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Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources

Testimony on LD 800 "An Act Regarding the Passage of River Herring on the St. Croix River"

Presented by Representative Beth Peloquin Turner—House District 141
April 27, 2015

Senator Baker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources. I am State Representative Beth Turner; and I have the honor to serve the good people of House District 141, which is from the Penobscot River to the Canadian border than hang a right and continue to the beautiful community of Edmunds Township in Washington County. I am here today to proudly support and present LD 800 "An Act Regarding the Passage of River Herring on the St. Croix River"

To say it has been a bumpy road getting this bill here is an understatement!

According to the CapLog Report it estimates economic benefits of reopening the fish ladders on the upper St. Croix River and allowing an alewife run at only 1.8 million dollars. Benefits would be from direct sale of alewives as bait and cost savings for lobstermen. Compare that to the fishing industry in Washington County bringing in 15 million dollars according to the 2013 tourism study. So I wonder if the evasive introduction of alewives into the upper St. Croix is worth lobster bait?

The majority of the upper St. Croix lies in my District and is some of the most beautiful waters in all of Maine. The Guides and the Commercial Sporting Camps in the Upper St. Croix River Watershed of Washington County are critically dependent upon its healthy freshwater fisheries, as is the local economy. From hiring the help, to buying supplies, it supports this remarkable world renowned type of tourism. I trust the men & women that fish and make their livelihoods on these waters and have for many generations.

After studying the information available on both sides of this issue I believe that the risks to our present fisheries and the harm it could do to the local economy do not outweigh any benefits that would result with the introduction of alewives in the upper St Croix.

The hatchery at Grand Lake Stream supplies over 70% of the salmon stocks for the State of Maine. These waters need to be maintained and managed to ensure the future of our fisheries. If this bill were to fail I ask you, are you 100% willing to risk these fisheries and put our states salmon at risk? These lakes need careful monitoring on what the impact of millions of river herring can have on these pristine waters, as it is limitless to how many river herring can enter these waters.

You will hear today about the illegal introduction of river herring back in the 1980's and how the decline of the smallmouth bass fishery remains unresolved. The cause of this decline is no mystery to the Guides of Grand Lake Stream and others who know these waters. It was the river herring that caused those declines in the smallmouth bass. Emergency management efforts, including prohibition of alewife passage into Spednic Lake, were implemented in 1987 to address immediate concerns for the smallmouth bass resource and economic impact to the guiding community.

Today the St. Croix is unregulated and the concerns are not being addressed. Please listen to these men and women that live and make their lives there. I ask you, why would anyone who has a business that is dependent on these waters, why wouldn't they want a fish that is supposed to be the best thing since sliced bread? I say because it is not!

I hope you will listen to the folks that are here today that live and work these waters. They know these lakes!

For me the opposition hasn't proven their case, so I would always err on the side of caution and stand with those who work and live in the affected area. I would implore you to support LD 800 and vote ought to pass and save the upper St. Croix.

Respectfully,
Beth P. Turner
State Representative