



**Testimony of the Atlantic Salmon Federation and  
Maine Council of the Atlantic Salmon Federation on**

**LD 1848: An Act to Implement Recommendations for Improved Dam Safety**

**May 7, 2025**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is John Burrows, I live in Kennebunk, and I am the Vice President for U.S. Operations 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. Today, I am speaking on behalf of both ASF and the Maine Council of ASF, which is comprised of a dozen angling, conservation, education, and watershed organizations located across Maine, representing more than 2,500 members and volunteers.

We are providing testimony today in support of LD 1848: An Act to Implement Recommendations for Improved Dam Safety.

ASF and MCASF have worked on scores of fish passage and habitat restoration projects involving dams on rivers across the State of Maine. Sometimes we have collaborated with dam owners to remove decrepit dams, other times we have worked with them to construct various forms of fish passage. Often, these fish passage projects have often entailed a substantial amount of dam repair work. Due to the type of work that we do, we have seen a lot of dams and we can tell you that many of them are in poor condition and pose risks to public safety, in addition to having negative impacts on our river ecosystems, water quality, and our fish and wildlife resources. While we would like to see more small dams removed, the majority of the dams on the landscape will continue to be there and they should be properly maintained and inspected due to the risks that they pose.

The Maine Dam Safety Program at the Maine Office of Emergency Management (MEMA) currently oversees 519 dams, including 41 that are considered high-hazard potential (failure of the dam would result in loss of life) and 62 that are significant-hazard potential (failure would result in significant property damage). Most of these dams were built before 1975, and a number of dams in Maine date back a century or longer than that.

The Maine Dam Safety Program is tasked with overseeing these structures and making sure that dam owners do the repairs and maintenance work necessary to avoid dam failure. The program is significantly under-staffed and under-resourced, and we believe it is only a matter of time before a dam fails and causes significant damage to public and private property or takes the life of someone.

In 2021, MEMA described the Maine Dam Safety Program as being in a “dire situation” due to not having a dedicated funding stream and because they were unable to pay the competitive wages needed to hire – and retain – professional engineers and other technical staff.

LD 1848 will address this “dire situation” by implementing thirteen recommendations from the peer review of Maine’s Dam Safety Program that was completed by the Association of State Dam Safety Officials (ASDSO) a couple of years ago, thereby significantly strengthening and improving the program.

LD 1848 will require the hiring of one or more dam safety inspectors and that their salary package is competitive and aligns with that of other professional engineers in the state. It also requires MEMA to quantify the funding level needed to administer and enforce an effective dam safety program and report back to the Committee in January 2026.

LD 1848 will improve coordination between MEMA and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, which also has regulatory oversight of dams through the Natural Resources Protection Act. The bill will also give MEMA greater clarity over its authority and will provide them with a number of tools that are needed to be able to successfully administer and enforce an improved dam safety program.

LD 1848 will also require greater inspections of all significant-hazard potential dams and all high-hazard potential dams, while also requiring greater evaluation of the potential risk to public safety and property downstream from a dam that may result from failure or operation of the dam. The bill also requires the identification of all dams under MEMA jurisdiction that are not currently in compliance with dam safety standards and take the actions necessary to ensure that those dams achieve compliance.

By implementing these and other changes that have been needed for decades, LD 1848 will be a huge step forward in improving the Maine Dam Safety Program and aligning it with national standards. We strongly urge the committee to vote ought to pass on LD 1848.

Sincerely,

John R.J. Burrows  
Vice President, U.S. Operations  
Atlantic Salmon Federation

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