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Ms. Carrie Walia, Executive Director
Loon Echo Land Trust
1 Chase St.
Bridgton, ME 04009

August 26, 2011

Dear Ms. Walia,

I am writing in response to recent developments that bear upon the award of Land for Maine's Future (LMF) funds to assist Loon Echo Land Trust in acquiring land popularly known as Hacker's Hill on Quaker Ridge in Casco, Maine.

In March, 2011 Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) applied for funding from the Land for Maine's Future Program and at its July 12, 2011 meeting, the Land for Maine's Future Board approved the preliminary allocation of \$220,382.00 to the Loon Echo Land Trust for Hacker's Hill project.

Subsequent to its selection as an LMF finalist, staff at the Department of Conservation, the state agency sponsor for the project, and we here at LMF have become aware of a constitutional issue with public funding for the Hacker's Hill project. This project site contains numerous items displaying religious symbolism and serves as a location for regularly occurring religious services.


While we realize that the State will not own the site and that the State is contributing only a portion of the total acquisition costs, the Attorney General's Office has advised us that there could be a First Amendment violation should LMF funds, an allocation of public dollars, be used to assist with the purchase of the site with the religious reliquary in place, and if regular religious services were to continue. The First Amendment prevents the government from supporting or advancing religion.

Therefore, prior to the use of the LMF funds for the acquisition and the signing of the project agreement by the State Sponsor and LMF, all of the items displaying religious symbolism must be removed from the LMF project lands and use of the site for regular religious services must be discontinued.

LMF and the Department of Conservation are willing to work with the Loon Echo Land Trust to find a solution, which may include relocating the religious statutes, signage, and services to an adjacent alternative site that is not part of the LMF supported acquisition. This relocation must occur prior to the use of the LMF funds.

Please keep me informed as you work through this issue and certainly, please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance. We look forward to working with LET with all the many tasks that are ahead, once this matter has been resolved.

Sincerely,



Sam Morris

Hacker's Hill Project Manager,
Land for Maine's Future Program

cc: David Rodrigues, Senior Planner, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, Dept. of Conservation
Greg Caporossi, Trust for Public Lands
Don Marean, Chairman, Land for Maine's Future Board
David Hursty, President, Loon Echo and Trust Board of Directors
David Morton, Town Manager, Town of Casco.