

Scott Palmer
BIG LAKE TWP
LD 2141

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and

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Submitted on behalf of LD 2141 An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better
Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations

Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, January 31, 2024

We are camp owners on Big Lake in eastern Washington County. We want to encourage members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to support a \$2 million appropriation to the Invasive Aquatic Plant and Nuisance Species Fund as well as requirements to strengthen watercraft inspection protocols.

About six years ago, invasive Milfoil was discovered in our lake. This discovery shocked us, the lake preservation community in Maine and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Before this discovery, the progression of infestations from the southern part of the state had been gradual. Suddenly we discovered that the problem had “leapt over the fire line” by hundreds of miles, and a vast new part of our State was threatened.

The lake preservation community in Maine understands that an infestation of something like milfoil anywhere in Maine threatens all of Maine. A boat with dangerous milfoil fragments can cross our state in less than day. We were grateful that groups like the Lake Stewards of Maine, whose members reside primarily in central and southern Maine, came to our aid with volunteer surveyors, sacrificing weeks of their valuable time. At the same time, the DEP’s Invasive Species Program, recognizing the threat this discovery represented to a vast new portion of our State, stepped in with a grant to help with removal. You as legislators can be proud of the caring, committed and competent professionals in the DEP and their partners at the Department of Inland Waters and Fisheries who work on the invasive species problem. We as property owners and local citizens also understood that we must do our part and we formed a coalition headed by The Downeast Lakes Land Trust, with strong support and cooperation from the Passamaquoddy Tribe.

The stabilization of our lake is far from over, but we have learned a stark lesson from our journey. The cost of dealing with an infestation of the kind we discovered at Big Lake would be difficult anywhere in Maine, but it is especially challenging in the less populated and poorer parts of our state. And these less populated areas are sadly the new frontier for these infestations as warming trends move further north.

Big Lake is one of the largest lakes in Maine, covering 10,444 acres. Much of it is shallow and thus vulnerable to milfoil. While Big Lake is a prime destination for thousands of small mouth bass anglers from all over Maine and beyond, a vast amount of the shoreline is undeveloped, and in a conservancy, and will never be built upon. Thus, the actual population on the lake is very small and cannot grow. Our ability to protect this lake for the benefit of all Mainers is limited by our numbers and our location in the poorest county in Maine. This is an all-too-common problem for the economically challenged areas of our state.

Because our ability to mobilize local resources is limited, we have benefitted from the Milfoil Boat Tax, which along with some modest federal grants to DEP is the revenue stream that allowed DEP to give us a grant to fund various strategies to remove the milfoil. But in the invasive plant area, those revenue sources are not sufficient to keep up with the growing problem in Maine. Hence your consideration today of a direct appropriation is both justified and welcome.

Our Maine lakes have an extraordinary twelve-billion-dollar impact on the Maine economy. Just like a road system or a telecommunications network, or modern manufacturing plants, they support jobs and contribute to “the way life should be.” We all know that the threat to our lakes is increasing and requires an even greater

degree of attention than ever before. The threat is real, and we cannot take it for granted. The consequence of failure is something for which our children would never forgive us. The waters of Maine legally belong to the people of Maine, and you as legislators have a sacred trust to protect, maintain, and when necessary to restore them for the people. We commend you for stepping up to that responsibility today by considering LD 2141 and we thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to this hearing.