



Sally Cluchey
15 Brickyard Way
Bowdoinham, ME 04008
Phone: (207) 814-8879
Sally.Cluchey@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

March 24, 2025

Testimony of Rep. Sally Cluchey presenting
LD 976: Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. My name is Sally Cluchey, and I represent House District 52, which includes the communities of Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, Richmond, and Perkins Island Township. I am here today to present *LD 976: Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township*.

Swan Island is a 2,000-acre wildlife management area located in the Kennebec River between Richmond and Dresden. It is owned and managed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) as part of the Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area. This unique resource combines conservation, outdoor recreation, historical preservation, and education, offering opportunities that few other places in Maine provide.

For decades, Swan Island has provided public access for wildlife conservation education, learn-to-hunt programs, camping, and historical preservation efforts. It became a hub for outdoor learning, attracting school groups, researchers, and visitors. The island provides important habitat for bald eagles, white-tailed deer, and migratory birds, offering hands-on learning experiences in conservation management. Swan Island is also home to remnants of the town of Perkins, one of Maine's earliest settlements, with five standing homes dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a cemetery with headstones dating from 1802-1968, and the entire island listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Families, scouts, and outdoor enthusiasts have utilized Swan Island for overnight camping, hiking, biking, and exploring Maine's natural and cultural heritage.

Historically, ferry service provided access to the island, allowing visitors to enjoy these resources. However, in 2022, ferry service was discontinued, drastically reducing public access and limiting the ability of the community and the state to fully benefit from this resource.

The ferry was discontinued primarily due to aging infrastructure and evolving U.S. Coast Guard regulations that require compliance with updated vessel inspection and staffing requirements. Without a compliant vessel and with the pier in need of repairs, safe and reliable ferry service became infeasible. As a result, access to the island is now severely restricted, with only those who can launch their own boats able to visit.

The loss of ferry service has negatively affected Richmond's economy, particularly tourism-related businesses. Swan Island was once a popular destination for families and outdoor enthusiasts, generating revenue for local businesses. Visitors would start the day with breakfast at Annabella's, take the ferry for an afternoon of hiking, wildlife viewing, and exploring the beaver pond, then return to town for pizza at The Old Goat and ice cream at Maine Street Dairy Treat. Without reliable ferry access, these kinds of experiences—and the economic benefits they brought to Richmond—have disappeared. Restoring ferry service is not just about recreation; it's about revitalizing the local economy.

The closure has also created a significant loss in educational opportunities. Richmond schools, in particular, actively participated in educational programs related to Swan Island, providing valuable experiential learning opportunities for students. One such program, *The Life and Death of a Small Maine Town*, delved into the history of Perkins. With its historic homes, cemetery, and the island's rich legacy of shipbuilding, farming, and ice harvesting, Swan Island was an invaluable resource for teaching Social Studies and Maine's history. Without ferry access, students can no longer experience this hands-on learning in a way that fosters a deeper connection to local ecology and history.

Restoring ferry access to Swan Island is critical not only for local tourism and education, but also for maintaining compliance with public access requirements for lands funded by the Pittman-Robertson Act. Lands purchased or managed with Pittman-Robertson funds, such as Swan Island, are required to be open to the public for wildlife-related recreation, including activities like hiking, wildlife observation, and educational programs. Since hunting is not allowed on the island, it becomes even more important to provide access to other activities that allow the public to engage with the island's wildlife and natural resources. Developing a plan to restore ferry access is the first step in ensuring the public can continue to experience Swan Island and fully benefit from this public resource.

The process of restoring ferry access involves two key steps: rebuilding the pier and developing a transportation plan. This Committee voted unanimously to recommend that the AFA Committee appropriate \$150,000 in general funds to match \$350,000 in federal funds for pier repairs. LD 976 directs IFW to develop a transportation plan for restoring reliable ferry service. This will allow the department to evaluate flexible, cost-effective options for ferry service, such as part-time operations during weekends or peak visitation seasons.

