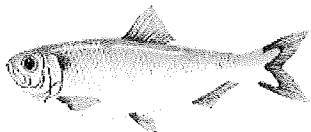


Alewife Harvesters of Maine



“Conserving to preserve Maine’s heritage

April 27, 2015

To: Marine Resource Committee: Co-chair Sen. Baker, Co-chair Rep. Walter A. Kumiega III

Members of the Marine Resource Committee

RE: LD800; An Act To Prevent Passage of Alewives through the Grand Falls Dam on the St. Croix River

Dear MRC members,

My name is Bob Baines and I am a lobsterman from Spruce Head, chair of the Lobster Advisory Council, and a board member of the Alewife Harvesters of Maine. Today I am here to testify for the Alewife Harvesters of Maine against LD800.

AHM is a 501(c)6 organization dedicated to preserving river herring runs and the heritage of alewife fisheries across the state of Maine. We are a watchdog and coordination group for the small but vital alewife fishery, as well as a conservation group focused on restoring and opening fisheries across Maine. Our membership supports actions like that sanctioned through LD72: An Act To Open the St. Croix River to River Herring. AHM testified here and at the International Joint Commission meeting in Calais, ME in favor of restoring alewives to the St. Croix River. We are extremely disappointed that after just two years our involvement as a legislative watchdog is necessary again to prevent reversal of the gains under LD72.

The AHM supports ecosystem restoration. Alewives are a native species in the St. Croix River and should be allowed to flourish in that ecosystem. IJC documents and historic reports from Canada and the US support alewives having always been a component of the St. Croix River ecosystem.

The AHM supports economic development. Our primary constituency is bait harvesters, but our biggest constituents are the lobstermen and women who are the many independent business owners that rely on affordable local bait to make a living. I am one of them, and I make extensive use of alewives every spring when they become available.

AHM sanctioned an MIT study that showed an alewife bait fishery on the St. Croix River could provide \$230,000 in seasonal revenue annually if about 1 million alewives were harvested. Other benefits would include enhanced tourist revenue from increasing eagle, osprey, and heron activity in the area. Alewives would also contribute to restoring the marine ecosystem in Passamaquoddy Bay and additional revenue could come from guiding for striper, cod and other marine species that would respond to having more bait fish in the area.

Alewife harvesting is a municipally sanctioned activity that towns use to offset property taxes as well. Warren, on the St. George River, is

an example of a town that has done well managing its alewife resource to maintain municipal infrastructure.

Most alewife harvesters work in places where smallmouth bass and alewives coexist. In fact, almost every run has a contingent of bass that hang out at the top of the fish ladder and spend weeks gorging themselves on adult alewives. Throughout the summer and into the fall smallmouth bass of all sizes gorge themselves on juvenile alewives. Examples of where smallmouth bass and alewife coexist quite well in the same ecosystem include Winnegance Lake in Phippsburg and Nequasset Lake in Woolwich. Damariscotta Lake has smallmouth bass, trout, landlocked salmon and a world famous alewife run. Sebasticook Lake and River, indeed the entire Kennebec, have excellent smallmouth bass fishing and over 3 million river herring. Graham, Gardner and Meddybemps Lakes located in the downeast region, have substantial alewife runs and support Smallmouth Bass tournaments.

Finally, alewives are a safe bait source. At a time when Maine imports over 30% of the bait used in the lobster industry from outside the Gulf of Maine, alewives are a safe, local, and renewable source of lobster bait. We should be doing everything possible to preserve and enhance the ecosystem that supports Maines's alewife population.

These are compelling economic and conservation arguments as to why the Marine Resources Committee should vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD800. Not the least of which is breaking the cycle of 32 years where a million acre St. Croix River watershed is managed as the exclusive economic zone of 48 fishing guides.

Sincerely,

Robert Baines
Board Member
Alewife Harvesters of Maine

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