

Testimony in Support of LD 164: An Act to Fund the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund

Written by Tristan Taber, Water Quality Program Director; Lake Stewards of Maine

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To the members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee,
Good day, and thank you for this opportunity to comment on this important bill. My name is Tristan Taber and I am the Water Quality Program Director for Lake Stewards of Maine. Lake Stewards of Maine is a statewide nonprofit and our mission is to protect Maine lakes and to promote lake stewardship through widespread citizen participation in the gathering and dissemination of credible scientific information pertaining to lake health. Our perspective on various lake-related issues is based on information provided by our network of over 1,200 trained and certified volunteers and the best science and management practices available for lakes and watersheds.

Today, I wish to share our sincere hope that the committee will support LD 164 and dedicate funding to the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund. This bill offers the chance to provide funding for an important need that is only partially being met in Maine right now. In addition, I would encourage the committee to consider a dedicated funding stream to support this fund in the future.

There are many projects throughout the state that could benefit from the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund. Lake Stewards of Maine's efforts focus on training and supporting volunteer water quality monitors and

invasive aquatic species surveyors, however we have offered grant funding to community groups to defray the costs of watershed assessment surveys. This is a critical community engagement and lake protection activity. The work that derives from these surveys directly improves the health of a lake by limiting excessive nutrient additions and fostering stewardship in the watershed.

Our experience has shown us that there are many communities who are invested in their lake and interested in pursuing environmental stabilization and restoration projects. Although we assist these communities by supporting them with technical and logistical resources, many need financial assistance beyond our capabilities for projects such as culvert repairs, bank stabilization, and nutrient mitigation.

Funding this bill is also an issue of equity. This fund could provide a means of equitable disbursement to communities that may not be able to raise the funds they need from their immediate community. There are many unfunded and underfunded projects in the state that have firm technical support and ecological reasoning. Generally, wealthy and more populated communities are able to leverage local support. Rural, and less affluent, communities may not have the financial means to support these types of stabilization and improvement projects.

Our 1,200+ volunteers collect data from lakes to better understand what is taking place, but without greater financial support, many cannot address the negative trends they are seeing. I recognize there are limited funds available in the budget. However, efforts to mitigate the worst of cyanobacteria blooms, warming waters, invasive aquatic species, larger

volumes of stormwater runoff, and development pressure is only going to become increasingly important in the foreseeable future. Supporting this bill will help to protect one of Maine's most valuable and cherished natural resources, our lakes.

Most respectfully,

Tristan Taber

Water Quality and Technical Program Director, Aquatic Scientist

Lake Stewards of Maine

Tristan@lakestewardsme.org

www.lakestewardsofmaine.org