

William Meserve
Falmouth
LD 430

Comments on L.D. 430

My name is William Meserve, and I live in Falmouth. I am writing to oppose the adoption of L.D. 430, which would impose a moratorium until 2027 on the removal of any dam that provides hydropower.

One of the many features that makes Maine so attractive to tourists, fishermen, hikers and anyone who enjoys the outdoors is the wild, unspoiled and rugged beauty of much of the State. There is no place like it east of the Mississippi River and few beyond it. Key to this attractiveness are the unspoiled lakes, ponds, rivers and streams located throughout the State. Regrettably, some of these rivers have multiple dams that restrict the uninterrupted flow of water and make it impossible for many anadromous fish to move freely up and down stream, thereby reducing these populations enormously and negatively impacting the attractiveness and ecological balance of these rivers. The larger dams also create impoundment ponds or lakes that warm the water to such a degree that the survival of certain fish, such as Atlantic salmon, can be severely jeopardized. Moreover, many of the dams reduce the ability of a stream to flush out decades of pollution, thereby negatively affecting water quality and the habitat for many aquatic creatures as well as limiting their potential for recreational opportunities. Not only are dams, even those with fish ladders, an impediment to the return of spawning fish, but those few that do make it upstream to lay their eggs see many of the resulting smolts chewed up in turbines when they eventually head back to the sea.

There are about 230 dams in Maine that generate hydropower, but most generate less than 10MW – a very small fraction of the State's total electric energy requirements. Where recommended, they could be removed with minimal impact on our supply of electricity. While the larger dams generally provide more power, a few of those also represent significant barriers for access to large watersheds by spawning fish. Any of those dams that might be proposed for removal should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, but where an individual dam's usefulness is outweighed by other considerations, there should be no artificial delays – like those imposed by L.D. 430 -- in taking appropriate remedial action. Although I favor transitioning to renewable energy, the adverse impact of hydropower on certain ecological systems is much greater than most solar or wind projects that could replace it.

We have seen the beneficial impact of dam removal already on both the Penobscot and the Kennebec Rivers. With the removal of the Great Works and Veazie dams on the Penobscot and the Edwards dam on the Kennebec, migrating fish began to return almost immediately. River herring, alewives, lampreys, smelt, Atlantic salmon and sturgeon populations have all multiplied, with some species, such as river herring on the Penobscot, having increased their numbers from a few thousand per year to several million. Not only has this helped the fish, but bald eagle and osprey numbers have also increased significantly, and the rivers, which are much more active in those stretches where dams were removed, are also more attractive to those who like to sit or walk along their banks or canoe or kayak in them. In addition, once the offspring from these migrating fish return to the sea – obviously in much greater numbers -- they provide essential food to increase significantly the number of larger ocean species that are essential for both our commercial and recreational ocean fisheries to thrive. In short, the benefits already recognized through limited dam removal have been amazing. To pause these benefits by imposing a moratorium on other removals, where appropriate, would be foolhardy.

Maine currently has as many as a thousand dams on its various rivers and

streams. Most were built in the 19th century when water was used to power mills of all descriptions – grist mills, sawmills textile mills, etc. They are no longer needed for these purposes. Many have had little or no maintenance since they were initially built or “retired” – even those that are currently used to generate electricity. As many as a hundred dams in Maine are deemed high or significant hazard dams. Some, therefore, are likely to pose a significant hazard in the event of a failure with a sudden release of the large volume of water held in the impoundment lake or pond behind the dam. That risk will be increased unnecessarily if an owner, who is reluctant to spend the capital to repair a dam that is no longer serving a useful purpose or providing a meaningful financial return, is also prohibited from removing it.

Thus, for economic, ecological, safety and aesthetic reasons I believe it would be very unwise to restrict the removal of dams anywhere in the State through a moratorium even if the restriction is limited only to those that are providing hydropower. I therefore urge you to reject L.D. 430.

Thank you for your consideration