



Ensuring Our Future

Testimony In Support of LD 164: An Act To Fund The Maine Lake Restoration and Protection Fund

Submitted by 7 Lakes Alliance, Belgrade Lakes to the
Environment and Natural Resources Committee

January 30, 2023

Dear members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

With this letter, 7 Lakes Alliance, a non-profit organization whose mission is to conserve the waters and lands of the Belgrade Lakes region, urges the Environment and Natural Resources Committee to **unanimously support LD 164: An Act to Fund the Maine Lakes Restoration and Protection Fund**. 7 Lakes works to protect and restore lakes through water quality monitoring and analysis in collaboration with Colby College, invasive aquatic plant remediation and prevention, public education and erosion control partnerships with landowners through the Youth Conservation Corps, LakeSmart, and Clean Water Act Section 319 program. We work collaboratively with many public and private partners, including individuals, Belgrade Lakes Association (Long Pond and Great Pond), Friends of Messalonskee, East Pond Association, McGrath Pond-Salmon Lake Association, North Pond Association and numerous municipalities, landowners and businesses to protect the waters of a 180-square mile watershed in Central Maine.

7 Lakes urges the committee to **vote unanimously ought to pass on LD164: An Act to Fund the Maine Lakes Restoration and Protection Fund**. This investment is essential to ensure that our lakes continue to support Maine's the outdoor economy, municipal tax base, livelihoods and way of life for the people of Maine.

The proposed funding of \$9 million per year over two years is a wise investment, especially given a recent study's conservative estimate that the net economic value of Great Ponds in Maine (in 2021 dollars) was over \$12 billion (includes direct and indirect expenditures for recreation, water consumption, summer camps, and lakefront properties).¹ The importance of maintaining water clarity has long been established as a key driver of real estate values and tax base.²

However, Maine's lakes face growing pressures from increased use, new and increased threats from invasive species, increased unsustainable development on shorelines and tributaries, and increasingly intense weather patterns that worsen erosion that fuels harmful algal blooms. In just the past 5 years, 7 Lakes has worked with lake associations, state and USEPA to implement a costly (over \$1.5 million) alum treatment on

¹A. Daignault and M. Genoter. 2022. Valuing the Economic Benefits of Maine's Great Ponds in the 21st Century.

² J. Shuetz, K. Boyle and R. Bouchard. 2001. The Effects of Water Clarity on Economic Values and Economic Impacts of Recreational Uses of Maine's Great Ponds. Maine Ag and Forest Experiment Station, Misc. Report 421.

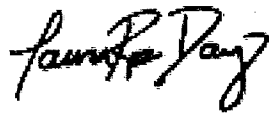
East Pond to remediate a decades-long algal blooms. North Pond now also now faces severe algal blooms that have interfered with lake uses. Herbicide treatments have been required to remediate intractable invasive plant infestations, and in 2021 a citizen found a new invasive plant requiring remediation. Programs to remediate and prevent invasive plants, mitigate erosion and educate visitor and citizens to prevent further infestations are increasingly expensive.

If Maine is to have a chance to protect its lakes from these challenges, we must invest in them now. The funding proposed in LD 164 will help leverage millions of additional private and public dollars to protect and restore the lakes, rivers and other waters that support the economy, livelihoods and way of living for people throughout the state of Maine. It will help support and leverage additional funds for **prevention of erosion, pollution and invasive organisms – the most inexpensive way** to protect our lakes. The funds will help make it possible provide the matching funds required to attract both private and public funding sources, including federal sources. For instance, 7 Lakes Alliance has successfully leveraged millions of dollars in private and public erosion control work pursuant to Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. The funds will support demonstrated effective and valuable collaboration among the state, municipalities, tribes, citizen-based nonprofit organizations, and many private partners. The payback for Maine's lakes and economy will be significant.

Maine's lakes are extremely valuable but also increasingly vulnerable. he key question is not only whether Maine can afford to invest in its valuable lakes but rather can Maine afford not to make these investments to protect the economy, livelihoods and way of life way supported by Maine lakes?

7 Lakes urges the committee to vote **unanimously ought to pass LD164** to ensure the health and benefits that our lakes provide for the people of Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. I can be reached at (207) 495-6039 if I can answer questions or provide additional information.

Respectfully submitted,



Laura Rose Day
President & CEO
7 Lakes Alliance