

May 8, 2023

Good Morning, Senator LaFountain, Representative Landry, and Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee:

My name is Elizabeth Neale Pollock and I support LD 958 to prohibit the sale and use of painted lead jigs for fishing.

I am the Coordinator of both the annual Loon Count on Cobbosseeconte Lake as well as the Coordinator of the Loon Restoration Project here on Cobbosseeconte. I am president of Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed board and head of Lake Health for the Cobbossee Lake Association. But I am here today as a proud citizen of the state of Maine.

Historically, Cobbosseeconte Lake has had one of the largest loon populations in the state of Maine. In the last few years, each annual count has alarmingly shown smaller numbers of both adult and chick loons.

Cobbosseeconte Lake is one of the most popular fishing lakes in the state. It is about 5,000 plus acres, easily accessible from both 95 and 295 and has a history of successful fishing tournaments over the years.

While large boat wakes have undoubtedly had some effect on nesting loon populations over the last few years, lead poisoning has long been one of the leading causes of death for adult loons in Maine. Loons ingest a striking amount of fishing tackle that is either lost or left behind. Some of this tackle contains hazardous and life threatening lead.

When the ultimate cause of death of loons can be determined, lead poisoning continues to be one of the leading causes of death. Once having consumed lead, loons experience a 2-4 week slow death, causing blindness, paralysis, seizures and "wing droop" during this painful and preventable death.

Death of these magnificent birds, which represent Maine as an iconic symbol is avoidable.

Unpainted jigs have been now outlawed since 2017. Both experts and current research indicate there is a remaining impact on loon life across our state due to this loophole in the law to continue the use of painted jigs.

It has been 10 years since the last bill to protect loons was passed. We must revisit this loophole in the existing law to further protect the health and safety of this beloved bird here in Maine.

I grew up hearing the call of loons on our lake. It was inspiring, jaw dropping and a sound never to forget. My children and grandchildren know and love this bird, its call, and it's graceful presence. Losing just one more elegant and exquisite loon to the fate of a painful death due to painted lead jigs is something I know you will consider most important for now, and for the future of both loons and their human admirers here in Maine.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Neale Pollock