

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

January 31, 2024

RE: LD 2141, *An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State*

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 2141, *An Act to Enhance Protections for and Better Address Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State*.

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 – and both of those numbers are increasing every year. 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.

Considering the long-term financial commitment required to manage invasive aquatic species and the need to limit the spread of invasive aquatic species, we urge you to support LD 2141. This legislation will help address this issue through three important elements:

1. **Appropriate \$2,000,000 to the Invasive Aquatic Plant and Nuisance Species Fund to address the most serious aquatic plant infestations.** Managing existing infestations reduces the risk of spread, and benefits all who use Maine's lakes. Whether you boat, bird, swim, ski, fish, or just enjoy lake scenery, your lake experience will diminish significantly as invasives spread and degrade water quality and habitat for fish and wildlife.
2. **Require the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) to strengthen watercraft inspection protocols.** Recognizing that boats coming out of heavily infested waters pose a greater risk of invasive spread than those coming out of other waters, the bill asks the two departments to assess if current protocols are adequate for these waterbodies, and to develop guidelines for stronger protocols where needed.
3. **Require DEP and DIFW to review policies and procedures for surface use restrictions.** Boats passing through areas with invasive infestations are more likely to pick up plant fragments and transport those fragments to new lakes. Surface restrictions in areas of the worst infestations are a common-sense tool that can reduce that spread.

We encourage the Committee to support this bill as a measure to help prevent the spread of invasive aquatic species with the best available science and strategies and better address existing outbreaks. 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,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Policy Advocate