

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Mary Schwanke, I am a resident of Vassalboro, and a member of the Webber Pond Association Water Quality Committee. I write in strong support of the bill, LD 2141, which would provide \$2 million from unclaimed bottle deposits annually to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

I am part of a community-led effort to develop a new Watershed-based Management Plan for our three interconnected ponds, Webber, Threemile and Threecornered Pond.



Webber and Threemile Ponds are two of the 22 lakes on DEP's Impaired Lakes Priority List, with high levels of phosphorus from watershed runoff and internal loading from sediment release resulting in severe algae and cyanobacteria blooms, the latter of which can release toxins that threaten the health and safety of people, pets and wildlife. Threecornered Pond is on the Threatened Lakes Priority List, classified as sensitive to additional phosphorus inputs due to threats in the watershed and susceptibility to internal phosphorus release from the sediment.

Community volunteers from our pond associations, working with the Kennebec County Soil and Water Conservation District, have applied for grants from DEP's Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Nonpoint Source Water Pollution programs in 2024 and 2025. The funding has paid for chemical and biological (plankton) analyses of water samples, sediment sampling and analyses, and watershed surveys for the three ponds to identify sites of nonpoint source pollution. Our environmental consultants are in the process of developing phosphorus modeling and prioritization of remediation options for the new 10-year management plan. Once completed and approved this plan will allow us to seek additional state and federal funding to restore water quality and protect the ponds from hazardous algal/cyanobacterial blooms. However, the funds currently available for remediation efforts are quite limited, given the number of impaired Maine lakes in need of water quality restoration, especially if alum (aluminum sulfate) treatments are prescribed to reduce phosphorus levels. These treatments are extremely expensive, with estimated costs of up to \$1,250 per acre. This would put our needs at approximately \$1.5 million each for Webber and Threemile Ponds, well beyond the normal fund-raising capacity for small rural towns.

With increasing waterfront development, higher average summer temperatures and shorter winters, the threats to water quality in Maine's lakes and ponds are becoming widespread. LD 2141 would provide an incredible source of funding for the restoration and protection of these valuable Maine resources.

Thank you for reading my testimony. I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on this bill.

Mary Schwanke  
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