



April 10th, 2023

Senator Henry Ingwersen
Representative William D. Pluecker
Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

RE: Testifying Neither For Nor Against, LD 1441, An Act to Enhance State Oversight of Water Use and Water Resources

The development and use of sustainable water sources is an important component of the wild blueberry producers' crop management and is the most critical tool producers employ to mitigate the devastating effects of drought. We support continued sustainable use of Maine's water resources and recognize that sustainable use requires oversight.

It is for this reason that we have taken an active role with the Agricultural Water Management Board. This board,

works in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Protection to oversee and coordinate environmentally sound and affordable development of water sources for agricultural use. The board can make recommendations for improvements to federal and state permitting processes for the development of farm ponds and other water sources for agricultural use; work to secure funding for the construction of environmentally sound; efficient and affordable water sources for agricultural use; and facilitate the implementation of sustainable agricultural water source programs.¹

This board relies on information provided by the Hydrogeologist for the Maine Geological Survey to understand and make recommendations to appropriate agencies or legislative committees for improvements to current permitting processes. In fulfillment of its obligations, this committee was instrumental in (and I quote from the bill before you today):

Identifying measures to enhance or supplement the State's monitoring of and data collection regarding water use and water resources and the support of that data and, as necessary, identifying funding opportunities to support those measures.²

¹ Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. Agricultural Resource Development Division, Agricultural Water Management Board. https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/water_management/ag-water-board.shtml.

² LD 1441, An Act to Enhance State Oversight of Water Use and Water Resources (excerpt) as presented to the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee on April 10th, 2023.



To that end, and with the assistance of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the input of the Agricultural Water Management Board contributed to the development of LD 315, An Act to Provide Funding for Drought Relief and Other Programs Benefiting Maine Farmers. LD 315 was sponsored by Senator Ingwerson, and unanimously voted OTP-A by this Committee on March 1st. The bill provides funding for a one-time consultant to the Land Use Planning Commission and ongoing funding for 3 full-time permanent positions to add capacity to the State's agricultural water withdrawal and permitting processes.

The Agricultural Water Management Board is also engaged in (and I quote from the bill before you today),

Develop[ing] recommendations for measures to enhance drought preparedness and drought resilience by agricultural producers...³

To this end, the Agricultural Water Management Board in February of 2022 submitted a letter to Governor Mills that asks her to engage with our Congressional Delegation to help secure sources of Federal funds to help Maine farmers increase their drought resilience.

To summarize, while the wild blueberry industry nominally supports the objectives as described in LD 1441, an effective structure is already in place, in the form of the Agricultural Water Management Board, to protect, oversee and coordinate environmentally sound and affordable development of water sources for agricultural use.

I am uncertain why the Water Resources Planning (WRP) Committee would take up topics and make recommendations that are duplicative of the work that the Agricultural Water Management Board already carries out, or why the WRP Committee, which has only a single agricultural producer, would seek to add requirements to the work of the Agricultural Water Management Board—work that is already being carried out.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to try and answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,



Eric Venturini
Executive Director
Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine
Eric.Venturini@maine.edu
(207) 478-7612

³ LD 1441, An Act to Enhance State Oversight of Water Use and Water Resources (excerpt) as presented to the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee on April 10th, 2023.

