



Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, Institute for Legislative Action (SAM-ILA)

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The honorable Senator Baldacci, Rep. Roberts, members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee, my name is David Trahan, I am the Executive Director of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine Institute for Legislative Action. I am testifying in support of the proposed department amendment to LD 77 - An Act to Stabilize and Sustainably Fund the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Fisheries and Hatcheries Division by Increasing the Inland Fishing License Fees and Establishing the Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement Fund.

Supporting fee increases is always difficult, particularly in a rural state like Maine where incomes are always in the bottom third of states. When considering this legislation, which I was made aware of last year, I asked, then Fisheries Division Director, Francis Brautigam, for two things: a supporting General Fund appropriation and dedicated funding to fix our aging state fish hatcheries. The first was accomplished, the second request is in the amendment.

Few people are aware of the fact that for over 30 years, our hatcheries have struggled and failed to keep up with infrastructure and effluent discharge upgrades to comply with Department of Environmental Protection permits. Administration after administration has kicked the issue down the road while the state has demanded compliance from similar private sector industries.

In meetings with the Commissioner and the fisheries staff to discuss amendments to this bill, it has become apparent they feel as strongly as we do at the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, ILA. The problem will no longer be kicked down the road!

This amendment restructures the proposed fee increases to reflect the needs of the fishery division, (there has not been a fishing license increase for 15 years), by lowering the resident increase from \$7 to \$5, (we surveyed our members and they supported the \$5) and proportionately raises other fishing licenses, more importantly, it dedicates \$2 of all fishing licenses into the fish hatchery maintenance account. It also adds language that allows funding for the "design, construction and operation of additional state fish hatcheries."

It is not widely known, but two years ago, the department helped SAM apply for and receive a \$700,000 Congressionally Directed Grant to search the state for a suitable site to build a new fish hatchery, (the SAM ILA receives none of this money.) Our former SAM President, Nick Archer, and past IFW Deputy Commissioner, Mathew Scott are here today. Together, they have built one of the finest hatchery committees ever assembled to assist us in modernizing existing hatcheries and finding a suitable site for a new hatchery. We have a Project manager, Jon Edgerton and sub-contractor conducting the work as we speak.

Freshwater fisheries provide \$380 million in jobs and economic activity annually, more importantly, fishing is part of our outdoor culture. This bill may be viewed by some as a fee increase, we see it differently, for decades the problems with our aging hatcheries and the embarrassing fact that they needed millions in investment has lingered in the dark without a plan. Few people know that the department is poised to sign a consent agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection to address the last remaining effluent discharge problems at several state hatcheries. It will be expensive, and in time, as this work is completed, will build a road map to a modern hatchery system.

The department was created to protect our natural resources and provide us with a stocking program to enhance and maintain healthy fisheries. As sportsmen and women, we are intimately connected to the work they do and they work they don't. If our hatcheries are in need of repair or exceeding their discharge permits, it is as much our responsibility as the consumer to fix it, as it is the departments.

What this department has now, that it didn't have in the past is strong support from the SAM ILA, a hatchery committee that can guide them through to the end and administration that cares. I believe, if this committee understood the history and significance of the problem, they would enthusiastically join us in fixing it. Perhaps, at the work session, the department and SAM could give you the context and history, so together we can fix this problem and stop kicking the can down the road.

Thank you,

David Trahan, Executive Director, SAM-ILA