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## COBBOSSEE WATERSHED DISTRICT

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*Maine's first regional lake management district*



### **Testimony in Support of LD 2141 (HP 1365) – “An Act To Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State”.**

Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. My name is Bill Monagle. I am the Executive Director of the Cobbossee Watershed District (CWD) and a limnologist. On behalf of the CWD, I wish to express the District’s **support for LD 2141**.

The CWD is Maine’s first, and still only, watershed district, authorized by the Maine legislature in 1971, and charged with the purpose of protecting, conserving, and improving the lakes and ponds of the Cobbossee Stream watershed. The impetus for the creation of the CWD was the decline of several of the 28 lakes and ponds of the 217-square mile Cobbossee Stream watershed. Currently, there are eight member municipalities (Gardiner, Litchfield, Manchester, Monmouth, Readfield, Richmond, Wayne, and Winthrop) in the CWD.

Over the past fifty years, the CWD has worked aggressively to address stormwater and nonpoint-source (NPS) phosphorus pollution related problems to rehabilitate and/or protect the lakes of the CWD. Included in these efforts have been dozens of projects supported by grants funded under various sections of the Federal Clean Water Act and performed cooperatively with member towns, local and regional agencies, lake and road associations, as well as the Maine DEP.

Over the course of the past few decades, a new threat to our lakes has emerged. In the 1980’s, there grew within the Maine lake community a heightened sense of the threat posed by invasive aquatic plants to our lakes that had largely been a scourge more common in the lower New England states. Early on, there were relatively few Maine lakes with documented infestations of invasive aquatic plants, primarily Variable-leaf Water-milfoil. Things were about to change.

Beginning in 2001, Variable-leaf Water-milfoil (VLWM) was detected in Pleasant Pond, the terminal waterbody in the Cobbossee Stream watershed. Since that time invasive aquatic plants have invaded several other lakes of the CWD, including Annabessacook Lake and Cobbossee Lake despite the development of a program of courtesy boat inspections (CBI) at several public boat launch sites aimed at preventing the transport and introduction of invasive species on trailered watercraft from and between lakes. Over a period of ten years beginning in 2013, an intensive search and destroy mission targeting VLWM on Annabessacook Lake has required continuous intensive efforts from a collaboration of Annabessacook Lake Improvement Association, Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed, CWD, and Maine DEP to try to manage it. And while an herbicide treatment in 2020, and establishment of a Surface Use Restriction zone to reduce the further in-lake spread of invasive plants, shows promising early results at managing but not eradicating the VLWM, it will require continued effort to protect those investments.

More recently, Eurasian Water-Milfoil (EWM) and European Frog's Bit were discovered in Cobbossee Lake in 2018. The DEP responded immediately and began hand harvesting the EWM in an isolated area in the north end of the lake. Like Variable-leaf Water-milfoil, EWM is an extremely aggressive invasive species capable of great ecological harm, not to mention diminished recreational utility and reduced shorefront property values. Subsequent to these efforts, the DEP treated the EWM infestation with an aquatic herbicide in 2019 to eradicate the plant and prevent further spread throughout Cobbossee Lake. It was hoped that this would represent a case in which early detection leads to a successful outcome. Unfortunately, these plants continued to spread throughout the lake and in 2023 were found in numerous locations including near the outlet dam as well as into Cobbossee Stream below, threatening downstream resources and prompting additional herbicide treatments by Maine DEP and the establishment by the Maine DEP and Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife of a Surface Use Restriction zone in the lake in the vicinity of the outlet dam.

Sadly, despite these intensive efforts, infestations in impacted lakes have continued and/or have expanded to some extent despite initial and ongoing eradication and control efforts and having been served by courtesy boat inspections, albeit on a limited basis. It has become clear that a robust statewide multi-faceted approach to controlling and eradicating invasive aquatic plant infestations is needed. We believe that LD 2141, as introduced, prescribes a program that contains several elements of such an approach that would include: the inspection of watercraft and related equipment at boat launching sites on Maine waterbodies as well as those watercraft crossing the State border; close monitoring of inland waters of the State (e.g., Cobbossee Lake) known to have invasive aquatic plants; serious review and consideration of the designation of Surface Use Restrictions (SUR) in inland waters with invasive aquatic plants; enhanced public education on the topic; and one-time funding to the Invasive Aquatic Plant and Nuisance Species Fund to support the control and eradication of invasive aquatic plant infestations.

In closing, the provisions of LD 2141 will help prevent the spread, and enhance control, of Invasive Aquatic Plants and in turn will support efforts to preserve our valuable lakes and ponds. ***I firmly believe the State of Maine would greatly benefit from the implementation of the program elements described in this bill*** and therefore I urge that you **vote LD 2141 ought to pass.**

I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.



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