

**Testimony of the Atlantic Salmon Federation on****LD 758: Resolve, to Update Flood Hazard Data in the Sandy River Watershed****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 758, Resolve, to Update Flood Hazard Data in the Sandy River Watershed. The Sandy River watershed, among other things, is some of the highest quality habitat for endangered Atlantic salmon in the nation and is the only place in the US where naturally spawned Atlantic salmon have been restored in habitat where they were previously extirpated.

This bill is a response to long-term problems with flooding, stream bank erosion, damage to brook trout and Atlantic salmon habitat, and damage to farmland, roads, homes, and other infrastructure. It is the result of years of work by a group called the ARC—Agriculture and Rivers Coexisting—and you’ll hear from them about their formation and work. The Atlantic Salmon Federation has only been involved with the ARC over the last year, in the wake of the December 2023 flood that caused so much damage. We appreciated their invitation to join them and have been impressed by their commitment to find solutions that work for farmers and Sandy River communities while maintaining natural river processes and high-quality salmon and brook trout habitat.

This bill has changed from what Senator Black originally proposed. I am testifying on the amendment updated on March 10th. I believe others will explain why that change was made. The revised bill authorizes the Maine Office of Community Affairs to conduct a “geomorphic study” and use that, in combination with updated flood mapping, to update flood hazard data in the Sandy River Watershed. The study must include an “assessment of river movement, erosion and sedimentation, and impacts to flood risk and river health.” It will be funded by federal or private, non-state funds.

I expect you are wondering what a “geomorphic study” might be. My expertise is limited. I shared an office with a trained “fluvial geomorphologist” for a few years, and I have worked with them on a handful of restoration projects. The best definition I could find came from a water science center in Kansas.

“An understanding of river- and stream-channel responses to various human-caused and natural disturbances for effective management, conservation, and rehabilitation of rivers and streams to accommodate multiple, often conflicting, needs.”

Way back in 1883, the famous geomorphologist Mark Twain defined the problem in Life on the Mississippi.

“One who knows the Mississippi will promptly aver . . .that ten thousand River Commissions, with the mines of the world at their back, cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot say to it, Go here, or Go there, and make it obey; cannot save a shore which it has sentenced; cannot bar its path with an obstruction which it will not tear down, dance over, and laugh at.”

We’re not going to make floods go away on the Sandy River. They are going to happen, and when they do, things are going to change. If anything, we are going to see more frequent and larger floods. USGS stream gauges on the Sandy—one way upstream in Madrid, and the other on the lower river in Mercer, tell us that just in 2023 the Sandy had two historic floods, one on May 1 and another on December 18-19. Those were the second largest and fifth largest floods ever recorded on the river, and with climate change that trend is expected to continue.

This study, combined with updated flood mapping, will provide all stakeholders in the Sandy River with information to plan for and respond to those floods as they come, and to balance all the competing needs in the Sandy River valley as we do so. We believe this approach—a commitment to use the best information for planning to address environmental, community, and infrastructure concerns to address planning for and recovery from floods—may serve as a model for the many other rivers in Maine with similar issues. It comes at no cost to the state, and I urge you to support the bill.

Sincerely,

Jeff Reardon
Project Manager
Atlantic Salmon Federation