



LD 77 Public Hearing Testimony - February 24, 2025

My name is Larry Bastian. I am speaking on behalf of the Maine Chapter, Native Fish Coalition (NFC). NFC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation, preservation, and restoration of wild native fish. NFC was founded in Maine in 2017 and has since grown to 21 state chapters representing members, partners, volunteers and supporters.

NFC was planning to support LD 77 as originally submitted. While we generally do not get involved in user fees, we intended to support the bill due to the establishment of an Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement Fund, which would receive a portion of the fee increase to be used for conservation, research, and management of Maine's native freshwater fish species.

The Proposed Amendment to LD 77 replaces the Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement Fund with the Fish Hatchery Maintenance Fund and removes additional funding for wild native fish management.

NFC does not support LD 77 with the proposed Amendment because there is no funding allocated for wild native fish. We also do not oppose it, because we do not get involved in user fees nor with hatchery maintenance or expansion. While most of our members and supporters are anglers, NFC is focused on fish, not fishing.

Maine has the largest and most diverse intact populations of wild native salmonids in the contiguous United States. Maine has roughly 90% of the remaining lake and pond, sea-run, and large river brook trout; the last wild native arctic charr and the last wild Atlantic salmon in the contiguous United States. Maine has lost populations of wild native brook trout, Arctic charr, landlocked salmon, and lake whitefish. If we are to stop the losses as noted in IFW's 2021 Strategic Plan, we will need to dedicate more money to native fish preservation, and prior to the proposed amendment, LD 77 was going to do that. Irrespective of the amount of the fee increases, which also change under the amended bill, we ask that the committee consider including the Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement Fund and some level of funding in the bill before passing it.

Thank You,
Larry Bastian, Chair
Maine Chapter Native Fish Coalition