration.

- I propose to bring together and coordinate the many significant economic development and resource conservation projects now underway, with the addition of new initiatives unfolding in the near future, under the banner of the Maine Woods Legacy. This hopeful but practical vision will carry us forward through these times of uncertainty and change. Maine's Woods as a privately owned forest continues to provide employment in paper and wood products, while offering the people at its perimeter a distinct lifestyle intimately connected to the outdoors. And it is special to all Mainers because of the deep connections that Maine people have to this place.

But, these connections have become fragile. Challenges to the economic viability of the forest products manufacturing sector have resulted in unprecedented changes in patterns of ownership in the Maine woods. In the past 6 years, we have seen more than 5.5 million acres of forestland change hands. In some cases, new investment patterns have led to new harvesting practices and fragmentation of what were once large tracts of woodlands.

The communities along the perimeter of the Maine Woods have begun to respond to these challenges. Still, we see an ever present and growing uncertainty about the future of the region. We must replace that uncertainty with confidence. We must develop an integrated, statewide effort, working in concert with the communities, business owners and landowners most affected by these changes, to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities that are before us.

Here are the components of a Maine Woods Legacy that is our brightest hope for the future and that is uniquely our own:

- Strengthening the connection between economic health and conservation in the Maine Woods. This connection is evident in the creative thinking of Maine Woods “gateway” communities to enhance forest products business opportunities, economic expansion, outdoor recreation and cultural and heritage tourism potential. Examples include the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council, the Millinocket Area Growth and Investment Council, and the Lincoln Lakes Regional Development Corporation – all of which are addressing local economic development issues. Groups such as Friends of Moosehead and Down East Lakes Land Trust are modeling the collaborative approaches to landscape-scale resource protection that demonstrate that conservation of our natural heritage and economic health can go hand-in-hand.
- Support for and expansion of the manufacturing base in the forest products industry. A healthy forest products industry is critical to the Maine economy. This is inextricably linked to a viable manufacturing sector. People who rely for their livelihood on long-time local employers like Moosehead Manufacturing, Hardwood Products and Pride Manufacturing must have assurance that value-added businesses will continue to have access to affordable, high-quality wood from the forest while operating in a supportive business climate to help them remain competitive.
- New efforts to ensure a continuous supply of wood fiber to the market. At the recent Blaine House Conference on Natural Resource Based Industries, I heard of the need to support the logging infrastructure here in Maine. Recently, we have heard of the problems Maine’s forest products manufacturers are having in getting an adequate supply of fiber out of the woods and to the mills. I will shortly name the Governor’s Task Force on the Sustainability of the Forest products Industry, to be chaired by Commissioner Jack Cashman of DECD. I will direct this group, as its first task, to address the shortage of loggers in the Maine Woods, which is reported to be the primary factor contributing to the difficulty of getting fiber to the mills. I will ask them to identify and support programs designed to cultivate interest in the logging profession. In addition, they will be charged to report back to me on the status of our forest products industries and what is needed to enable these industries to regain their role as an engine of the Maine economy and a primary contributor to the economic health of our rural communities.

- New initiatives, now underway, to support Maine landowner efforts to become “green certified.” These efforts, together with strategic measures to prevent liquidation harvesting and to promote best forestry practices, are vital to the future forest economy. They will ensure that Maine’s forests will continue to be well-managed, sustainable, and form the foundation of the future vigor of economic health for workers and communities. Maine’s first-in-the-nation Forest Certification Initiative has already paid dividends to the Maine economy. Time, Inc., the largest buyer of coated magazine stock in the world, increased its purchases of certified stock from Maine by 10,000 tons in 2003. Domtar, Inc.’s pulp mill in Baileyville has established FSC chain-of-custody certification for part of its fiber supply, and will be dedicating part of its production run to certified pulp. The demand by end users of forest products that those products are made from wood from certified sustainable forests is constantly rising.

- Promotion of, and access to, Maine’s woods and waters as an unparalleled place for a full range of recreational opportunities, appropriately located. Maine’s large woodlands owners have a long history of voluntarily allowing public access to the working forest for recreational purposes. We encourage a continuation of this policy. This includes traditional outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, snowmobiling, and skiing as well as a whole gamut of relatively new recreational pursuits such as ATV trails. This also includes the creation and preservation of non-motorized wilderness opportunities for Maine citizens and visitors alike who seek solitude...and an untrammelled place for refreshment. There is truly room for us all in the Maine Woods if we work together.

- Celebration of the cultural heritage of the small but stalwart communities bordering the Maine Woods. Here hard work, common sense, practical ability, and an innate closeness to the land are typical. We must conserve the landscape that has proven to be such fertile ground for incubation of these precious values. This includes honoring the distinctively Maine tradition of sporting camps, Maine Guides, and outfitter services, all of which have been providing visitors with back woods experiences unlike any other in the country.

- A Maine program of landscape-scale conservation of our woods, waters and wildlife. There are models for land conservation that have worked elsewhere in the United States. Some argue these models should be used in Maine. But, I believe that Maine can craft a better solution – economic development and conservation strategies tailored to Maine’s landscape, Maine’s traditions and Maine’s economic needs and abilities. We will retain our large undeveloped tracts of forestland in an undeveloped condition, and in a manner that will

guarantee the continued availability of the forest resource for sustainable forestry and continued public access. We will continue to rely on private ownership of much of Maine's woodlands, in many instances protected with conservation easements. In addition, we are committed to strategic state ownership of those areas in Maine with the most critical recreational, scenic, watershed and wildlife habitat resources, along with opportunities for the tradition of backcountry wilderness.

- Maine is home to one of the most legendary sections of the Appalachian Trail (AT) known among hikers everywhere as the "100 Mile Wilderness." This world-renowned trail winds through blankets of forest, over jagged peaks with spectacular views, and around pristine lakes and remote ponds. Local residents, businesses, economic development groups and conservation groups such as the Eastern Maine Development Corporation, the Maine Appalachian Trail community and the Sierra Club are working together to explore new opportunities throughout this region that will enhance economic development, recreational access and land protection. Forest industry and conservation groups will be joining with us shortly to make an announcement about another example of long-term collaboration in the Maine Woods.
- Our Maine Woods Legacy arises from a shared vision of a future for Maine's forestlands that is rooted in shared values. Though these lands will remain in the ownership of a variety of parties, both private and public, the issues of sustainable forestry, public access, land conservation and diverse outdoor recreation will be the guiding focus. This comprehensive perspective, which looks at the Maine Woods as a whole rather than as unconnected pieces, will ensure that each of us can find our place in the Maine Woods of the future. This vision opens the door for strong communities, economic health and dynamic new conservation of this spectacular resource.
- This cannot be accomplished without the participation and support of landowners, local businesses, community leaders, forest products industry representatives, sportsmen and land protection organizations. We must all work together to protect the legacy of Maine's North Woods and assure a bright future for the people who have chosen to make their lives here. Now is the time to act on this vision. Together.