

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

Neither For Nor Against L.D. 1342

**An Act to Increase Funding for the Prevention and Control of
Invasive Aquatic Species**

SPONSORED BY: Representative RISEMAN of Harrison

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator CHIPMAN of Cumberland
Representative CROCKETT of Portland
Representative HEPLER of Woolwich
Representative MALON of Biddeford
Representative MONTELL of Gardiner
Representative SUPICA of Bangor

DATE OF HEARING: May 1, 2023

Good morning Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Jim Connolly, Resource Management Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, Neither For Nor Against L.D. 1342. This testimony represents joint testimony on behalf of the Department and the Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP).

This bill amends 4 existing statutes in Title 12 (**§10206, sub-§3, ¶C; §13056, sub-§8, ¶A; §13056, sub-§8, ¶B; §13058, sub-§3**) to increase the fees charged for the purchase of a Lake and River Protection Fund Sticker, commonly referred to as the “milfoil sticker”. The fee increase would apply to all resident and nonresident motorized watercraft, personal watercraft, and sea planes. The bill proposes a \$10 increase starting January 1, 2024 and then another \$2 increase beginning January 1, 2026 and each January 1st biennially thereafter.

Revenues generated from the sale of “milfoil stickers” are shared between the MDIFW and MDEP for invasive aquatic species prevention and control programs. Current statute stipulates that 80% of the revenues are directed to the MDEP and 20% to the MDIFW.

The MDIFW and MDEP convened a public stakeholder process (representing 19 organizations that convened 9 meetings) in 2022 to develop a clean, drain, dry public awareness campaign for Maine, as well as identify other meaningful actions to reduce aquatic invasive species (AIS) threats in Maine. In total 25 consensus-based action items were identified to further reduce introductions and spread of AIS. These actions include public education, enforcement and funding AIS program priorities for both agencies, particularly prevention and early detection program needs. There was a general consensus that current program funding was not sufficient to address all the current AIS needs, particularly considering the significant additional funding

provided by municipalities, private foundations, lake associations and other watershed management organizations to support management of statewide needs. Furthermore, the primary past focus has been invasive aquatic plants, which does not address management of invasive fish and wildlife threats. As a result, an important stakeholder action item being advanced by the MDEP and MDIFW, in cooperation with key stakeholders is the development of a comprehensive statewide budget based on prioritized invasive prevention and management program needs. This shared planning and budgeting effort is in the early stages of development and once completed would then be used to advocate for additional funding, including reexamination of the current allocation of milfoil sticker revenues between the MDIFW and MDEP. As proposed this statewide budget planning process is expected to be completed by January 1, 2024. This information could be used by this committee to support and justify proposed milfoil sticker fee increases or to explore other funding opportunities.

Preventing the introduction and spread of the entire suite of invasive aquatic organisms (invertebrates, fish, pathogens, as well as plants, etc.) that threaten the ecology of Maine waters remains an important management concern for both agencies, many nongovernmental organizations, and most citizens who enjoy recreating on Maine's waters.

There is considerable overlap in fundamental approaches used by MDEP and MDIFW in managing AIS prevention and awareness programs, which has fostered a very collaborative relationship within both agencies. Furthermore, there are differing complementary strengths that each agency brings when collaborating on AIS issues and this was never more apparent than during the development of the Clean, Drain, Dry public awareness campaign. For example, MDIFW's warden service provides all the enforcement of AIS laws and has just over 100 game wardens in the field to enforce the laws and assist with public AIS outreach. Also, MDIFW's Division of Information and Education has more capacity than MDEP and is more capable of reaching and educating more members of the public using many different social media platforms, as well as an extensive email delivery list of those who recreate on Maine's lands and waters. MDEP has greater capacity to manage AIS planning and grant programs and has cultivated a robust network of lake associations and other interested watershed groups to support implementation of key AIS prevention programs.

Maine is fortunate to have relatively few invasive threats compared to other states to the south, justifying continued investments to prevent new infestations of all invasive aquatic organisms. Both agencies anticipate that additional funds will likely be needed to manage statewide AIS program, which is why the agencies have begun a budget planning process to support advocacy for program funding, including bills like the one that is currently before you. There may be value in carrying over this bill until completion of the statewide AIS budget, planned for January of 2024.

If this committee would like to advance this bill at this time, I would request that only a \$10 fixed fee increase be considered and not the \$2 increase every other year in perpetuity as proposed. Administration of a fee increase every other year would be challenging for the Department to manage.

Francis Brautigam, Director of Fisheries will be available to answer any questions during the work session.