

LD 800, An Act To Prevent Passage of Alewives through the Grand Falls Dam on the
St. Croix River
Public Hearing Before the Joint Marine Resources Committee
April 27, 2015

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, members of the Marine Resources Committee, I am
Madonna Soctomah, a resident of Pleasant Point.

It is with great pleasure that I have this opportunity to speak against LD800. River Herring,
known as “the fish that feed all”, “benefit all”.

River Herring refers to the Alewife and the Blueback Herring, which are anadromous fish that
live in the sea but return to natal fresh water to spawn. These fish are native to the St. Croix
River and should not be confused with the Landlocked Alewife, which is a genetically
different freshwater fish or the Atlantic Herring, a completely saltwater fish.

Two years ago, my bill, LD72, opened the St. Croix River fishway at Grand Falls dam for free
passage of River Herring, which were blocked from 98% of their spawning habitat upstream
of the dam and had been so blocked by legislation since 1995. This legislation was enacted
because of a fear that the presence of river herring spawning in our lakes and ponds would be
harmful to the smallmouth bass population.

A well-known Master Maine Guide recently wrote, “... we are fortunate to have large
numbers of sea run alewives that come to lay their eggs in the ponds each spring. As the small
alewives begin to move back to sea ... the predator fish begin to feed actively. Yesterday I
was ... with clients and many of the bass that they caught were actually potbellied from all of
the feed they have been enjoying.” Imagine that – bass that are potbellied with alewives and
still going after a fishing lure.

In response to a Canadian journalist’s question, if letting alewives up the St. Croix River will
hurt smallmouth bass, a State Official replied, “No, except getting fatter.”

So, if obesity of bass is the problem at issue here, then I would have to admit that we didn’t
have that problem above the Grand Falls dam and hadn’t had that problem for the past three
decades. You see, our bass had not been doing well since alewives were blocked from our
waters.

I think this alewife-bass experiment has run its course. Studies at great expense have shown
that alewives do not harm smallmouth bass, and we should now continue to let Mother Nature
do her job. Let her produce the natural abundance that Canadians, Native People, Lobstermen,
Alewife Harvesters, Ground Fishermen and a multitude of mammals, birds and predator fish
have long been denied. I ask that you not support LD800.

Thank you for your attention.