



Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

May 1, 2023

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

Dear Chair LaFountain, Chair Landry, and Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee:

My name is Francesca Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon's Policy Advocate. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to “conserve Maine’s wildlife and wildlife habitat” by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1342, *An Act to Increase Funding for the Prevention and Control of Invasive Aquatic Species*.

For the past 40 years, Maine Audubon has led a broad range of efforts focused on the health and well-being of Maine’s Common Loons. From documenting lead fishing tackle as a leading cause of death in adult loons, to providing educational programming to thousands of people in every county, loon conservation is central to Maine Audubon’s work. Preventing and controlling the spread of invasive aquatic plant species is elemental to conserving the Common Loon.

Clean, clear water is essential to loons. Their primary prey is small (6 – 8”) fish. As visual predators, loons need to be able to see fish in order to pursue and catch them. Invasive plants cloud Maine waters – keeping them contained and out of any new lakes in Maine is vital to the long-term health of Maine’s loon population. As of January 2020, more than 30 Maine lakes and rivers are infested with seven different invasive plant species. Once these species are introduced, they grow and spread rapidly, outcompeting native plants, and creating “blooms” that degrade habitat for fish and wildlife. Invasive aquatic plants like Eurasian watermilfoil are usually introduced into lakes and ponds when they “hitchhike” on boats and their associated equipment.

In 2001, the Maine Legislature created a mechanism to fund invasive aquatic prevention and control. This law required that all power boats (the primary vector for moving aquatic plants) purchase a sticker that would provide dedicated funding to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW). As of 2020, the sticker fee is \$15 for in-state registered and \$45 for out-of-state registered watercraft. Today, that amount is insufficient because the number of infestations and prevention and control project costs are increasing.

Nearly all revenue for invasive aquatic control and prevention work in Maine comes from the Lake and River Protection Fund. This fund is supported by the Lake and River Protection Sticker, described above. The revenue from the sticker is split 80:20 between DEP and DIFW, respectively. LD



1342 raises the cost of stickers across the board and establishes biennial fee increases to help ensure that the program has adequate funding long into the future.

DIFW uses its share of the revenue to offset the cost of enforcement of the sticker (i.e., requiring that all motorboats purchase a sticker annually) as well as other invasive species laws, including performing random searches of vehicles with trailers (it is illegal to transport or launch with any aquatic plant). The revenue allocated to DEP goes to DEP personnel, plant removal, and inspections. Inspection funding supports the Courtesy Boat Inspection grant program, a program whose costs have risen significantly since 2001.

The Courtesy Boat Inspection program is the best line of defense against invasive aquatic plants. Under this program, inspectors wait at boat launches to inspect watercraft to ensure no foreign plants or animals are accidentally introduced or removed from the water. Individual launches receive grant funding from DEP to support this work, though those funds are hugely insufficient; it costs approximately \$8,500 per year to staff an individual launch and DEP grants are rarely more than \$2,000.

As costs rise to support this strategy, including increases in minimum wage and a longer boating season (meaning a need for more staff hours), so does the cost of other strategies such as directly removing invasive species from Maine waters once they are established. Again, DEP issues grants to nonprofits, associations, or municipalities to remove invasives. The average grant is \$25,000, while successful programs cost upwards of \$200,000 annually. The Lake and River Protection Fund isn't keeping up.

We encourage the Committee to support this long-overdue increase in the cost of the sticker fee in order to support programs and strategies proven to prevent the spread of invasive aquatic species. Maine is fortunate to be one of only a handful of states where you can watch loons raise their young—let's keep it that way. Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesca Gundrum".

Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Policy Advocate