



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

January 27, 2025

**RE: LD 157, An Act to Amend Certain Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Laws**

Dear Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Roberts, and Members of the IFW Committee:

My name is Francesca “Ches” Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon’s Director of Advocacy. 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 157, *An Act to Amend Certain Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Laws*.

Maine Audubon supports the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife’s (DIFW) suggested changes to Chapter 923, Subchapter 5, §12664, *Unlawful use of lead sinkers, bare lead jigs and painted lead jigs*. In the 131st Legislature, Maine Audubon supported legislation (LD 958, *An Act to Expand Protections to Maine’s Loons from Lead Poisoning by Prohibiting the Sale and Use of Certain Painted Lead Jigs*) to expand protections to Common Loons from lead poisoning. Loons ingest a striking amount of fishing tackle that is lost or left behind, or is in fish that have ingested tackle, some of which contain hazardous and life threatening chemicals – chief among them are those manufactured with lead. This effort prohibited the use and sale of *painted* lead jigs weighing an ounce or less or measuring 2.5” or less. Despite specific exclusion from Maine’s lead tackle laws, wildlife biologists and researchers have demonstrated that lead jigs coated with a layer of paint are just as deadly to loons as bare, “unpainted” lead jigs. We are pleased that this effort was successful.

Since passage of this bill, Maine Audubon has ramped up our efforts to support Fish Lead Free, an initiative that provides lead-free fishing tackle and lead tackle collection and recycling assistance for anglers and builds awareness of Maine’s current lead tackle laws. To help offset costs of the law to retailers, Maine Audubon also secured a Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund grant in the summer of 2024 in order to support our retailer tackle buyback program – supporting the removal of newly prohibited, painted lead jigs from store shelves. A total of 23 store locations have turned in 284 lbs. of lead tackle merchandise since the program’s inception. This is more than 17,000 pieces of lead tackle that will remain out of circulation, out of tackle boxes, and out of Maine lakes and ponds. In addition, 40 lbs. or 2,380 pieces of lead tackle were collected through 12 tackle exchange events in 2024. During winter, we

attend ice fishing derbies and each spring, Maine Audubon hosts an exhibition booth at all three Sporting Shows in the state, where we educate thousands of anglers about the law and the benefits of switching to lead-free tackle; collect lead tackle; and provide anglers with lead-free tackle samples.

One of the many objectives of updating this law was to send a clearer message to anglers about Maine's commitment to preventing avoidable deaths of loons and other wildlife from lead tackle with a more clear-cut directive for achieving that goal. While the message is clear, it is our understanding that there are opportunities to add clarity to both where this law applies and the definition of a lead jig – *but not rollback progress* – under Maine's lead tackle law.

We appreciate DIFW's commitment to this important law and help to ensure that – in practice – it's working for retailers, anglers, Game Wardens, and wildlife as intended. We believe that the changes before you do not compromise the integrity of the law and will allow all parties to embrace this opportunity to curb avoidable deaths to Common Loons without issue moving forward.

**We encourage the Committee to support this bill.** Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum  
Director of Advocacy