

LD 800
Testimony by Frank Richards
President, Webber Pond Association
April 27, 2015

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources. My name is Frank Richards. I am here to testify in opposition to LD 800.

I live on Webber Pond in Vassalboro and have been the President of the Webber Pond Association since 2001. We have had sea-run alewives almost 20 years now. I have entitled my testimony **A Tale of Two Cities Lakes**.

By way of background, in the mid to late 1990s, restoring sea run alewives to Webber was also controversial. Many people had heard what I will call the "St. Croix doomsday scenario". However, after considerable deliberation, we decided to go along with bringing back sea run alewives to Webber, knowing we could change our minds, if problems developed.

However, and fortunately for us, not a word of the "St. Croix doomsday scenario" proved to be true. Today the fishing on Webber Pond has never been better. The algae blooms that plagued the lake for a century are gone. The harvest is well accepted and spins off a little money, about \$10K a year, for the town. Alewives enjoy wide support from people living on the pond and in the community generally.

In contrast, the problems on the St. Croix evolved to become the longest political controversy in Maine's history. There has been a bill nearly every session going back to the 1990s.

It is difficult to reassemble what happened approximately 30 years ago. I will say that at the time, those alewives may have looked guilty because they had been re-established just as that smallmouth fishery collapsed.

However, there has never been another incident like Spendic. Alewives have not hurt the inland fisheries on lakes, such as Lake George, Webber, Three Mile, Seabasticook, Unity, or Damariscotta Lake. Sea run alewives and smallmouth bass have co-existed on nearby Meddybemps Lake for decades.

Those alewives were just in the wrong place at the wrong time 30 years ago. There would have been problems on other lakes, if they were harmful. If LD 800 is defeated and the restoration is allowed to continue, they won't hurt the fishery on Spendic. In my opinion, aggressive drawdowns for generating power were the most likely culprit back then.

The Washington County guides are honorable people who sincerely believe their livelihoods will be put at risk. Thirty years ago; it wasn't unreasonable for them to believe alewives were to blame for the collapse of the fishery. However, this belief is on the wrong side of science. Today, it would be nearly impossible to find a credentialed biologist with a background in alewives that would support their views.

In closing, if the restoration is allowed to continue, Washington County will eventually see new types of small businesses through the harvest, in addition to its sporting camp and guiding businesses. There's just no scientific reason to think there would be a tradeoff. Based on our experience on Webber Pond, I think the fishing would probably get better. Ours clearly has.

Additionally, restoring sea run alewife run will contribute to improving the ocean fishery because alewives would return to their role as a forage species for cod, haddock and other fish in the ocean. They are a highly beneficial keystone species.

That concludes my testimony. I would like to encourage this Committee to stay the course on restoring sea run alewives to the Spendic Lake and report LD 800 out as "Ought not to pass" unanimously. If the Committee has questions, I will be happy to try to answer. Otherwise, thank you for the opportunity to express my views.