

Town of Brunswick, Maine

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Testimony of:

Ashley Charleson, Environmental Planner – Town of Brunswick

Before the:

Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business

In Support of:

LD 941 – “An Act Facilitating the Efforts of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority and the Town of Brunswick to Design and Carry Out Improvements to the Storm Water System and Other Infrastructure at the Former Brunswick Naval Air Station”

Cross Building, Room 202
Augusta, ME 04333

April 4, 2023

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Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and distinguished members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business. My Name is Ashley Charleson. I am the Environmental Planner for the Town of Brunswick, and I am submitting this testimony today in support of LD 941, An Act Facilitating the Efforts of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority and the Town of Brunswick to Design and Carry Out Improvements to the Storm Water System and Other Infrastructure at the Former Brunswick Naval Air Station.

LD941 presents as an unusual opportunity to bring to bear the collective expertise of the town of Brunswick, MRRA, and Maine government in support of a holistic solution to the water problems that are part of the Navy's legacy in Brunswick. Even as a number of the problems are longstanding, there's not yet been a fully coordinated effort to negotiate and work with the Navy on an overall plan for the waters and toxins of the Landing. This bill promises to promote that chance. Citing and explaining the many problems that need addressing would exceed the testimony's limits, but here, as example, are a few crucial ones:

With over 61 miles of coastline, an important part of Brunswick's identity is built around its connection to our coastal resources. Of particular value is Brunswick's connection to shellfish harvesting, as the Town has been a top producer of hard-and soft-shell clam exports since the late 90's; in 2021 alone, the total economic contribution of Brunswick's shellfish industry was \$8.7 million, which directly supported 212 local jobs. This legacy of success our Town has built and maintained is due to the collective efforts of the municipality, its shell fishermen, and its citizens having maintained a decade's long approach concerning the protection of these highly valued resources, much of which centers around the fishery's dependence on clean water. As such, close oversight of watershed activities and their subsequent impact on water quality is of great concern.

Beyond reasons pertaining to shellfish management, the Town is actively engaged in remediation efforts surrounding the Mare Brook Watershed, which includes the area of land that drains into Mare Brook and its main tributary, Merriconeag Stream (see Figure 1). This is due to the fact that this watershed is central to our town, its entire 3,700-acre reach within our jurisdiction, its health connected to that of own. The Landing is a well-known contributor to Merriconeag Stream, as roughly 80% of its stormwater flows into the watershed after passing through its Pond Stormwater System (Pond A, Pond B, and Picnic Pond – see Figure 2). There is certainly debate surrounding the strength and reliability of the piping infrastructure that runs beneath the landing and feeds this pond system, with question as to how severe the leaching of PFAS into our Town's groundwater system has become. In addition to the threat of polluted drinking water, there is growing contention surrounding the question as to how to proceed with remediation efforts of known polluted sediments in Picnic Pond. Short term efforts have focused on the continued removal of sediments to prevent further contamination via overtopping. While temporarily effective, these efforts ultimately offer no long-term solutions and do little to ease the

minds of those who fear an environmental health crisis in the event of pond system failure. Based on a recent analysis of our watershed's stormwater infrastructure, this danger is very real, as study results suggested that Picnic Pond Dam is at severe risk of overtopping for storm events of similar order magnitude as the 2-year storm or greater.

Collectively, the risk to water quality in the lower Mare Creek watershed, below the confluence with Merriconeag Stream is entirely due to inputs of PFAS, from direct spills, as in 2019 from Hangar 4, and chronic inputs from PFAS-contaminated groundwater entering the faulty stormwater system inherited from the Navy. While stakeholders argue as to how best to proceed, quantify, and remediate these concurrent threats to both environmental and public health, a more appropriate question would be *'how bad must this problem become before we receive the help and guidance we are so desperately asking for?'*

Today, we find ourselves battling a rapidly changing climate and global biodiversity crisis coupled with unprecedented development pressures. These threats, as I've described, are most pronounced when it comes to our town's water resources from headwater wetlands to their outlets along coastal bays and estuaries. As an EP, it is my responsibility to prioritize the environment for the health and wellbeing of our Town's residents, to analyze and reduce the environmental impact of any planning-related project or development, and to ensure that no problem should arise in the interplay of the natural and built environment. Concurrently, it is my duty to ensure that actions we pursue emphasize sustainability while maintaining a balance between the social, environmental, and economic wellbeing of the Town of Brunswick. Without support and funding to aid our remediation efforts, Brunswick will be unable to fulfill its responsibilities to its residents, including the shell fishermen that harvest its mudflats, the business owners that invest in and perpetuate our local economy, and all of those who enjoy the beauty of our local ecosystems for recreation and wellness alike.

