Atlantic Salmon Federation Fédération du Saumon Atlantique

Testimony of the Atlantic Salmon Federation on

LD 593: An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program

March 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

My name is Jeff Reardon, I live in Manchester, and I am a Project Manager for the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF), an international non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wild Atlantic salmon and their environment. ASF has more than 2,500 members and volunteers with ASF, our Maine Council, and a dozen local affiliates working on river and fisheries conservation and restoration across Maine. ASF is providing testimony today in support of LD 593, and more generally in support of continued funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF).

LMF has been described by many people as one of the best ideas the State of Maine has ever had. It provides state funding for land conservation projects in four categories: Conservation and Recreation, Farmland, Water Access, and Working Waterfront. My testimony today will focus on projects in the Conservation and Recreation category, because all the projects I have had any involvement in have been in that category. I'm sure you will hear from others about Farmland, Water Access, and Working Waterfront projects.

LMF is a consistent and essential source of state funds to conserve land for habitat—including coldwater fish habitat that is central to ASF's mission—and recreational access—including access to observe and fish for coldwater fish. The state's investment through LMF is critical to leverage local, private, foundation, and federal funding for high scoring projects. Attached to my testimony is a list of Conservation and Recreation Projects that resulted in conservation of habitat for and/or angler access to coldwater fish, including Maine's native Atlantic salmon, landlocked salmon, brook trout, and landlocked Arctic charr. This list is not comprehensive but reflects projects that I know had significant benefits for Maine's trout and salmon. Beginning in 1990 with the Nahmakanta and Rainbow Townships Project around Nahmakanta and Rainbow Lake and continuing through two projects completed last year to protect brook trout habitat in the Kennebago Headwaters and habitat for endangered Atlantic salmon in Orbeton Stream, LMF has supported almost two dozen of critically important coldwater fish habitat conservation projects across the state.

Over the last 35 years, those projects have protected almost 393,000 acres of land containing much of Maine's best trout and salmon habitat and best fishing. That's almost two Baxter State Parks. It includes maintaining public access to iconic fisheries including Grand Lake Stream and the Crooked River: two of Maine's four native landlocked salmon populations; to Rainbow Lake, one of just 12 remaining lakes that support landlocked Arctic charr; to Little Kennebago Lake and its tributaries, where spawning supports fisheries on Big and Little Kennebago Lakes and many miles of the Kennebago River. One of

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the first major investments Maine made as part of then Governor King's commitment to recover Atlantic salmon in Maine was to protect most of the Machias River corridor for its Atlantic salmon habitat values. Around the same time, collaboration between Coastal Mountains Land Trust, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and a host of partners protected almost the entire watershed of the Ducktrap River, an Atlantic salmon river on the coast in Lincolnville squeezed between rapid development around Camden and Belfast in the late 1990s and early 2000's. More recently, working with the High Peaks Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, and multiple state and federal agencies, LMF funds have helped catalyze the conservation of most of the watersheds of Orbeton and Perham Streams, tributaries to the Sandy River that contain some of Maine's highest quality habitat for endangered sea-run Atlantic salmon. The Sandy River watershed, including Orbeton and Perham, is the only place we have successfully naturally reared adult and juvenile salmon in a place where they were previously extirpated.

On a personal note, my wife and I got married in the Oquossuc Church, right next to the LMF protected Rangeley River Corridor; and split our honeymoon between Grant's Camps on Kennebago Lake, and Nahmakanta Camps on Nahmakanta Lake, both surrounded by LMF protected lands. Our annual vacation to Baxter State Park involves hiking from inside the park to the Debsconeags Forest just outside the park boundary, where, in part with LMF funds, The Nature Conservancy has conserved two of my favorite Heritage Brook Trout Ponds, and three others I've yet to fish. I know I am not alone when I say that at least half of my outdoor recreation has some connection to a nearby LMF project.

We thank Senator Black for bringing this bill forward. LMF has historically been funded with bonds passed periodically by Maine's voters, and as far as I can remember, those bonds have always passed. This bill suggests supplementing that with $10 million dollar appropriations from the General Fund in each of the next two fiscal years. There is no question that Maine gets its money's worth from LMF funds. I anticipate considerable discussion in the Committee and the Legislature about a new approach to funding the LMF program. I ask you to consider it seriously, along with other potential funding mechanisms.

Sincerely,

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Land for Maine's Future Conservation/Recreation Projects to Protect Cold Water Fish Habitat and Public Access

(Compiled by Jeff Reardon, Atlantic Salmon Federation)

Project	Year	Town	Acres	Coldwater Fish Benefits
Nahmakanta/Rainbow	1990	Nahmakanta + Rainbow TWPs	29,692	Heritage Brook Trout Ponds, Arctic Charr in Rainbow Lake
Grand Lake Stream	1995	Grand Lake Stream	271	Landlocked Salmon Habitat and angler access
Ducktrap River	1996, 1999	Lincolnville	191	Atlantic Salmon and Sea-run Brook Trout Habitat
Rangeley River	1997	Rangeley	150	Access to Rangeley River for Angling
Rapid River	1997	Upton	446	Trophy Brook Trout Habitat and Angler Access
Narraguagus River--Little Falls	2000	Cherryfield	215	Atlantic Salmon Habitat
Denny's River	2002	Cooper and Meddybemps	1039	Atlantic Salmon Habitat
Leavitt Plantation Forest	2003	Parsonsfield	8603	Wild Brook Trout Habitat
Machias River	2003	Multiple TWPs	13,177	Atlantic Salmon Habitat
West Branch	2003	Multiple TWPs	46,985	Heritage Brook Trout Ponds; West Branch Penobscot access
Katahdin Forest Project	2006	Multiple TWPs	194,751	Heritage Brook Trout Ponds and streams.
Katahdin Iron Works	2007	Bowdoin College Grant E+W	37,000	Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout Habitat, West Branch Pleasant River
Dead River Corridor	2008	Multiple TWPs	1,175	Angler and Boater access to Dead River
Millinocket Forest Sandy Stream	2011	T2R8WELS	5,061	Brook Trout Spawning Habitat
West Grand Lake	2012	Grand Lake Stream	21,870	Landlocked Salmon Habitat
Orbeton Stream	2014	Madrid	5,798	Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout Habitat
Cold Stream Forest	2016	W. Forks,Parlin, Johnson Mt. TWPs	8,159	Brook Trout Spawing for Kennebec River Gorge; Heritage Brook Trout Ponds
Crooked River and Forest	2016	Harrison	296	Landlocked Salmon Spawning for Sebago Lake
Gulf Hagas Whitecap	2017	Bowdoin College Grant E	8,450	Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout Habitat, West Branch Pleasant River
High Peaks Keystones	2024	Madrid, Mt. Abrams	601	Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout Habitat--Perham and Orbeton Streams
Kennebago Headwaters	2024	Rangeley, Stetsontown TWP	6,813	Brook Trout Heritage Pond (Kennebago Lake) and its watershed.
Orbeton Keystones	2024	Madrid, Mt Abrams	2,100	Atlantic Salmon and Brook Trout Habitat
Total			**392,843**	