

**In Support of: LD-164: To Fund Lake Restoration and Protection Fund
Supplemental Testimony**

I am Lucy Leaf, Vice President of Toddy Pond Association in Hancock County Maine. I join others doing protection work on my lake and throughout my county, in both a volunteer and paid capacity. The following indicates some specifics about the work we do county-wide and some of the challenges we face in meeting today's needs.

We in Downeast Maine have always hoped that invasive plants would be slow to spread to our region, especially if we were diligent in our protective efforts such as Courtesy Boat Inspection, Invasive Plant Monitoring and Water Quality Testing, all excellent and effective protective programs initiated over twenty years ago by DEP and implemented by lake associations on higher risk lakes, especially those that have high boat use, such as my own.

But then a large infestation was discovered in Washington County to the East of us in 2019 followed by the discovery of an invasive plant in our own County in 2021, which was clear indication that **it is just a matter of when, not if, our lakes also become infested.**

These programs involve volunteer participants for the most part, though state grants are available to hire boat inspectors, sourced from the "milfoil stickers" boaters are required to purchase every year.

The problem is that these programs must be implemented through lake associations or groups that can organize and receive grant funds. Hancock County has 270 named lakes and less than ten active lake associations or groups with this volunteer capacity. So not many lakes get this protection.

The state funding Toddy Pond Association receives for its Boat Inspection Program, which is the maximum amount of \$2,000, covers less than 20% of its direct costs to run the program. **Boat use has increased substantially over just the past few years.** Today, Toddy inspects over 50 boats on a busy day. While the boat ramp is state built and state owned, the responsibility of implementing the Boat Inspection Program is up to property lake owners.

Donnell Pond is the second busiest lake in our county for boat traffic due to its scenic value and most of its shoreline being part of a state preserve where camping is allowed on numerous sandy beaches. There is no state-funded boat inspection on Donnell Pond, nor any of the other protective measures taken because there is no lake association there. Hancock County Soil & Water Conservation District provides weekend boat inspection at Donnell, funded by a private organization not affiliated with the lake or the property owners there. This helps protect other lakes due to the very transient boating community. The Conservation District also acquires private funding for plant monitoring county-wide.

Another trend that is presenting a challenge is that **volunteerism seems to be dwindling.** Hiring inspectors, grant writing, fund raising, and organizing programs that are becoming increasingly complex is beyond the scope of most volunteers, many of whom are seasonal.

The fund being considered today is targeted for projects versus ongoing protective programs. Restoration projects are vitally important, but **key to the possibility of restoration is early detection.** And that won't happen if no one is looking for changes in water quality to foresee deterioration of lake health or for the presence of invasive plants or species like zebra mussels taking hold. And restoration projects also require lake associations and volunteers- that don't exist for most lakes.

In the last several years, I have discussed with other local lake groups the possibility of **starting a regional lake association** in our county that could provide professional services to help get lake groups started and support them by pooling resources such as coordinating a Boat Inspection Program, organizing training, volunteer efforts and remediation if needed. I have seen the effectiveness of these regional groups in other areas of Maine that have faced similar challenges.

We cannot rely on volunteers alone to protect or restore our lakes. Nor should we rely on private funders to shoulder much of the financial burden. Lakes are a valuable natural resource from which we all benefit.

Please support this bill and any other measures to protect Maine's lakes.

Lucy Leaf
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