Testimony of John Lichter in Support of LD 2187 subject to an amendment to reclassify the Water Quality designation from Class C to Class B on the reach of Lower Androscoggin River from Worumbo Dam in Lisbon Falls upstream to Gulf Island Dam in Auburn.

February 25, 2026

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

My name is Dr. John Lichter. I moved to Maine in 2000 to accept a faculty position in Biology and Environmental Studies at Bowdoin College. Currently, I am Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies, Emeritus. I am an ecosystem ecologist whose 30-year research career focused on forest biogeochemistry, plant succession, and lastly, the ecological recovery of the river-estuary complex of Merrymeeting Bay and its tributary rivers including the Androscoggin. I have published peer-reviewed papers about the ecological history of Maine's mid-coast rivers and their historical importance in supporting the nearshore marine food web in the form of juvenile diadromous fish emanating in mass out of the rivers each year. This last portion of my research was in collaboration with Ted Ames of Stonington, a retired commercial fisherman and MacArthur Award recipient.

My teaching at Bowdoin College included a large introductory class in Environmental Studies in which many non-science majors were enrolled. My most important goal for this class was to help students understand how and why science works before these young people graduate and go out into the world. Science works because our models and hypotheses are put to the test against observation, measurement, and experiment. That is, empirical observation is the final arbiter of what is true in science; models are not. Even Einstein waited anxiously for predictions of his Theory of General Relativity to be confirmed with real-world observations to know that he was on the right track. At best models are approximations of reality. At worst, they are more wrong than right, which is why observation is required for confirmation and real understanding.

It is clear from numerous measurements conducted over many years that the river meets the standards for a B classification in the section between Lisbon Falls and Gulf Island Pond. As I understand it, the law states that when "the actual (i.e., observable) water quality exceeds the minimum standards of the next highest classification, that higher water quality must be maintained and protected." We should make sure we do not put model projections above the indisputable observations that the river has achieved the standards of the B classification. The recovery of the Androscoggin over the last six decades has been truly remarkable. It is a profound success story that deserves to be protected well into the future.

Perhaps, the best single thing we can do for people in the future is to leave them with functioning ecosystems to better equip them to face environmental and/or societal

challenges yet to come. Ensuring that improved water quality is preserved in this Androscoggin reach is one easy step toward helping our present and future. Maine's rivers are not simply about the river ecosystems, but the coastal marine ecosystems as well. They are the reason the groundfish fisheries were so bountiful in centuries past. People in the future will almost certainly appreciate these marine resources and may very well need them to survive and thrive.

Please vote to pass LD 2187 with the Androscoggin upgrade amendment.

John Lichter
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Bowdoin College