

# COBBOSSEE WATERSHED DISTRICT

SANDRA SMALL-HUGHES  
Chairperson

P.O. Box 418, Winthrop, Maine 04364

Telephone (207) 377-2234

WILLIAM J. MONAGLE  
Executive Director

*Maine's first regional lake management district*



Zooplankton

## COBBOSSEE WATERSHED DISTRICT TESTIMONY 2/12/25 IN SUPPORT OF LD 171: **An Act to Enhance Protections Regarding Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Good Afternoon:

My name is Wendy Dennis. I am here as a limnologist testifying on behalf of the Cobbossee Watershed District in **SUPPORT** of LD 171. Thank you for this opportunity. The Cobbossee Watershed District, or CWD, is a special-purpose district authorized by the Maine Legislature in 1971 to protect, improve and conserve the 28 lakes & ponds within the “Cobbossee Watershed”. The municipalities with lake shorefront in the watershed provide our primary funding. Those municipalities’ economies greatly depend on the lakes for both property tax and tourism revenue.

Unfortunately, five of those waterbodies are infested with invasive aquatic plants: Annabessacook Lake, Cobbossee Lake, Cobbosseecontee Stream, Horseshoe Pond, and Pleasant Pond. Four distinct species of invasive aquatic plants have taken residence. The invasive aquatic plant (IAP) Variable-leaf water-milfoil (VLWM) was first discovered in Pleasant Pond in the 1990s, then found in Annabessacook in 2014. In neighboring Cobbossee Lake, two additional IAP species were discovered – Eurasian Water Milfoil (EWM) and European frogs-bit (EFB). Last year, 2024, swollen bladderwort was observed in Pleasant Pond.

The number of lakes infested, the number of invasive species, and the area covered by the invasive plants, are all increasing in the Cobbossee watershed and in the state. LD 171 recognizes that serious scrutiny of programs for preventing IAP movement is needed and that efforts concentrated on the infested lakes will not only minimize the plant spread within those lakes but more broadly will protect the majority of lakes in Maine, which are to date not infested. I will use Annabessacook Lake in Winthrop and Monmouth, infested with VLWM, to illustrate what strengthening watercraft inspection protocols and surface use restrictions could accomplish.

There is a surface use restricted area (SUR) in Annabessacook Lake on the original and thickest bed of milfoil, where the former municipal boat launch and lake access was located. SURs are an extremely important tool. Prior to the SUR boats had no alternative but to travel through the invasive milfoil, chopping it up into fragments that moved around the lake or clogged propellers that carried the plants elsewhere in the lake. The Departments of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and of Environmental Protection should consider establishing more SUR areas in lakes with IAP. This does not have to be viewed as overreaching elimination of public access. In the case of Annabessacook Lake, IF&W built a new launch facility on the lake in another, plant free, location, which is greatly appreciated. However, this boat launch is a short distance from the second largest area of VLWM which is at the north end of the lake. After surveying that area last summer and identifying over 100 invasive milfoil plants in that area, I propose that it should also come under an SUR. It is a popular fishing spot, shallow and with dense plant growth, such that one cannot motor through it without disturbing the plants. It’s a guaranteed way to spread plants to other parts of the


lake as well as getting fragments stuck on props and potentially transported to other lakes. Making this area of the lake off limits would do more good than harm, as both the existing and this recommended SUR would still leave more than 90% of the 1400-acre lake accessible to the public. It seems reasonable to prevent access to fragile or damaged ecosystems and thereby preserve more of the rest of the public lake resource for access to enjoy water use activities.

Other ideas relating to SURs that could be helpful relate to both the extent of activities that are prohibited within an SUR, and educating the public about specific SURs. For example, there is a small SUR at the outlet of Cobbossee Lake that prohibits watercraft but not swimming or fishing, which were both popular activities there amidst the easily breakable EWM; perhaps those activities are not appropriate there, adjacent to the outlet dam, where fragments would easily wash downstream. At the new state-owned Annabessacook Lake boat launch, there is a glaring absence of information that boaters need regarding where the buoys are and that they mean keep out.

It is important to clarify that the establishment of the SUR is not the only action that has been taken to control VLWM in Annabessacook Lake. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent for monitoring the infestation, hiring certified contractors to remove plants by diver assisted suction harvesting as well as limited hand removal, and one herbicide treatment. DEP, two regional agencies (CWD and the Friends of Cobbossee Watershed), and the Annabessacook Lake Improvement Association have been spending many hours and dollars each year for the past 11 years. In some but not all years the control efforts have made a noticeable reduction in plant growth, but it is not expected to be eradicated. Therefore, it poses a perpetual threat to other lakes with the likelihood that windblown fragments from the SUR and boat motor fragmentation of the other three infested areas of the lake that are popular unrestricted fishing spots will result in some export of these invasive plant pieces to other waterbodies.

Inspections of boats leaving the infested lakes is paramount. There should be a study of how to recruit and fund enough inspectors to conduct inspections every day. Maybe the access should be shut off if no inspector is there. How easy it is to bring a plant to another lake. It's only two miles from the Annabessacook Lake boat launch to the Maranacook Lake boat launch – it's a disaster waiting to happen. There are less than 50 lakes in Maine infested, why risk the other hundreds accessible by boat, many with no or limited boat inspection programs? Consider making inspections at infested lakes mandatory, not courtesy. A courtesy boat inspector at the Annabessacook boat launch told me about a boat owner who refused an inspection when politely asked, responding "I'm not interested" and driving past. Would required inspections at infested lakes really be an infringement? What harm is being suffered by the boater – a few minutes of time. Inspectors cannot be expected to be enforcers, but just like with boaters who go into SURs, the boat registration information of non-compliant boat owners can be called into IF&W who could contact the person. I trust that the DIF&W can figure out how to accomplish some of these ideas. That is the purpose of the bill – to focus on the problem and develop solutions.

Thank you to Rep. Hasenfus for sponsoring the bill, and co-sponsors Sen. Hickman, Sen. Bennett, Rep. Bridgeo – you all have a history of listening to constituents' concerns about the state's lakes. The CWD strongly supports LD171. Thank you and I am happy to take any questions.

  
Wendy Dennis, Limnologist  
Cobbossee Watershed District, [cwg@fairpoint.net](mailto:cwd@fairpoint.net)