

***Testimony of***

***Thomas D Mullin, Executive Director of the Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed***

***PO Box 206, East Winthrop, Maine 04343***

***[www.watershedfriends.com](http://www.watershedfriends.com)   [tom@watershedfriends.com](mailto:tom@watershedfriends.com)***

***Submitted on behalf of LD 2141 An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations***

***Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, January 31, 2024***

I am here today to express our support for LD 2141, a bill that will fund critical work to reduce the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in the state of Maine

This work benefits all who swim, work, live or play on Maine's lakes, ponds, and streams. It will impact not only the year-round residents, but the millions of seasonal residents and visitors who come to our state every year. The economic impact of not addressing this issue head on for our local economies potentially could be devastating.

We care about this issue because we know how devastating invasive infestations can be to a lake, its wildlife, and its surrounding community, with far-reaching impacts to habitat, economic values, and tourism. All ones needs to do is to look at other states and communities to see the impact it can have on local communities

But the needs for managing current infestations of invasive species, as well as reducing the risk of spread, far exceed the current funding available.

Last year the Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed in partnership with the towns, 5 Lake Association, Department of Environmental Protection and other local organizations, were on the front lines of conservation efforts to mitigate the impacts of AIS

In 2023 Friends of the Cobbossee Watershed with its staff and volunteers from neighboring Lake Associations conducted over 13500 Courtesy Boat Inspections at ten public boat launches, removed over 10000 gallons of AIS, conducted 2000 hours of plant

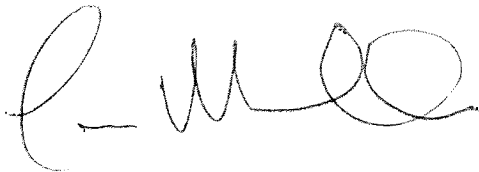
survey and removal in the Cobbossee Watershed. To keep the recreational as well as provide for healthy lake ecosystems, we contracted with New England Milfoil to mechanically harvest Variable Milfoil in heavily infested areas of Lake Annabessacook and Pemaquid Pond/Cobbosseecontee Stream at a cost of nearly \$70000. In 2023 we invested \$300000+ in our efforts to manage the challenges that aquatic invasive species in the Cobbossee Watershed. State funding for this effort covered only a portion of this work and the rest was made up by private support from donors and foundations.

While that sounds impressive, it is just the tip of the iceberg of what is needed to ensure our lakes, ponds and streams remain healthy and accessible for humans and wildlife. Early prevention and detection along with rapid response to new challenges is critical

Last season our resources were stretched to the limit when a significant Eurasian Water Milfoil occurrence was discovered on Lake Cobbosseecontee by our Plant Survey team. This detection of an aggressive and easily spread invasive plant required a significant shifting of our resources to ensure that this was managed as quickly as possible. The reality is our season of plant survey for invasives which normally wraps up in mid to late September extended this year with new plant growth of EWM being found as late as mid-November. This discovery last year has meant we have had to plan to increase our efforts to manage the challenges on Lake Cobbosseecontee in 2024 in order to prevent the spread of EWM to other waterbodies in the watershed and beyond. As one of Lake Association partners say, we are just one boat away. The vigilance and need for preventive work is critical

We urge you to support LD 2141 in order to further protect the future health of Maine's lakes and ponds in order to provide a sustainable ecosystem for the next generation. The investment now will have a significant return on investment for the year round and seasonal residents of our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'E. M. O.', written in a cursive style.