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Maine Trout Unlimited Council



**Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries & Wildlife RE: 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.**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, my name is Greg Ponte, and I am representing the Maine Trout Unlimited Council which is a nonprofit conservation organization, and our mission statement is *"We bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams, so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon."*

I am speaking today representing over 1600 Trout Unlimited members of the six chapters in Maine, but moreover, I am here representing the last remaining stronghold of native Brook Trout in the United States.

Salmonids require clean, cold water, which we are fortunate to have here in Maine as much of our landscape remains remote. Still the threats they face are real and growing with every new development, every bucket biologist, every blocked or perched culvert and obsolete dam.

When we originally read LD 77, we were heartened to hear that 65% of the annual license revenue deposited into the fund would be allocated to conservation, research and management of freshwater fish species native to the state, and that 35% would be allocated to enhancing and managing inland freshwater recreational fisheries to the state. We were prepared to testify today to urge the passage of LD 77.

With the proposed amendment favoring the hatchery program we are ignoring the fish management plans for our native salmonids. This proposed bill would turn our backs on these highly sensitive and native species of freshwater fish. There is in fact no mention of what percentages of funds would be so allocated. We are left to hope that there will be enough leftover funds to protect our native fish. Hope alone is not sufficient.

We support the raising of the license fees but at the same time we need assurances that protection of our native fish remains as part of the original proposed LD 77.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I am happy to answer questions pertaining to this proposed bill.

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