

Public Testimony in Support of LD 296
February 12, 2025

Greetings to the distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 296.

I am Eric Lind, and I am representing two lake associations in two different roles. I am proud to be an Augusta city councilor, and as such I represent Togus Pond located on the outskirts of Augusta. I am a proud member of the Togus Pond Association. I also serve as the Vice President of the China Lake Association. My wife and I were blessed to be able to buy a camp in 2015 on China Lake, a lifelong dream. Both Togus Pond and China Lake are considered impaired. Both lake associations, in partnership with Maine's Department of Environmental Protection developed a 10-year Watershed-Based Management Plan, which describes the steps needed to restore the water quality. The estimated cost of executing the plan for Togus Pond is \$1.7 million, the estimate for China Lake started at a staggering \$3.16 million and has climbed to over \$4 million. Let me say that again, the estimate to restore Togus Pond is \$1.7 million and the estimate to restore China Lake is just over \$4 million. Please think about a small non-profit, without full time staff attempting to execute a 4-million-dollar project to save an iconic 3,900-acre lake that serves as the drinking water supply for 6 municipalities.

Lake restoration is a serious, expensive, scientific challenge that normally exceeds the capacity and capability of a lake association. I often find myself stressed just trying to understand the complexity of lake science, that combined with a constant challenge to raise the needed funds, manage a non-profit, and recruit volunteers can often be very discouraging. To be blunt, it's wicked hard!!

Our lakes, Maine's lakes, are in trouble. We are loving them to death. The water quality of many of our lakes is deteriorating. The rescue of our lakes will take a collective effort in terms of resources, which includes the provisions contained in LD 296.

By serving on this committee, you have demonstrated your concern for our natural resources. There are over 6000 lakes in Maine, they are a part of our DNA.

The value of China Lake as an economic driver for the town of China is widely known, but a new study by a Colby College economics team shows that impact extends to the greater China Lake Watershed as well. China Lake Association asked Professor Michael Donihue, director of the Colby Laboratory for Economic Studies, to focus the lab's attention on the China Lake Watershed, which extends from the lake into, not only China, but parts of Vassalboro, Albion, and Winslow. The team's research, which was released in May 2024, shows homes inside the watershed, not just lake frontage, on average sold for 16 percent more than comparable properties outside the watershed. The population of China Maine grew by 2.4 percent during the decade 2012-2022, with most of the growth in proximity to China Lake. During that same decade the median household income in China doubled. More than 60 percent of the town's population lives in the China Lake Watershed. Earnings paid by firms in the Town of China contributed more than \$71 million to economic activity in Kennebec County in 2022 alone, nearly 10 percent of the County's total of 8 billion. The Colby study coincided with a University of Maine economic impact report that concluded Maine lakes are worth \$14 billion, with contributions coming from everything from the value of lakefront properties, to sales of gas and meals, to the value of drinking water. It is estimated that Maine lakes contribute more than \$3 billion a year in sales.

LD 296 is a critical step in the effort to restore and preserve our lakes. You have a real opportunity to make a difference in the fight to save Maine's lakes, not only as investment in our way of life but also an impactful economic investment.

In conclusion I provide a quote from Senator Ed Muskie, author of the Clean Water Act and summer resident of China Lake, "High quality water is more than the dream of the conservationists, more than a political slogan; high quality water, in the right quantity at the right place at the right time, is essential to health, recreation, and economic growth."

Thank you for all you do to help save our Maine lakes and way of life.

Eric Lind
Augusta Maine