

Policy Scholar Speech
April 27, 2018
Orono Campus

To: The Honorable Governor Paul Le Page,

Ladies and Gentlemen: Greetings!

My name is Liz Whittaker, and I was selected Policy Scholar for the Machias Campus of the U Maine System for the 17-18 school year. My topic for this project is “Increasing Recycling in Rural Maine.” When I researched this problem, I found that some people and towns recycle, and others do not. The biggest reason in each of these cases is that they do not believe that their contribution to this program will make a difference, but, when one person becomes 100 or 1000, or more, that can negatively impact in our roadsides, camps sites, or any other places where people gather. People need to be persuaded that they can help, whether they believe it or not; that their contribution WILL make a difference.

Another problem is living in a rural area where homes are scattered over a wide area; pickup service for recyclables, or solid waste becomes a problem. A quote from the “Sacramento River Watershed Program” in California tells us that “Low density rural residents receive proportionally fewer public services for their tax dollar; with urban/surburban areas are getting more of our tax dollars than rural areas do .

One of our biggest problems is plastic; The Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) refers to it as “plastic pollution.” (NRCM. 2018). These items are numbered 1 through 7, and most of our transfer stations will only take a few of these numbered items, and the rest gets dumped. These items will still be around long after we're gone. While there are many viable solutions to different kinds of recyclables, plastic is in a class all by itself because it does not fully biodegrade (NRCM), 2018). The fact of the matter is, plastic will never go away. While it

will eventually be broken down by the elements, it never disappears, and will return to the food chain. Also, we as a population are already consumers of that plastic pollution.

Microplastic particles have been found in seawater and shellfish (NRCM, 2018). Andrea Diaz, writing for CNN has reported about the recent beaching of a Sperm Whale in Spain; it was found to have ingested “64 pounds of plastic, including 30 plastic bottles, and other waste” (2018).

One of the simplest ways that the plastic problem can be addressed is through single-stream recycling (Clancy, 2017). The idea here is to have residents dump all their plastic into one container, and have others sort it out by number. This sounds like a simple solution, but just like a lot of other things in recycling and solid waste, it will cost money, and that must be factored in when instituting any recycling program; this would include transportation, paying others to sort the plastic at its destination, and for storage until enough plastic is accumulated to ship it from the transfer station.

There is a very successful single-stream recycling program in Rockport, Maine, home to the Midcoast Solid Waste Transfer Station (Clancy, 2017). Their article *Changing international markets result in new Midcoast plastic disposal trends*; appeared in the *PenBay Pilot* on October 18, 2017; this discusses their plastic recycling program.

Any rural town setting up single-stream recycling will have to tailor it to their own specification within their individual community(ies). Let me use my town, Grand Lake Stream, as an example. Like any typical rural community, we are spread out, we have no post office, but pick up our mail at stand alone mail boxes; it is just such a location where recycle containers could be placed. Two of the advantages here is that these areas are plowed out in the winter, this is where people will gather, and it is the perfect opportunity to increase

recycling while collecting your mail. From there it will be picked up on a weekly basis or whatever schedule the individual town uses. From there it will be taken to the local transfer station awaiting further transport to the recycling center that the town may be doing business with. The money from these recyclables will go to the transfer agent and/or the recycling center; that may help defray the cost of using these facilities.

In the end, this is not a one size fits all, but it could be a start of a new recycling initiative in any rural community. Trial and error comes to mind; if one plan won't work these communities can try something that better suits their recycling needs. Who knows, maybe one our local towns will start a new recycling trend. The fact remains that anything we can do to protect our environment is well worth the effort for residents now, and all the people that will coming behind us, and they will, hopefully, pass their legacy on to future generations.

In the meantime, my call to action would be to charge a higher per bottle deposit; Copying California we could keep the \$0.05 for bottles under 24 ounces and institute a new rate of \$0.10 for bottles over 24 ounces whether they be plastic or glass. In addition placing recycling centers in supermarkets might work as well; it's just like the mail; it's someplace where we go to frequently.

Appendix

Recycling Then and Now

Historically, Maine had been in the forefront of a strong recycling trend compared to other states. The projected original goal in 1989, as reported by Nicholas Miller, a summer intern, was to “reach a recycling goal of 50%.” Mr Miller investigated a number of communities and their recycling efforts. His booklet *Recycling in Maine Municipalities: What Makes it Tick?* was the result of that inquiry [in 2008]. We see in this report that the recycling numbers [were relatively high in] “1997, when they peaked at a rate of 42%.” The numbers clearly show that Maine's recycling rate dropped in 2006 to 36.2% (Miller, 2018). We should remember here as well, as I mentioned earlier, that “many of [our] smaller towns have ceased recycling altogether. A more recent report from the State of Maine, dated 2015, “calculated Maine's recycling rate for 2013 at 41%” a bit lower than the 1997 target of 42%, but still better than the 2006 figure of 36.2% (Maine's Laws Should Help. . ., (2015). The maine.gov website also revealed a new state recycle or compost goal of 50% of its municipal solid waste by January 1, 2021 (maine.gov, 2017).

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