

COBBOSSEE WATERSHED DISTRICT

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Maine's first regional lake management district



Zooplankton

Testimony in Support of LD 164: An Act to Fund the Lake Restoration and Protection Fund

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and Members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Wendy Dennis. I am a limnologist with the Cobbossee Watershed District and am here to testify, on behalf of the District, in support of LD 164.

In 1981 the Maine Legislature approved LD 627 AN ACT TO CREATE A LAKE RESTORATION AND PROTECTION FINANCIAL AID PROGRAM which established the nonlapsing **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund** for DEP to use for projects to improve or maintain the quality of lake waters in the State. This is the fund we are discussing here today, 42 years later.

The **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund** has been used to restore and protect Maine lakes, when funds were actually appropriated. I want to share my first-hand experience with this. In 1986 the Cobbossee Watershed District received money from this fund to implement one of the most successful lake restoration projects in the state of Maine. It was an alum treatment of Cochnewagon Lake in Monmouth, Kennebec County; I was the project manager.

The Cobbossee Watershed District, which I will also refer to as CWD, is a special purpose district authorized by the Maine Legislature in 1971 to protect, improve and conserve the 28 lakes, ponds, and major waterways within the geographic area known as the "Cobbossee Watershed", which drains into the Kennebec River via Cobbossee Stream. CWD is a regional lake management district funded in part by the eight municipalities that recognized the value of their water resources and ratified the enabling legislation and its inherent fiscal commitment.

In 1980, Cochnewagon Lake in the Cobbossee Watershed took a surprising turn for the worse when water clarity plummeted from 25 feet in July to less than 3 feet in August. The lake was pea green with a thick bloom of nuisance algae known as cyanobacteria. This problem reoccurred the following year. As you can imagine, lake property owners and town officials were up in arms. Owners of the large dairy farm adjacent to the lake had already installed Best Management Practices to reduce phosphorus runoff. By 1983 CWD and Maine DEP determined that an alum treatment was the best course of action to restore lake water quality.

Alum treatments are expensive. Fortunately, within the founding legislation, \$100,000 had been appropriated for FY82/83 for the **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund**. \$25,000 of that fund went to CWD for an alum treatment of Cochnewagon Lake in 1986. The treatment cost \$150,000. Today it would cost half a million dollars, and it is a small lake.

The fund was thoughtfully administered by DEP. The project had to meet key eligibility criteria. Perhaps the \$25,000, at 17% of the total cost, doesn't sound like much, but it was critical. Federal funds from US EPA would only cover 50%. Where was the other half going to come from? The lake is located in only one town with a modest budget and back then there were less than 90 shorefront property owners.

It was definitely worth spending the money on the Cochnewagon Lake restoration project. Water quality improvements were immediate. Algae blooms were eliminated and the lake no longer violated its State of

Maine water quality classification. Annabessacook Lake, an impaired lake directly downstream, benefited by receiving cleaner water from Cochnewagon Lake. Economic development increased as the Town of Monmouth developed better public recreational facilities lakeside which attracted more people to the lake, centrally located in town.

However, a lake alum treatment is not effective forever. Algae blooms returned in Cochnewagon Lake after 20 years. We had predicted this when we designed the project. What we had not anticipated is that federal and state dollars for such lake restoration projects would be eliminated before we needed a follow-up treatment. This lack of funding caused a thirteen-year delay in implementing a second treatment.

We conducted the second Cochnewagon Lake alum treatment in 2019. By that time the project cost was almost \$400,000. Fortunately, federal funding had recently become available for alum treatments, but it only provided 40% of our project cost. Unfortunately, there was no money in the **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund** to help.

The magnitude of pollution control work that CWD has accomplished in the last 50 years has only been possible with significant additional funding to augment the local municipal support. State assistance has been essential for some of our top projects; for example, in the form of very extensive DEP staff and lab services for the Annabessacook Lake alum treatment in 1978 (the first in Maine), and, in the form of money from the state **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund** in 1986 for the Cochnewagon Lake alum treatment. The state's role is important.

I have focused on alum treatments so I could relate a real and successful example of the **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund's** utility. There are other worthy lake restoration and protection actions to consider. I will close with one more example of how the fund was used in the rather distant past. In 1988/89 a \$250,000 appropriation was put to extremely good use in terms of widespread lake protection. It funded staffing at DEP and regional planning agencies to provide technical assistance to municipalities to develop plans and ordinances that very specifically outlined measures to guide development such that lakes were protected. That type of training and technical assistance needs to be re-instituted.

The statement of fact for the original 1981 legislation that created this fund noted that Maine... "must continue its positive stand of lake and pond water quality protection and restoration which has now been recognized on a worldwide basis. Maine has been a leader in New England and now is recognized as a national leader in the United States." That was true then. This sentiment is still relevant today. CWD supports funding the **Lake Restoration and Protection Fund** for the benefit of Maine's lake resources, as well as Maine people, Maine's economy, and Maine's reputation.

Thank you.



Wendy Dennis, Limnologist
Cobboossee Watershed District
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