

Testimony by Alex Hoar of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding LD 800 (H.P. 549):
An Act To Prevent Passage of Alewives through the Grand Falls Dam on the St. Croix River
Public Hearing Before the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources Committee of Maine

April 27, 2015

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources (Committee), my name is Alex Hoar. I am a senior biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Regional Office in Hadley, Massachusetts. I am here today to represent the Service at the request of the Marine Resources Committee (Committee). I thank you for the invitation and opportunity to be here today.

The Service has been a long supporter and continues to support an unimpeded St. Croix River that allows for a self-sustaining population of alewife in line with the estimated full production potential. We are also interested in restoring American eel to areas where it has been extirpated and increasing their number wherever they still occur. Ultimately, our interest is the safe, timely, and effective passage of aquatic species on the river.

The St. Croix River has been a priority for the Service since about 1965 due in large part to its high alewife production potential. The St. Croix River has been reported to have the largest potential alewife-spawning run of any watershed in Maine. One estimate is approximately twice that of the Kennebec River and 1.5 times that of the Penobscot River. At that level, the number of juveniles produced annually in the St. Croix River would add to the food supply for predatory fish. Since juvenile alewife and adults are prey for many other fish, some birds, and other wildlife in the watershed and at sea in the Gulf of Maine, the ecological importance of a diversified food source due to alewife restoration in the St. Croix River has been recognized. The benefits of alewife restoration in the St. Croix River will likely extend to Passamaquoddy Bay.

Adult marine alewife spend little time in freshwater during their spawning migration, and alewife fry and juveniles may add to the food base for sport fish. Once the alewife are restored to capacity in the St. Croix River, the Service anticipates that the local economy and culture will benefit - especially if the population can be sustainably harvested for lobster bait or other uses.

The Service has helped raise about a half million dollars to invest in and advance fish restoration in the St. Croix River. That money is being spent in the watershed to purchase lodging, meals, fuel, equipment, and supplies. The Service expects to help raise a similar amount as restoration continues. Examples of activities organized and funded include an engineering site inspection of the fishways at all seven key dams, and an alewife tracking study. The Service also helped organize, fund, and conduct a field inventory of fish migration barriers in tributaries. The field work for streams in the United States was completed last year. The plan calls for inventorying the Canadian streams this summer. The results will be used to identify stream restoration

projects for which competitive funding will be sought. And, the Service tested 60 sea-run alewife collected at the Milltown trap and determined that those fish did not have health issues that could be transferred to sport fish in the river. Finally, the Service continues to financially support the operation of the fishway and important monitoring of the alewife run at the Milltown Dam.

In conclusion, the Service fully supports accelerating the restoration of river herring (alewife and blueback herring) by providing safe, timely, and effective passage in the St. Croix watershed. We understand that achieving this goal will require a team effort and we are interested in working with all partners to ensure success.

This concludes my testimony. I have made 25 copies for the committee. Thank you for the invitation to be here today.