# Regional Forum Series to explore land use and impacts of proposed LURC legislation in western Maine's unorganized territories

In late February and March, economic development entities in western Maine in conjunction with the Western Mountains Alliance will host a regional public forum series exploring land use and the impacts of new LURC legislation in western Maine's unorganized territories. Forums will feature a broad range of presenters including residential and woodlot property owners, policy experts and tourism interests. Forums are scheduled for February 27 in Bethel, February 28 in The West Forks, and March 1 in Carrabassett Valley. A fourth forum in Piscataquis County is yet to be scheduled.

The public forum series is supported by the Emanuel and Pauline A. Lerner Foundation in partnership with the Western Mountains Alliance, Somerset Economic Development Corporation, Piscataquis County Economic Development Council, Greater Franklin Economic Development Corporation, the Western Maine Economic Development Council and the Western Maine Legislative Caucus.

In 2011, the LURC Reform Commission charged with making recommendations to improve the Land Use Regulation Commission released its suggestions. A small state agency with oversight for over 10 million acres in Maine's unorganized territories, LURC is responsible for permitting projects such as new home development, as well as resort and large scale wind projects.

Legislation introduced this session to improve how the agency operates includes changing its name to the Land Use Planning Commission; increasing representation of county commissioners on its board; and allowing counties that meet certain requirements to provide their own oversight for land use planning and permitting in their unorganized territories. The public is invited to explore what these changes may mean for land use and regulation in western Maine's unorganized territories and the broader topics of land use and Maine's longstanding tradition of public access to large tracts of private lands.

**Somerset County:**

**Tuesday, February 28, 5:30-7:30 p.m. at The West Forks Town Office**

**FMI: Somerset Economic Development Corporation, (207) 474-0166, jvbatey@myfairpoint.net**

In addition to the discussion about the proposed changes to LURC our presenters will address forest ownership patterns and trends, different types of forest owners in the UT and provide an update on conservation of forestland in the UT. We will discuss the value of having large tracts of land for public access for recreation, tourism promotion, working forests and the economic health of our county.

**Panelists:**

**Patrick Strauch, Executive Director of the Maine Forest Products Council**
**Carolann Ouellette, Director, Maine Office of Tourism**
**Karin Tilberg, Deputy Executive Director of Forest Society of Maine**
**Bob Dunphy, Somerset County Commissioner and LURC Commission member**