



Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
c/o Office of Fiscal and Program Review
5 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 26, 2025

RE: LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Dear Sen. Rotundo, Rep. Gattine, Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Roberts, and Members of the AFA and IFW Committees:

My name is Francesca "Ches" Gundrum and I am Maine Audubon's Director of Advocacy. Maine Audubon is a wildlife conservation non-profit – we fulfill our mission to "conserve Maine wildlife and wildlife habitat" by engaging people of all ages in nature through a science-based approach to education, conservation, and advocacy. On behalf of Maine Audubon and our 30,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on LD 210, specifically, the proposed budget initiatives and language related to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW).

Maine Audubon offers our support for several of the proposed budget initiatives and language related to DIFW¹ in order to support the agency in fulfilling its responsibility to preserve, protect, and enhance the inland fisheries and wildlife resources of the state. Items that are of particular interest to our organization are: Endangered and Nongame Operations positions; the Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement program's creation; and the transfer of the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) to DIFW.

Maine Audubon enthusiastically supports staffing requests for DIFW's Endangered and Nongame Operations (ENDANGERED NONGAME OPERATIONS 0536, p. A-436⁴²⁸). The additional resource biologist positions are critical to helping DIFW do their best work to protect our state's precious wildlife and habitat, restore endangered species, and boldly tackle some of the greatest challenges that face our state's birds, bats, bees, and more. Especially now, as Maine, along with every other state in the nation, is embarking on a herculean effort to update its 2015 State Wildlife Action

¹ Budget proposals related to the DIFW can be found [2026-2027 Recommended General Fund Biennial Budget – Part A, A-422–A-455](#).

Plan (SWAP), required by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to access hundreds of thousands of dollars through the State Wildlife Grants program. The purpose of the SWAP, per Congress, is to keep as many species as possible off the threatened and endangered list by identifying those species and habitats that are declining or otherwise compromised and developing conservation actions to enhance habitats and boost populations. The plan includes a list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), key habitats associated with them, identified threats for both species and habitats, and conservation actions for all. It also includes a plan for how to engage partners and the public in both the development of and the implementation of the plan. Maine Audubon is playing a key role in facilitating the update to the plan. These additional positions are critical to this work.

Additionally, we support the creation of the Inland Fisheries Conservation and Enhancement program (INLAND FISHERIES CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT Z427, page A-436). Maine is the last true stronghold in the East for wild Brook Trout, and has the only remaining populations of landlocked Arctic Charr and sea-run Atlantic Salmon. With the most extensive distribution, abundance, and habitat diversity of eastern Brook Trout within their native U.S. range, Maine's wild Brook Trout waters represent a unique, valuable, and irreplaceable ecological resource. Unfortunately, a range of pressures including some forestry practices, development, dams, invasive species, and overfishing have compromised or destroyed wild fish and their habitat across their range. Through proper identification and regulation, and proactive conservation and restoration measures, these waters can be protected, reconnected, and restored so these heritage fish can thrive in the future.

This program would be supported by the help of fishing license fee increases. Fee increases are reflected in budget language (Part NNN) and proposed within 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*. With this new program, there are a suite of conservation initiatives the state would be better positioned to pursue alongside a range of partners, including: surveying remote ponds and coastal streams for Brook Trout; prioritizing high quality habitat, such as cold water refugia, for conservation; restoring degraded habitat by adding downed wood into streams to create feeding, resting, and nursery areas; understanding the influence of adjacent land use activities on habitat suitability; protecting shoreland habitat; and reconnecting fragmented waterways by removing dams and using "Stream Smart" (science-based solutions to protect road infrastructure and enhance fish and wildlife passage) practices.


Maine Audubon also supports the transfer of MNAP to DIFW (RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SERVICES - IF&W 0534, p. A-450). MNAP facilitates conservation of Maine's biodiversity by providing comprehensive information and scientific expertise on at-risk species, natural ecosystems, wildlife habitats, ecological reserves, and invasive plants to landowners, developers, resource managers, towns, and other conservation partners. The program helps provide objective and thorough information to equip decisionmakers with tools to make informed and responsible land management decisions. Moving this program to DIFW will help reduce duplicative work between agencies and

create a more coordinated approach to database management, environmental review, species tracking, and leveraging of federal funds for habitat conservation.

With Commissioner Judy Camuso's bold leadership, DIFW has embraced their mission to promote the safe enjoyment of Maine's outdoors for so many Maine people and advance the preservation, protection, and enhancement of Maine wildlife and inland fisheries. Maine Audubon is proud to be a partner in the Department's work. **Supporting the proposed budget initiatives and language in the Department's budget will allow the agency to do their best work.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Francesca "Ches" Gundrum
Director of Advocacy