

Testimony in Support of LD 296, “An Act to Appropriate Funds to the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund” Submitted to the Committee on The Environment and Natural Resources By: Peter L. Kallin, Ph.D., February 12, 2025

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Distinguished Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, I’m Dr. Peter Kallin. I am a retired professional watershed manager, a retired Professional Wetlands Scientist (P.W.S.), a retired environmental consultant, a retired university water resources extension specialist, and President *emeritus* of Maine Lakes. I serve on the Board of the 7-Lakes Alliance, and am a member of the Belgrade Lakes Association, and a certified invasive plant and water quality monitor for the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program (VLMP). I have served on numerous DEP stakeholder groups including the most recent reviews of gravel roads, phosphorus control, and shoreland zoning. **I strongly recommend that you endorse LD 164 with a unanimous “ought to pass.”**

Our forefathers recognized the importance of our lakes. One of the first pieces of legislation passed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony was the Great Ponds Act of 1647 that granted citizens the right to access Great Ponds, those greater than 10 acres, for fishing, fowling, swimming, boating, cutting ice, and navigating. Even in 1647 the leaders of the community recognized the importance of lakes as a source of food and economic activity and deserving of special protection. When Maine became a State in 1820, this colonial law was part of the articles of separation and became integrated into Maine common law. Over time, our lakes and rivers provided not only natural resources like fish and ice, but hydropower to power factories, and the ability to bring those resources to market by boat, allowing not just Maine but the United States to become a world economic power. We often drew drinking water and dumped wastewater into the same waterbodies-**not a good idea!** This exploitation of our waters took its toll in water quality and in 1969 when the Cuyahoga River in Ohio caught fire for the 13th time, Americans recognized we couldn’t continue to abuse our waters and called upon the US Congress to act to protect our waters. The Nixon administration created the US Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and, under the leadership Maine’s Senator Ed Muskie in the Senate, a bipartisan Congress passed the Clean Air Act (CAA) in 1970 and the Clean Water Act (CWA) in 1972, setting a goal of making all our waters fishable and swimmable and free from toxic discharges. **The CWA contains language that requires States to maintain and protect their water quality.** The CWA and the CAA have been highly effective in cleaning our air and water, but the job isn’t done yet.

According to a recent UMaine study*, Maine’s lakes provide over \$12B of Economic Activity annually, to the State of Maine. Unfortunately, many of Maine’s lakes are suffering from degraded water quality. For example, of the 7 major lakes in the Belgrade Lakes Watershed, three are considered “impaired” and the other four are considered “threatened” by Maine DEP. In the past 10 years, the 7-Lakes Alliance has performed well over \$3M in active

remediation of our lakes and shorefronts. Most of the funding for this work comes from USEPA Clean Water Act Section 319 funding that we receive from Maine DEP, all of which requires a local match. While that sounds like a lot, it is well short of what is needed. While it is usually possible to get a fairly well to do shorefront property owner to come up with funds to match erosion control work that will protect the value of their property, it is much more difficult to raise funds when the property is owned by a municipality or property owner with limited means who inherited a century-old dirt road through a woodlot or farm that drains straight to the lake. Often these properties are not right on the water but the sediment drains almost directly into the lake. The resource that is degraded is the lake, which belongs to all the citizens of Maine. This affects all the residents in the watershed and beyond. For example, in the Town of Rome, where I reside, 80% of the property tax base is shorefront property (over ½ owned by nonresidents), which covers basically the entire \$18M education budget for our 100 students in RSU-18. In Belgrade, nearly 60% of the tax base is shorefront property. This bill would enable Maine to help provide a non-Federal match to leverage additional Federal funds for lake restoration and protection.

Healthy lakes and ponds are essential to a thriving Maine economy. But the cost of keeping our lakes and ponds healthy is growing each year, outpacing existing sources of funding. That growth is expected to continue, perhaps at an even faster pace, in the future. Funding lake health today through the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund is a sound investment in the future of Maine's lakes and outdoor economy. This bill would supply much needed funding to Maine's Lake Restoration and Protection Fund. **Please support maximum funding for this bill.** Thank for important service to our State and thank you for your consideration for this important piece of legislation.

Peter Kallin, Ph.D., P.W.S. (Retired)

Rome, ME

* A. Daignault and M. Genoter. 2022. Valuing the Economic Benefits of Maine's Great Ponds in the 21st Century