

**Testimony in SUPPORT LD 171, An Act to Enhance Protections Regarding
Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State**
Submitted to Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee
February 12, 2025



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

My name is Susan Gallo, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Lakes. Our membership organization includes more than 6,000 supporters, followers, and volunteers as well as 95 Lake Associations and their thousands of members. We are dedicated to our mission of promoting, protecting, and enhancing lake water quality and habitat, and of preserving the ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits of Maine's lakes for everyone.

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

This bill helps reduce the risk of aquatic invasive species spread by focusing on key management actions on infested lakes. You are all I am sure aware that invasive aquatic plants pose a serious risk to Maine's inland waters. They outcompete native plants, with potentially devastating effects on aquatic ecosystems, water quality, native wildlife and fisheries, recreational opportunities, and property values.

Maine has so far not seen the more devastating invasive species outbreaks plaguing our neighboring states to the west and south. That is because of much hard work over the last two decades by Maine's lake organizations, lake associations, and many thousands of volunteers, as well as by the Departments of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and Environmental Protection staff, and by legislators like you who have repeatedly supported this work, both with funds and with forward-thinking, proactive lake policies. This work has benefited Maine residents and visitors, municipal budgets and local economies, property owners, summer camps, anglers, swimmers, boaters and most importantly lakes, their wildlife, and their ecological functions.

This bill focuses on several important areas of risk reduction that desperately need attention.

Monitor inland waters infested with invasive aquatic plants:

While we often think of invasive aquatic plants coming "from away," there are 37 waterbodies in Maine with current infestations. This bill adds monitoring of inland waters already infested with aquatic invasives to the joint aquatic invasive species prevention program shared between IFW and DEP. As conditions for invasive plant growth improves with warmer water, knowing how far and how fast they are spreading within a lake provides valuable information for management.

Strengthen watercraft inspection protocols at lakes infested with invasive aquatic plants:

Recognizing that boats coming out of heavily infested waters pose a greater risk of invasive spread than those coming out of other waters, this bill asks IFW and DEP to assess if current protocols are adequate for these waterbodies, and to develop guidelines for stronger protocols where needed. Given the difference in risk, and the higher probability of spread from these sources, a review of protocols and if needed a strengthening of inspection standards at these site is a reasonable undertaking that will protect long-term lake health.

Review policies and procedures for surface use restrictions:

Given our constitutional right to fish and fowl on our Great Ponds, surface use restrictions can be difficult to place and retain and emotionally fraught. However, 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 so having consistency and clarity around the use of this management tool would benefit lake health.

Different agencies have had different perspectives on when and where surface use restrictions should be applied as a management tool. This bill includes a directive for the commissioner to work with the commissioner at DEP to review surface use restrictions on inland waters of the state. Having the agencies work together on this charged issue makes sense. We would suggest finding a way to bring Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry into the conversation as well given their oversight of public boat launch sites.

We see only positive outcomes in terms of invasive species risk reduction by the common-sense measures enacted in this bill. We urge the committee to vote yes on this bill.