

TESTIMONY FOR LD 1473

I have lived in Auburn since 1979. When I moved here, I was told that farsighted people had passed laws and formed overseeing bodies to protect Lake Auburn “forever.” The naïve environmentalist in me assumed that “forever” truly meant “forever.” I barely understood climate change at that time, but now it is recognized everywhere as a force to be reckoned with, especially in water supplies.

I have learned more about eutrophication since 1979. Eutrophication occurs when phosphorus, an essential nutrient for life, accumulates in a water body to the point where algae, that depend on phosphorus for their own lives, multiply rapidly, and cause an algal bloom. “Bloom” is a good name for the phenomenon because it conjures up an image of an explosion. You only need to type “pictures of an algal bloom” into your search box to see vivid gross-out pictures of algal blooms in bodies of water of all sizes. Algal blooms kill fish and can kill people.

An algal bloom happened in Lake Auburn in 2012. I knew enough about lakes by that time to realize that once an algal bloom had happened, it was almost impossible for a body of water to become healthy again, because an algal bloom starts a feedback loop. Phosphorus that has previously congealed and sunk to the bottom rises again.

I remember being sick at heart in 2012. I don’t clearly remember if I actually saw the green scum, but the mental image from seeing green water or seeing a photo of it stuck in my memory. I don’t ever want to “see” green scum on Lake Auburn again. Fortunately, the Lake Auburn water district was able to put alum in the water, and precipitate some phosphorus to the lake bottom. But they can’t keep doing that forever.

LD 1473 will prevent the extensive development of the Lake Auburn drainage basin that could happen under current state law. Lake Auburn right now is teetering between health and eutrophication, which almost always means death for a lake. LD 1473 is part of a plan that will hopefully allow Lake Auburn to avoid algae, greenness, and toxicity for a long, long time.

Ben Lounsbury

505 West Auburn Road

Auburn, ME 04210