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LD 531: Dam Ownership
March 31, 2025 10am
Sponsored by: Nina Milliken D-Blue Hill
Committee: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

In Favor of the Bill

My name is Mark Fowler, I am a landowner and business owner located on the shorefront of Toddy Pond. I would also like to speak for the lakefront property owners on Toddy Pond and my town of Orland Maine. I do endorse passage of LD 531.

Toddy Pond has provided an important habitat for wildlife, recreation and business opportunities for the towns of Blue Hill, Orland, Penobscot and Surry, and a water source for fire departments who secure the safety of tax payers homes. Toddy Pond provides a vital resource for our communities.

Besides being a home to numerous fish species, the pond is also the home of a vast network of animals and birds: beavers, foxes, deer, loons, eagles, cormorants and many other living creatures. All these have lived in this environment for well over a hundred years. Large environments covering thousands of acres like this are becoming less and less available and protected as population increases. It is never good to allow the kind of change in the environment that reduces wildlife habitat. Certainly, just as our laws protect vernal pools home to certain species of wildlife (that were possibly created by human presence or activity), Toddy Pond is a habitat to varieties of wildlife that deserve the same protection. Allowing it to disappear would be a truly cataclysmic change.

The boat launch on Toddy, located on Route 1 in Orland is one of the busiest in Hancock County. Boaters and families from all over Maine and New England come to Toddy, to fish and enjoy lake life.

As a business owner on Toddy Pond, I know that for many of us resident taxpayers make our living here. And we, in turn, provide a powerful economic engine for business in the region and incomes for families who live here. The property tax we pay to our towns significantly impacts the tax revenues for all four towns.

The loss of such an important economy engine would be devastating to the towns of Blue Hill, Orland, Penobscot and Surry.

This effort to make a path forward by the people and towns most affected by the status of the dams on Toddy Pond and Alamoosook may be unique now, but beware, this is a problem that will need to be closely monitored across the entire state of Maine since there are many dams that are aging and may have outlived their original purpose. Regardless of this fact, these lakes continue to bring significant benefit to the people living on the waters and the towns adjoining those water bodies. The State of Maine should embrace and encourage efforts such as this to solve local problems at the local level. We all encourage the legislature to support this bill.

Yes, I do vote in favor of this bill. Though I do have my concerns, I believe we must take this first step in getting the bill passed and then we can work on how Maine, the towns and its residents will find ways to fund this effort.

Regarding the legislation for dam ownership and maintenance, our preference as property owners on Toddy Pond would be to have it managed and paid for the way the Orland Village dam is maintained, and that is by the town.

However, the proposal of the lake homeowners having to pay 50% of the maintenance can also work. I would suggest that the legislation should state that the towns are required to kick in their 50% just like the lakefront owners. The towns can impact the amount of spending in the budget that they help develop as members of the authority on which they will have representation. In fact, the towns will have a majority of the membership

on the committee. Here are some key points that lakeside landowners would like you to consider:

1. We already pay a premium in our property taxes.
2. Other people benefit from the use of the lake, especially via use of the boat launch.
3. Most of the roads around the lake are private thus not a burden on the town (we take care of maintain our roads year-round and do not have postal or trash benefits other tax payers receive).
4. Most of the landowners around the lake do not use their property as their primary year-round residences, thus a lower burden on the town for things like schools etc.
5. If the dam were to go away, then property values would most likely go way down and cause a burden on the other town residences.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mark Fowler