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Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

RE: LD 958 – An Act to Expand Protections to Maine’s Loons from Lead Poisoning by Prohibiting the Sale and Use of Certain Painted Lead Jigs

Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to submit written comments in support of LD 958 – An Act to Expand Protections to Maine’s Loons from Lead Poisoning by Prohibiting the Sale and Use of Certain Painted Lead Jigs.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. The Nature Conservancy has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres. We also work across Maine to restore rivers and streams, partner with fishermen in the Gulf of Maine to rebuild groundfish populations, and develop innovative solutions to address our changing climate.

LD 958 would help close a loophole in Maine’s lead tackle laws that allows for the sale and use of small-sized **painted lead jigs**. This bill would phase out the use and sale of painted jigs weighing an ounce or less or measuring 2.5” or less and send a consistent message about Maine’s commitment to prevent avoidable deaths of loons and other wildlife from lead tackle.

Lead poisoning has long been one of the leading causes of death for adult loons in Maine. In 2013 the Legislature passed a bill to address bare lead jigs and lead sinkers. Because of that effort, it has been illegal to sell and/or use lead sinkers and bare, “unpainted” jigs weighing an ounce or less or measuring 2.5” or less in Maine since 2017.

Our state can be proud of this effort and the subsequent education programs that have proven effective over the last 10 years. However, continued research and wildlife experts agree that the loophole allowing for painted lead jigs continues to negatively impact loons. We must build on our past success and address this loophole to support the health of Maine’s iconic loon populations.

TNC urges the committee to support LD 958. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and I am available to answer questions at any time.