

LD 2141

As President of the Lakes Association of Norway (LAON) I would like to explain my support of LD 2141 which is designed to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations.

Like many other lake associations, LAON expends considerable energy and resources in our efforts to keep invasive species out of our lakes primarily through our Courtesy Boat Inspection program. Unfortunately, that has weaknesses. We cannot guard all 4 of our lakes; we cannot have 24/7 coverage; and we cannot cover the entire boating season. Increasing funding to address infestations is needed, it is the easiest thing to do, and I endorse it. However, while that money is needed, it is needed because other measures have failed to keep boaters from inadvertently transporting invasives from infested lakes. It is money needed to recover from the failure of other policies, or from not having policies that match the seriousness of the potential threat invasives pose to Maine's lakes. We watched with dismay as the number of waterbody infestations has grown by nearly 50% in the past 10 years. Accordingly, I am particularly interested in the portions of the bill that focus on strengthening policies, protocols, and procedures that would reduce the probability of boaters carrying invasives from infested waterbodies. Past data shows that the majority of times an invasive was found during an inbound boat inspection, that boat last visited an infested Maine waterbody (72% during 2013 – 2018). Maine waterbodies are the biggest threat to Maine waterbodies! With that in mind, I would like to present two concepts that I recommend for consideration, and are hopefully improved upon.

1. Since infested Maine waterbodies are our biggest threat, how can boaters be allowed to exit them without a thorough inspection? Amazingly, there are no requirements that boats departing an infested lake be inspected. Some infested lakes have Courtesy Boat Inspectors, but not all. Even when there is an inspection program, there are two weaknesses. First, those inspections are voluntary. The boater does not have to allow it. Second, where there are inspection programs, they cannot cover all possible boating hours, or the entire boating season, so it is inevitable that some boaters will leave when there is no inspector present. **My recommendation is that the starting point be to establish as a goal, strengthening policies and procedures to prevent any boat from leaving any infested waterbody in Maine without a comprehensive inspection for invasive species.** I want to emphasize that the starting is the goal of preventing transportations of invasive species from infested Maine Lake. Once that is set, good minds will likely come up with ways to accomplish that. Will there be a 100% perfect solution? While I would hope for one, it is not likely, at least not at first. But we should not allow perfect to be the enemy of good. One possibility would be to first make inspections mandatory, rather than voluntary, for boats leaving infested waterbodies. Then, install locked gates at boat launches of such waterbodies. When an inspector is on duty, it would be business as usual, except that the inspection is mandatory. If there is no inspector present, then there would need to be a way to contact one who would go the launch. Perhaps the boater could schedule his or her departure. I am sure that the immediate reaction would be to think of all the reasons not to do it. It would be inconvenient to the boater; on-call inspectors would be needed; installing locked gates cost money; we've never done it that way. But, when we consider all the costs (probably in the millions) and disruptions caused when an invasive invasion has been found, and the risk to thousands of Maine lakes, wouldn't prevention at a couple of dozen boat launches be well worth it?

2. Knowing how difficult it is to make change, and how long it would take to develop and implement a goal such as the one in item 1, above, then the question becomes what do to in the meantime? There are Maine laws that make transporting aquatic vegetation (invasive, or not) on a boat illegal, but from what I could determine, it has not been applied very many times. So, this suggestion is to randomly have IF&W stop boaters leaving an infested waterbody at a time when an inspector is not on duty and perform an inspection for plants. If one is found, apply the law. I believe that word would spread amongst boaters, and fewer boats would leave infested waterbodies uninspected. It would also be good to publicize this in advance, so it does not appear like a trap. Again, there might be obstacles. Does IF&W have the right to conduct such an inspection? Will judges enforce the law? I go back to the cost of the status quo, and the goal. If the desire is to achieve the goal, I would hope those who know the system best can make such a process work.

Thank you,
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