I happily welcome any questions and can be reached via phone (207-522-0580) or email (acharleson@brunswickme.org).

Sincerely,

Ashley Charleson
Brunswick Environmental Planner

Figure 1. Wright-Pierce Topographic Map of BNAS Stormwater Collection System

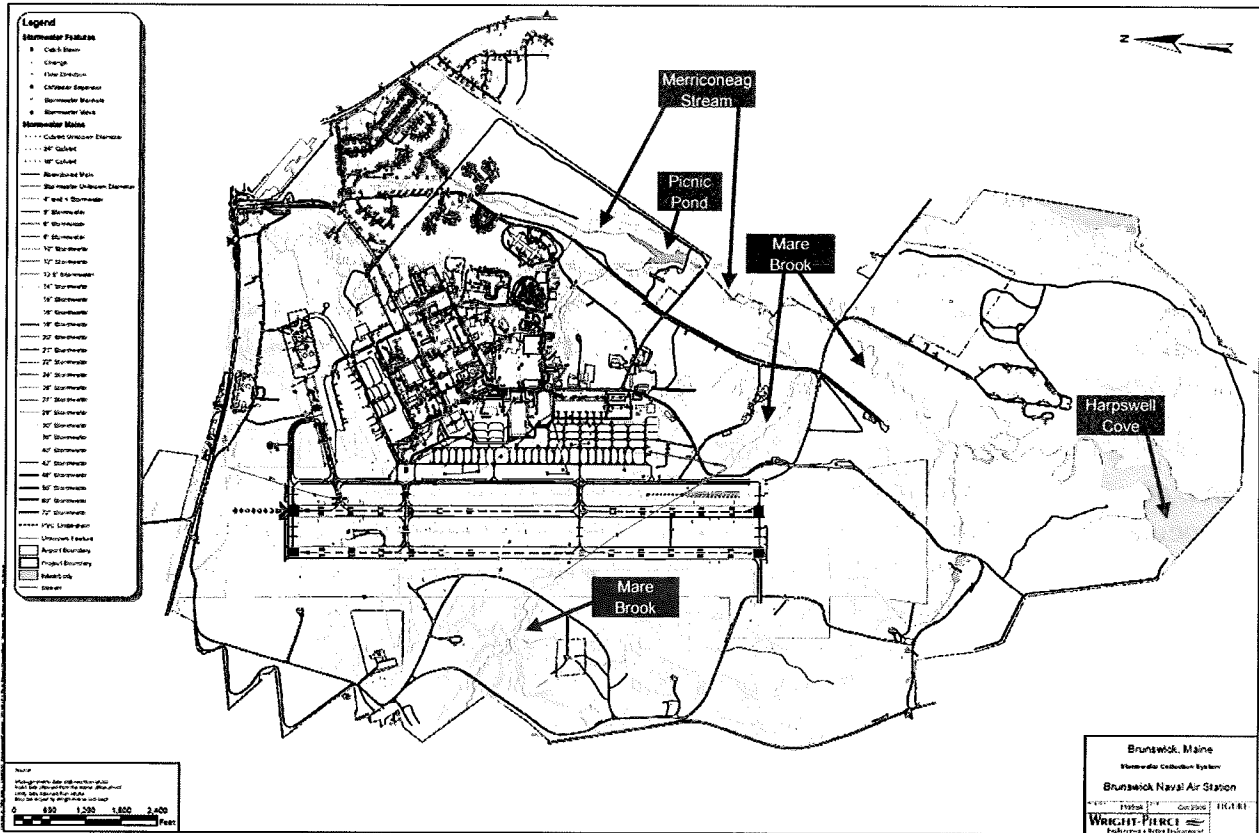


Figure 2. Wright-Pierce Map of BNAS Stormwater Collection System with Pond System Labels

