



Testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

LD 1342, An Act to Increase Funding for the Prevention and Control of Invasive Aquatic Species

and

LD 1534, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Interagency Task Force on Invasive Aquatic Plants and Nuisance Species

*Submitted to the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee
May 1, 2023*

Good afternoon, Chair LaFountain, Chair Landry, and Distinguished Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of LDs 1342 and 1534. My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 6,000 supporters and volunteers as well as over 80 Lake Associations. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality and habitat, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for all Maine people.

Invasive aquatic plants pose a serious risk to Maine's inland waters. They outcompete native plants, with potentially devastating effects on aquatic ecosystems, water quality, native wildlife and fisheries, recreational opportunities, and property values.

Maine has so far not seen the more devastating invasive species outbreaks plaguing our neighboring states to the west and south. Is that just luck? Absolutely not. Maine camp owners, anglers, swimmers, and boaters have benefited from more than two decades of forward-thinking policy and much hard work by Maine's lake organizations, lake associations, and many thousands of volunteers and paid staff, as well as by both the

Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Department of Environmental Protection.

But the risks continue to grow. In September of 2022, Zebra Mussels were found just 40 miles across the border in Quebec. It is more important than ever that we not just maintain our invasive species risk reduction programs, but that we make them stronger. And that takes funding. Both LD 1342 and LD 1534 raise the Lake and River Protection Fee in order to pay for increased costs and expansion of invasive species risk reduction work.

Even with the passage of LD 235 in the 129th legislative session, which increased the fee for the Lake and River Protection Sticker, costs for invasive species risk reduction continue to outpace available funds.

Costs for conducting boat inspections and managing invasive plant controls continue to go up.

Most notably, a competitive job market, where teenagers and young adults can make upwards of \$20/hour or more at fast food chains or big box stores, has made hiring for invasives work more difficult, especially as the very real cost of gas, groceries, and vehicles continue to rise. Additional funding is needed to pay staff and cover their expenses as they do critical invasive control and prevention work.

The number of boat inspection locations continues to grow, as Maine's tourism economy flourishes around clean lakes and surrounding communities, especially after COVID made boating an even more popular recreational past time. Inspections literally save Maine lakes (and camp owners, boaters, and lake users) by discovering invasive species on boats moving from infested waters (largely from out of state). Additional funding is needed to support more inspection locations as well as longer hours during busier launch times.

The length of Maine's boating season is growing. While the typical "summer" season has always been Memorial Day to Labor Day, more public boat launches are seeing high levels of activity outside of these dates, especially into and beyond September. Additional funding is needed to expand inspection schedules earlier and later into the boating season to match this trend.

The cost of not adequately funding invasive species prevention programs today will result in huge costs and lost resources in the future. The state of Florida spends approximately \$32 million each year controlling hydrilla¹. Eurasian milfoil has reduced property values as much as 16% in Vermont and 13% in Wisconsin.² When contrasted with

¹ Adams DC and DJ Lee. Estimating the Value of Invasive Aquatic Plant Control: A Bioeconomic Analysis of 13 Public Lakes in Florida. *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*. 2007.

² USFWS, The Cost of Invasive Species, <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/pythonpdf/costofinvasivesfactsheet.pdf>

the costs of managing future aquatic invaders, investing in preventative programs today, with a small fee increase, is a smart choice.

Maine's lake organizations, particularly Lake Stewards of Maine, Lakes Environmental Association, and 7 Lakes Alliance, have been leaders in the fight to keep invasive species out of Maine. They have done amazing work, built strong programs designed to utilize Maine's incredible volunteer network, and raised many hundreds of thousands of additional dollars outside of state funding to support invasive species work that benefits anyone who uses a Maine lake. However, this is not a sustainable model. Phasing in increases to the Lake and River Protection Fee now will help those organizations, as well as the DEP and DIFW, keep those programs strong. It will offer additional support to the many dozens of lake associations and civic volunteer groups engaged in this effort and will ensure that Maine's lakes are clean and free of invasives so they can continue to support our \$5 billion Lake Economy.

We support the idea of sustained, regular increases to the sticker fee as proposed in LD 1342. We do wonder if rather than a fixed amount, the regular increase should either be a set percent, or an amount tied to the rate of inflation.

For LD 1534, we fully support the directive to the Interagency Task Force on Invasive Aquatic Plants and Nuisance Species to review the 2006 Rapid Response Plan. We suggest that in addition to the specific topics listed in the bill, that the plan include an action plan specifically for a rapid response to the potential arrival of Zebra Mussels, given their proximity to our border and the need for immediate action to reduce the likelihood of spread and increase the likelihood of containment/eradication once they've arrived.

We assume that these two bills will be combined and urge you to vote Ought to Pass on the concepts within them both, assuming the intention of both bills are retained in the revised bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of both these important lake bills.