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LD 2141

Lakes belong to—and benefit—all the people of Maine. They are a shared public resource and a cornerstone of our state's identity and economy, contributing billions of dollars in total net economic value each year. Yet many communities, particularly those with fewer resources, are unable to raise the funds needed to protect lakes that belong to everyone.

It is always less expensive and more effective to keep lakes healthy than to remediate water bodies that are already in decline. Investing now to increase lake resiliency—through projects that reduce erosion, stormwater runoff, and other sources of pollution—is a prudent and forward-looking investment in Maine's future. While community groups and lake associations raise millions of dollars in private funds to protect public resources, this level of fundraising is not sustainable in the face of growing and accelerating threats to lake health. Many communities have already completed watershed surveys to identify pollution sources, but they lack the funding needed to implement the remediation projects those surveys recommend.

LD 2141 offers a smart, collaborative solution. By providing matching grants, the bill would leverage private fundraising, encourage partnership between the state and local organizations, and significantly expand the impact of every dollar invested. Bottle deposits are public funds, and when unredeemed, they should be directed toward a clean, healthy environment that benefits all people. This Act would provide valuable resources to the Department of Environmental Protection's Lake Water Quality Protection and Restoration Fund—an essential and timely investment.

The Maine DEP works diligently to protect lakes and support local lake groups, but it is underfunded and understaffed. This funding could support one or more dedicated positions to strengthen lake protection efforts, including improving the severely limited capacity to enforce shoreland zoning regulations that are critical to protecting water quality. More staff and more funding are clearly needed.

I strongly support LD 2141 and respectfully urge the Committee to approve and advance this important legislation.