

Testimony Opposing LD 800

April 27, 2015

Sen. Baker, Rep. Kumiega, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Dennis Damon. I live in Trenton, Maine.

A few years ago I had the privilege of sitting in the position you now occupy. During the eight years I served on this committee bills came before us which often affected the lives of fishermen as well as the lives of fish. As you work to make good policy it is difficult to consider one without your action affecting the other. The fishermen and the fish are inexorably joined.

That bond between the fishermen and the fish is more critically important when our attempt to regulate one species of fish adversely affects the ecosystem. Whether through our management practices or by natural means when the delicate balance in the ecosystem, in this case the marine/riverine ecosystem, is disrupted we inevitably encounter unforeseen or unanticipated consequences.

As you should, often policy makers demand proof, scientific proof, that "A" leads to "B" or that "X" causes "Y" which results in "Z".

Long-time fisherman, teacher, scientist and colleague, Ted Ames, has documented the importance of alewives to our commercial fisheries. His work has gained national and international acclaim. So important was his discovery that he received the MacArthur Genius Award for his work. Through historical research, oral history stories told and connecting many dots Ted has proven our near shore Gulf of Maine waters provided spawning grounds for ground-fish, particularly cod, haddock, Pollock and hake. These spawning grounds were located at the mouths of all our major river systems as well as many of our lesser ones.

The various species spawning grounds frequently overlapped as they sought the same sea bottom location. Was this overlap because they liked each other so much? Not at all, it was because they all wanted to occupy places where there

was plentiful food. Their food, in the form of alewives, blue back herring, shad and other Diadromous fish swam out of the rivers and streams, on their way to their ocean lives, into the waiting mouths of hungry cod and other ground-fish. These near shore ground-fish stocks did not have to venture off shore in search of food. Their food was coming to them.

This migration of fish from salt water to fresh water and back, part of the life cycle of all anadromous fish has gone on for thousands of years. They traveled to the fresh water to spawn, to complete their circle of life that they could then swim back to their salt water home to grow and perhaps most importantly to be eaten by fish higher in the food chain.

The food for the cod, haddock, Pollock and hake began to diminish as one by one dams were built on our rivers and streams. Dams which without fish passage built in prevented these fish from accessing their spawning areas thus denying ground-fish their ready access to food. With their easy access to this food diminished the large schools of ground-fish were forced to migrate and the catch of near shore fishermen was negatively impacted.

It is vital to the near shore ecosystem, to the fish and to the fishermen, that we do all we can to bring it back into balance.

In the case of the alewives in the St. Croix River perhaps you will be told that alewives never existed in that system because they could not traverse the natural barriers in the river. You should refer again to additional science to clear up this falsehood. Archeologists who have done extensive excavations of Indian mounds well above the Grand Falls have found irrefutable proof that alewives did indeed range as far as 60 miles above the falls.

Additionally, there are two scientists and fish biologists who have written conclusively of the alewife residency in the St. Croix River watershed. Lew Flagg, who spent his career as the preeminent fish biologist for the Dept. of Marine Resources and Dr. Theo Willis, currently faculty researcher with the Dept. of Environmental Science at the University of Southern Maine have each done extensive research on the St. Croix alewife. Separately each has concluded the

alewife did inhabit the St. Croix for thousands of years and their populations only started to diminish in the early 1800s when their access to the river was blocked by man. The adverse impacts to the alewives escalated in the 1980s and 1990s.

As you know, in 1995 when our Legislature passed a law blocking the alewives in the St. Croix we almost succeeded in causing their complete demise.

Subsequently there have been three attempts to reopen the St. Croix to its native alewives. Failing in 2001 and 2007 we finally succeeded in 2012. It is that success which has finally allowed the alewife back into their river that LD 800 is attempting to undo.

For Maine's commercial fishermen, for our coastal communities but most of all for the incredibly important fish, alewife, I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on LD 800.

We have finally made progress in restoring this river and the ecosystem of near shore Eastern Maine to its once healthy and productive condition.

Please do not allow this bill to roll back that progress.