



30 Mile River Watershed Association
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RE: Testimony in **SUPPORT** of **LD 171**:

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

February 12, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Baldacci, Chair Roberts, and Distinguished Members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of LD 171.

My name is Lidie Robbins and I am the Executive Director of the 30 Mile River Watershed Association based in Mt. Vernon. This watershed encompasses over 20 water bodies in Central Maine. We are a coalition of seven towns, nine lake associations and two conservation organizations. Our mission is to work as a community for clean and healthy lakes, ponds and streams in our watershed.

30 Mile strongly supports LD 171. This bill would reduce the risk of the spread of invasive aquatic plants by focusing on key management actions on infested lakes, reducing the likelihood of new invasive plant infestations that can devastate our lakes. **Now is the time to commit more resources to keep our lakes clean and healthy.**

One of the primary reasons that 30 Mile formed in 2008 was to protect our waters from invasive plants. For the organization's first twelve years, there were no known invasives in our watershed, so we focused on prevention. Then in the summer of 2020, variable milfoil, the most common invasive aquatic plant in Maine, was found in Androscoggin Lake. Since then, we have been fighting the invasive milfoil to prevent its spread, both within the lake and to other lakes, with the ultimate goal of eradication. We are managing the infestation as aggressively as we can with the tools available to us. Our paid staff survey the infested area by kayak, 40 hours a week, to locate individual invasive plants, which are then removed by a trained SCUBA diver on our team. So far, we seem to have been successful in containing its spread, but we may never be able to eradicate it.

In 2023, the invasive aquatic plant swollen bladderwort was found in Tilton Pond, a water body at the top of our watershed. This infestation threatens many lakes and ponds downstream. Now we must find the resources to fight this infestation, too.

A valuable tool in our effort on Androscoggin has been a Surface Use Restriction. Marked with buoys and signage, this restricted zone encompasses the area where we have found most of the invasive plants. These plants are fragile, and a boat propeller can easily break one into many fragments, each able to start new growth somewhere else. Even a fishing line can fragment a plant. Our boat inspectors who work at the public launch near the infested area tell boaters that by law they must not enter that restricted area. Our inspectors then observe that when educated about the law, these boaters stay away. While the surface use restriction is not perfect, and our inspectors don't reach everyone, it does keep the majority of boaters and fishermen outside of the area. While many people won't follow recommendations, most people will follow the law.

Maine has a long history of providing public access to our Great Ponds. But now we live in a very different time, where invasive species threaten to ruin our lakes. Management practices must adapt to these new times. When we know that an area of a lake is infested with invasive plants that can easily be spread by human activity, it's common sense that we should aim to keep people away from that area to prevent other areas from becoming infested. A Surface Use Restriction is a tool that works. The State has been hesitant to use this tool, but it is time to reassess this practice.

The State's thousands of lakes and ponds that we cherish are public resources to be enjoyed by all. However, when there is a problem, like an infestation caused by public use, the burden falls on private groups such as our organization to raise the funds to fix it, and the costs are growing every year.

The State needs to take stronger action now to support this work and protect our lakes, or they won't be here for future Mainers to enjoy.

The communities in our watershed, and throughout Maine, depend upon the health of these lakes for our local economy, our tax base and our quality of life. Losing our lakes would truly be devastating to our State. This act provides an opportunity to invest in a better future.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 171.

Thank you,

Lidie Robbins
Executive Director