



Testimony Opposing LD 800

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

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Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Jeff Reardon. I live in Manchester. I am the Maine Brook Trout Project Director for Trout Unlimited, and am testifying on behalf of our five Maine chapters, our Maine Council, and 1800 Maine members opposition to LD 800, An Act to Prevent Passage of Alewives through the Grand Falls Dam on the St. Croix River.

As the Committee is well aware, this is not a new issue. This is at least the fourth time I can remember that the Maine Legislature has been asked to block fishways on the St. Croix River to prevent native alewives from reaching their spawning grounds. The Departments of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Marine Resources, and the St. Croix Waterway International Joint Commission have also been asked to address the same issues. Those concerned about alewife restoration believe that alewives harmed non-native smallmouth bass in Spednic Lake when there were restored to the St. Croix in the 1980's, and are concerned about future impacts on the smallmouth bass fishery.

Since 1991, when the Grand Falls fishway was first closed to alewife, we've had more than 20 years of experience with alewife restoration in other watersheds, and multiple studies directed specifically at interactions between smallmouth bass and alewives, many of them specific to the St. Croix watershed. Anecdotally, those of us who live and fish in the Kennebec, Sheepscot, St. George and other watersheds where alewife restoration has advanced in recent years know that both smallmouth and largemouth bass thrive in the presence of alewife. We see thriving bass fisheries in lakes like Pleasant Pond in Gardiner, Webber Pond in Vassalboro, Damariscotta Lake in Jefferson; Seven Tree Pond in Union and many others—all of which support thriving alewife runs and host bass tournaments every year. More importantly, when studies within the St. Croix watershed have directly addressed concerns about alewives eating juvenile bass or competing with bass for food, they have demonstrated that alewife runs have no impact on bass growth or survival. A study in 2006, conducted by Theo Willis, a fisheries biologist at the University of Southern Maine, in collaboration with and with data from the National Marine Fisheries Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources, and the St. Croix Watershed International Joint Commission looked extensively at concerns about alewife impacts on bass, their findings, quoted directly from the report, were¹:

¹ The report may be downloaded from the Maine Department of Marine Resources website at <https://www1.maine.gov/dmr/searunfish/reports/stcroixalewifebass06.pdf>

1) We found no evidence from available historic data for Downeast Maine lakes that the presence of alewives systematically harmed smallmouth bass in terms of length, condition or growth.

2a) Fish constituted only a tiny proportion of the diet of adult anadromous alewives. Alewives were not significant predators on smallmouth bass.

2b) In most lakes, young-of-year smallmouth bass and young-of-year alewives did not have an ecologically significant overlap in diet. In the one lake in which diets were similar, populations of bass and alewives have coexisted for over a century. Based on one year's data, therefore, competition for food between the two species does not appear to be important.

3) Smallmouth bass tournament returns in the past few years have been similar in lakes with and lakes without alewives, suggesting that the quality of sport fishing for bass does not differ systematically between lakes with and lakes without anadromous alewives.

4) Landlocked alewives are genetically distinct from the anadromous alewife populations in the St. Croix and in other investigated watersheds. They are almost certainly the result of an independent introduction of landlocked stock from lakes outside the watershed and not the result of a shift in alewife life history strategy within the watershed.

I haven't spoken about the benefits of alewife restoration. There are many, and you'll hear about them from others today. But it's important for the Committee to realize that no matter how sincere the proponents of this bill are in their belief that alewives are bad for bass, there is no evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, there is abundant experience everywhere else in Maine that alewives coexist with thriving bass populations, and direct studies that demonstrate that alewives neither prey upon nor compete for food with bass. I urge you to vote ought not to pass on this bill.