



“Engaging the Community to Protect the Cobbosseecontee Watershed from Aquatic Invasive Species.”

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Dear Chair Tepler, Chair Doudera, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

My name is Jennifer Peasall, Director of Conservation for the Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed (dba. Watershed Friends). ***Watershed Friends supports LD 2141: "An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program"***.

Watershed Friends works to protect the 28 lakes, ponds, and streams of the Cobbosseecontee Watershed in Central Maine. The Friends' Conservation Programs help prevent, detect, and manage Aquatic Invasive Species to ensure safe and healthy waterways for wildlife and all communities, both inside and out of our watershed.

According to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, nearly \$17 million in beverage container deposits go unclaimed every year in Maine. Runoff from nonpoint source pollutants greatly impacts water quality, harming the health of our native plant and animal populations, as well as humans who rely on these healthy waterways. This, combined with the negative impacts from Aquatic Invasive Species, can cause substantial harm to the waterbodies within our watershed and across the state. Without increased funding for conservation measures, development pressures will cause further degradation of lake water quality. LD 2141 responds to this need with ongoing funding that can help ensure that clean lakes are passed on to future generations. In addition, this funding will help increase education and enforcement efforts across the state, which will, in turn, help educate all stakeholders on the importance of caring for these valuable natural resources.

Now is the time to take care of our lakes, ponds, and streams. In 2024, a study published by the University of Maine evaluated the economic value of Maine lakes to be **\$14 billion** annually. However, the risks posed by degraded water quality also grow each year. The state is seeing an increase in Aquatic Invasive Species, Harmful Algal Blooms, and other impacts on our lakes, ponds, and streams. ***An increase in funding is critically needed to protect the beautiful, clean waterways we enjoy today and for the future.***

The Watershed Friends urges you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2141.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Peasall

Watershed Friends
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