

**TESTIMONY OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND FISHERIES AND  
WILDLIFE**

**Neither For Nor Against L.D. 171**

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

**Sponsored by** Representative HASENFUS of Readfield.

**Cosponsored by** Senator HICKMAN of Kennebec, Representative BRIDGEO of Augusta,  
Senator BENNETT of Oxford

**DATE OF HEARING: Wednesday, February 12, 2025**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Liz Latti, Fisheries and Hatcheries Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), speaking on behalf of the Department, as well as the Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP), neither for nor against L.D. 171 An Act to Enhance Protections Regarding Invasive Aquatic Plant Infestations in Inland Waters of the State.

This bill would require the MDIFW and the MDEP to monitor inland waters of the State known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants and to provide educational materials to the public and watercraft owners on surface use restrictions on inland waters. Additionally, it tasks the Commissioners of both MDIFW and MDEP, in consultation with the Interagency Task Force on Invasive Aquatic Plants and Nuisance Species, to conduct a review of watercraft inspection protocols and surface use restrictions on inland waters known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants.

The items in this bill pertaining to the monitoring of waters known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants and providing educational materials to the public and watercraft owners regarding surface use restrictions are already prescribed in law. MDEP is currently mandated in existing statute (Title 38 section 410-N) to educate on this topic and investigate and document the occurrence of invasive aquatic plants in state waters. MDEP's program works in conjunction with lake associations and watershed management organizations to complete work that surpasses the monitoring proposed within this bill and includes ongoing work to suppress, mitigate, and eradicate infestations of invasive aquatic plants.

The MDIFW and MDEP regularly collaborate to post information on both Department websites to inform and educate the public and watercraft owners on surface use restrictions on inland waters of the state every year. The Maine Warden Service is actively informing the public about surface use restrictions and providing on-the-ground education to boaters. In addition, MDIFW's Information & Education Division directs outreach to boat registrants targeting surface use restriction information and general invasive aquatic species prevention. As such, the tasks identified in this bill regarding the monitoring of invasive aquatic plant infestations and providing outreach on surface use restrictions are being actively addressed by both agencies.

This bill proposes to require the Commissioner of MDEP and the Commissioner of MDIFW, in consultation with the Interagency Task Force, to jointly review watercraft inspection protocols and surface use restrictions on inland waters known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants. This proposed role already exists in statute for the Task Force within Title 38 section 1871.

Additionally, section 3 of the bill requires the commissioners to submit a report by January 1, 2026, suggesting any legislation with the ability to report out a bill. The bill states it must submit this report to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife with their findings and recommendations with respect to watercraft inspection protocols and surface use restrictions on inland waters of the State known to be infested with invasive aquatic plants and how information on restrictions is communicated to members of the public. This seems redundant as the Task Force is currently required to submit on or before January 15<sup>th</sup>, biennially, to the Legislative committees of jurisdiction for the Departments of MDEP, MDIFW, and Marine Resources a report containing its findings and recommendations, including any suggested legislation, on matters relating to controlling the introduction of invasive aquatic plants and nuisance species in the State.

The Task Force is currently reviewing and updating the state's Rapid Response Plans for Invasive Flora and Fauna, which includes a consideration of changes to surface use restriction procedures. The Task Force is actively engaged in ongoing discussions to enhance spread prevention efforts, focusing on strategies for education and outreach, watercraft inspection protocols, and treatment methods for infested waters. The Task Force provided a report back to the 132<sup>nd</sup> Legislature this session and will report back again in 2027.

In summary, the tasks outlined in this bill align with the current work, scope, and statutory responsibilities of the Task Force in managing aquatic invasive species. However, both Departments recognize the intent behind the proposed legislation and appreciate the continuing public and legislative support in working to address aquatic invasive species threats within the state.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.