

Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

My name is Eric Ward. I'm a life-long resident of Greenville, former Piscataquis County Commissioner, Registered Master Maine guide and avid angler. I am here today, to testify in support of LD 1049.

Over the years I've served on several IF&W Fisheries Committees, including the Steering Committee for the current IF&W Fisheries and Hatcheries Strategic Management Plan. I am also a member of the Moosehead Lake Fishery Focus Group.

I call your attention to Volume 1, page 4 and paragraph 1 of the current IF&W Fisheries and Hatcheries Strategic Management Plan. In reference to the sentence, "Prevention is the first line of defense." I believe keeping the current fish barricades in place will do exactly this.

It's no secret that bass and white perch were illegally introduced into Moosehead Lake from waters located 25-30 miles away. This would be approximately the same distance any new invasives would have if the barriers for passage are allowed to be removed. It would not be wise to create another source for "bucket biologists" to move fish around in this area.

By removing these barriers, the spread of invasive fish, such as Northern Pike, would be ever closer to the Moosehead Lake watershed and the many native fish species in it. These native fish are not only important for the enjoyment of folks but have a significant economic benefit to the area. People travel to this region to fish these native species that are found only here.

The amount of shad and alewife habitat upstream of these dams is very small and insignificant compared to the available habitat in the drainage.

Protection of our coldwater fisheries should be the only priority in northwestern Maine. We need the legislature to step in and protect our wild and native fisheries. Join me in advocating for our native fish. I urge you to support LD1049.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

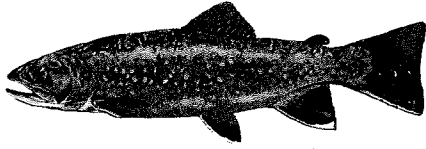


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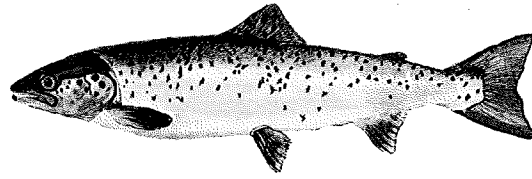
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BROOK TROUT



LANDLOCKED ATLANTIC SALMON

Maine's native trout and salmon evolved in the absence of competing warmwater fish and continue to be threatened by newly introduced nonnative fish, as well as some native species. When new, unauthorized species are introduced, we are challenged to consider available resources, costs, and potential benefits of any corresponding management action. With each invasion, the Division assesses the risks to the affected ecosystem, the conservation values of the native inhabitants, the values to the local community, and logistical considerations including the Division's capacity and the cost to monitor, suppress and/or eradicate the threat. Prevention is always the first line of defense, and Maine has made significant investments in regulatory, outreach, and surveillance strategies; but unlike most states, we also manage an active reclamation program to, when feasible, eradicate invasive species.

It is illegal to import live baitfish into Maine, dump baitfish in any water, or use live baitfish in the majority of North Zone waters. Deliberate illegal fish stocking carries a stiff penalty, and "Trouble by the Bucketful" signs have been posted around the state at angler access points. Unfortunately, introductions still occur, and early detection of new occurrences provides the best opportunity for early response and potential eradication. To collect information on new occurrences, we have integrated surveillance into a variety of field sampling, survey, and monitoring efforts. These efforts include winter retail baitfish inspections; routine population status monitoring; development, with the University of Maine, of new environmental DNA detection methods; and stream electrofishing. The Division's efforts to reduce new species invasions include the issuance of licenses and permits, adoption of restrictive fishing regulations, and development of public outreach and education materials. The state also regulates the use, transport, and possession of live fish through a network of existing laws, rules, and policies. Since unauthorized introductions represent one of the greatest threats facing the conservation of Maine's native coldwater fisheries, additional dedicated capacity to coordinate and manage related Division operations would be beneficial.

Anglers' growing affinity for nonnative fisheries, and their desire for the Department to actively manage and enhance these new opportunities, can conflict with the Division's responsibility to conserve what is native and unique to Maine. These new social pressures, which will undoubtedly increase with time, have complicated efforts to conserve Maine's native coldwater fisheries.

This management challenge has resulted in a more complex statewide management system, which is somewhat reflected in the demarcation of North and South Fisheries Regulation Zones. For example, smallmouth and largemouth bass are well established in the densely populated South Zone, and represent the second and third most popular sport fish in Maine (brook trout are #1), with the Division actively managing the species as a recreational fishery in this region of the state.