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LD 531: Dam Ownership

Sponsored by: Nina Milliken D-Blue Hill

Committee: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

In Favor of the Bill

My Name is James Helmer. My wife and other members of our family own a house on Toddy Pond in the Town of Penobscot, Maine.

I wish to strongly endorse passage of LD 531.

My wife was born in Bar Harbor, which I like to think makes me, to some extent, a Mainer by marriage. In the 1980s, my wife's parents purchased property on Toddy Pond and in 1992 built on that site a lovely log home. While some of the construction was done by family members and a few good friends, much of it involved local tradesmen.

My wife's parents have now been gone for decades, but we and other family members and friends return often to enjoy the beauty of the pond and the many activities it offers, such as swimming, fishing, and boating. Most of our visits are extended stays during which we interact extensively with the larger community, including restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations, and small businesses. As with any home, ours requires maintenance and repairs, such as the nearly \$20,000 roof replacement performed by a local contractor recently. We believe that we and the others who come to our house on Toddy Pond have a significant economic impact on the local community. And, of course, we pay property taxes based on the value of our log home and its frontage on the waters of Toddy Pond. Besides these personal matters, there are issues of larger scale, which are addressed below.

For over one hundred years Toddy Pond and Alamoosook Lake have provided superb wildlife habitat, bountiful recreational opportunities and an economic powerhouse for the towns of Blue Hill, Orland, Penobscot and Surry. Originally conceived as a water source for the paper mill in Bucksport, the lakes have outlived that paper mill and is now a vital resource for our communities and region.

The lakes are home to numerous fish species, loons, eagles, cormorants as well as beavers, fox, deer and other animals. For over one hundred years this wildlife has relied on the waters of Toddy Pond and Alamoosook Lake to live and raise their young. Would such wildlife adapt to a new environment without the pond? Perhaps, but this body of water has become as much a part of the local environment as Great Pond Mountain or Blue Hill. Allowing it to disappear would be a truly cataclysmic change in the local environment and economy.

The boat launch on Toddy, located on Route 1 in Orland is one of the busiest in Hancock County. Last year our Courtesy Boat Inspection program inspected over 1000 boats and we know that's only a percentage of all boats launched and recovered at the Toddy and Alamoosook boat landing. Boaters come to the two lakes, not only from the adjacent towns, but from all over Maine. Vacationers come from states beyond Maine and New England. Numerous fishing derbies are held on Toddy, both summer and winter providing much appreciated wholesome and family friendly recreational opportunities. Toddy Pond and Alamoosook are a much beloved 4 season recreational resource for the Hancock County region and indeed the entire state of Maine.

Toddy Pond and Alamoosook serve as a powerful economic engine for the region as well. Property tax support by the lakefront property owners significantly impacts the tax revenues for all four towns adjacent to the lakes. The economic impact on local businesses is immense. The TPA Outreach Committee has, using some of the same methods as the University of Maine did when they looked at the impact of Maine lakes on the local economy, estimate that the net economic benefit to the towns, and the state, is on the order of tens of millions of dollars annually. The loss of such a potent economic engine would be devastating to the towns of Blue Hill, Orland, Penobscot and Surry. Additionally, the waters of both Alamoosook Lake and Toddy Pond are vital resources for our local Fire Departments. Without these waters, safety in all four towns would be impacted.

Finally, this is a grassroots effort, by the people and towns most affected by the status of the dams on Toddy Pond and Alamoosook Lake to find local solutions to a problem which is not unique to these ponds/lakes and dams. All across Maine there are aging dams that, having outlived their original purpose, continue to bring significant benefit to the people living on the waters they impound, 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. This can-do attitude and effort reflects all of what's best about this state and its people, and I encourage the legislature to support this bill.

Respectfully,
James Helmer