



February 12, 2025

Testimony in Support LD 171 An Act to Enhance Protections Regarding Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State

Dear Chair Baldacci, Chair Roberts, and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee,

Lake Stewards of Maine (LSM), a statewide community lake science organization, supports LD 171, An Act to Enhance Protections Regarding Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State by requiring the Commissioner of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF&W) to jointly review and recommend more stringent watercraft inspection protocols. Additionally, it mandates discussion on surface use restrictions and the public notification of such restrictions.

Lake Stewards of Maine has a more than 50-year history of collaboration with the Maine DEP. Our organization originated as the Maine Volunteer Monitoring Program, which was established within the DEP in 1971. Since becoming an independent, nonprofit in the mid-1990s, we have continued to work closely with the DEP to train and mobilize volunteer community scientists who collect credible data on key indicators of lake health. Only in the last year and a half have we begun communicating and collaborating with IF&W, following the creation of a dedicated aquatic invasive species position within their department.

Through our Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program, LSM has trained over 5,000 volunteers to survey lakes for aquatic invasive plants and other aquatic invaders. As a member of the state's AIS Rapid Response team, we are increasingly assisting lakes facing new infestations. Our staff and trained volunteers conduct comprehensive surveys to determine the extent of infestations. This information provides a critical baseline for the preparation of invasive species management plans. In recent years, LSM has returned to communities grappling with infestations, particularly in regions of the state with limited local resources. Our focus has been re-surveying areas that have implemented removal protocols and identifying any new instances of invasive growth. Maine is now battling nearly 40 aquatic invasive plant (AIP) infestations and we expect this number to increase in the future, straining AIS funding and statewide efforts.

This bill takes an important step in strengthening protections for Maine's lakes and water bodies. Many invasive plants spread through fragmentation, thus motorized boat traffic can exacerbate their spread within and between lakes by generating plant fragments that are carried by currents, boats, trailers, and other equipment. Similarly, some invasive animals, such as zebra mussels, can also be transported by boats. Zebra mussel larvae are microscopic and can attach to hard surfaces. It is essential to clean, drain, dry boats and

equipment before moving between water bodies to prevent the spread of invasives. By requiring DEP and IF&W to review policies and procedures related to watercraft inspection protocols, this bill could help curb the spread of aquatic invasive species.

Implementing surface use restrictions is a critical tool in the fight against invasive species, but also presents challenges. These include balancing conservation efforts with recreational interests, enforcement, and ensuring clear communication with the public. DEP and IF&W have historically operated with separate priorities. Aligning these responsibilities requires careful coordination.

Given that DEP has focused on invasive aquatic plants while IF&W manages invasive aquatic animals, collaboration between these two agencies is both logical and necessary, particularly because the vectors for spreading these species are the same. Strengthening this partnership not only enhances Maine's ability to combat aquatic invasive species, but also demonstrates to the public that these departments are actively working together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alison Cooney".

Alison Cooney, LSM Executive Director
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