

# MAINE & NEW ENGLAND

## ENVIRONMENT, CONSERVATION

# Groups list top priorities

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A coalition of 20 of Maine's leading environmental and conservation groups has unveiled its top legislative priorities for the year.

They are: Reducing mercury pollution by requiring a mercury thermostat recycling program; saving energy by promoting conservation programs; preserving wildlife habitat that provides food, shelter and breeding areas for wildlife; fully funding the Land For Maine's Future program, and ensuring that no environmental rollbacks happen on the watch of the 122nd Legislature.

In announcing the goals last week, group representatives said Mainers want and need a healthy environment.

"Threats to our children's health, our waters, land and wildlife have not gone away," said Eliza Townsend, executive director of the Maine League of Conservation Voters.

"Poll after poll has shown that Maine citizens care deeply about their environment and want their lawmakers and government officials to act on those values," Townsend said. "This past Election Day, funding for Land for Maine's Future was one of the top two vote-getters in the state. Acting to ensure a safe and clean environment is a winner for all of us in Maine."

"We need to provide incentives so mercury from old thermostats doesn't end up in the environment, where it threatens the health of Maine families and wildlife," said Sarah Hale Krull of Portland, a mother of two who is replacing her mercury thermostat with a non-mercury model.

More than 5,000 pounds of mercury hangs in thermostats on the walls of Maine homes today, according to the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

"The bill sponsored by Sen. (John) Martin will provide the opportunity to give homeowners and contractors an incentive to ensure the mercury in thermostats is safely recycled," Krull said.

Others spoke of energy needs, and how conservation might be a better alternative to new power plants.

"We have a choice in Maine

to invest in more power plants or to invest in conservation," said Tony Marple, executive vice president and treasurer of MaineGeneral Health. "Conservation requires a lower investment to yield the same gains in electrical capacity, while at the same time improving air quality and public health."

Wildlife habitat protection also ranks high with the group.

"In my community, we have seen strong support from our citizens for protecting the wildlife habitat that makes Maine such a special place," said Caleb Hemphill of the Falmouth Conservation Commission. "Putting rules in place to protect significant wildlife habitat will help Maine towns plan development that doesn't destroy their vibrant natural areas."

Sandra Roseberry of South Berwick, the mother of two children poisoned by lead, said Maine needs to protect the gains it has already made.

"Maine's current environmental protection laws are the results of years of hard work and collaborative effort of the state Legislature and the environmental groups," Roseberry said. "We ... must continue to defend ourselves and our environmental laws, refusing any rollbacks, and we must continue to protect ourselves from big industry interests that exploit our natural resources without conscience, without remorse of poisoning our families, toxifying our environment, depleting our natural resources and walk away leaving the taxpayers to clean up their messes."

Group members also said that while no legislation on the issue is pending, they want lawmakers to remain vigilant on developments in the North Woods.

"We stand at a crossroads, and the conservation community will work tirelessly to ensure that Maine chooses the path that protects the North Woods," said Bob Guethlen of Rockwood. "That path includes permanently protecting both the undeveloped character of the forest and public access to it, and directing development toward town centers."

### Organizations:

- Androscoggin River Alliance
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Bicycle Coalition of Maine
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Environmental Health Strategy Center
- Environment Maine
- Environment Northeast
- Friends of Casco Bay
- Friends of the Presumpscot River
- Maine Audubon
- Maine Council of Churches' Environmental Justice Program
- Maine Council of Trout Unlimited
- Maine League of Conservation Voters
- Maine Rivers
- Natural Resources Council of Maine
- Northern Forest Alliance
- RESTORE: The North Woods
- Sierra Club
- The Ocean Conservancy
- The Wilderness Society

### Their legislative priorities:

- L.D. 1792, "An Act to Protect Maine Families and the Environment by Improving the Collection and Recycling of Mercury Thermostats;"
- L.D. 1931, "An Act to Encourage Energy Independence;"
- Bills to fund the state's Land for Maine's Future Program;
- Passing rules developed by Maine's departments of Environmental Protection and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to define and protect significant wildlife habitats; and
- Preventing any rollbacks in established environmental protection laws.