Reinstating ferry service comes with challenges, particularly with compliance to U.S. Coast Guard regulations, which require significant operational costs. However, there may be a way forward through discussions with the Coast Guard to seek a limited exemption that allows for a more cost-effective, part-time ferry service. Perhaps this could be a public-private partnership. Finding a sustainable solution does not necessarily mean restoring past service exactly as it was, but rather developing a feasible access model that balances cost and community benefit.

That is the good faith effort that this bill seeks. Swan Island is a publicly owned resource that should be accessible to the people of Maine. The first step—rebuilding the pier—is already in motion. LD 976 will allow us to take the next step by directing IFW to create a viable transportation plan to restore ferry access in a sustainable and responsible way. I urge the committee to support LD 976 and to help restore public access to one of Maine's treasured public lands.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions.

Hi Representative Cluchey –

Mike Russo passed along your request for costs associated with operating the Swan Island Ferry. Unfortunately, our financial system is not set up in a way that allows us to cleanly identify the costs of the ferry vs. other costs associated with running Swan Island, however we have done our best to pull together some estimates. If possible, I would like to discuss the information below with you, as there are many nuances in how to interpret this information and the estimates will vary substantially depending on how the ferry is run (e.g. number of days per week, whether on-island transportation to the campground is also provided, whether transportation is offered only for day use vs. overnight camping etc.). The single largest cost is staff time; however these staff would also be conducting other tasks so we don't want to imply that their compensation is only related to operation of the ferry. With all of that in mind, here is some information for your review:

Estimates of expenses for the 2021 operating year

Expenses		Comments
Contract Staffing wages (2021 - last operational season)	\$23,001	
IFW Staff wages	\$60,249	Prem. Rate @ 7 months
Misc - maintenance	\$3,500	maintenance to ferry
fuel - vehicles, boats	\$1,700	
Central Fleet vehicle lease	\$3,794	including 1/2 of mileage
Total	\$92,244	

It is important to note the estimates above do not reflect adequate maintenance and upgrade costs, as evidenced by the continued deferred maintenance of the island facilities and equipment. Also, additional ancillary costs are not accounted for, including maintenance of the bulkhead and pier, docks, or on-island transportation which was provided when the ferry was operational.

Estimated costs to upgrade and operate the ferry to comply with USCG regulations:

Master Class Licensed Captain	\$131,206	Prem. Rate \$63.08. Ferry Captain I
Deckhands (2)- Project Staffing	\$69,472	"At Sea" category \$33.40 x 2080 hours - two seasonal staff

Two new motors (90 or 115 HP)	\$28,000	Ferry is underpowered and increased use with public on board would mandate an upgrade. Does not include cost for install
Ferry Modifications to meet inspection	\$20,000	New CG approved gas tank (~\$2k), update navigation lights, upgrade fire extinguishers, CG approved first aid kit, add lanyards to hatches, replace the electrical in the hull, replace entire electrical schematics (~\$10k) for the vessel to be CG approved, repair broken welds, install navigation mapping, emergency/distress gear, etc.
Misc. Trainings/Testing for Captain and Deckhands	\$5,000	CPR, First Aid, Physical Exam, Drug Test, TWIC card, 50-60 hr training program, License Renewal, etc.
Ferry Maintenance	\$5,000	Welding, cleaning, motor repairs, winterizing & de-winterizing, trailer maintenance, etc.
Ferry Inspection (annual)	\$2,515	Vessel Application, Stability Test, Inspection, Dry-dock inspection (3 year renewal), etc. Estimate gathered from USCG website
Fuel Costs for Ferry and Transportation Van	\$1,700	Costs from 2021 Season
Mustang Survival Coats (3)	\$1,000	PPE for early and late season
TOTAL	\$263,893	

This assumes one Ferry Captain with appropriate credentials. If the ferry were operated 7 days/week, an additional Ferry Captain would be required to allow for scheduled days off.

This estimate does not include other costs ancillary to the ferry itself, including on-island transportation for the public, or maintenance of infrastructure including docks, pier and bulkhead. Additionally, if transporting the public for overnight camping, the Department needs to have the ability to transport them off at any time in the case of emergency. This would require staff housing on the WMA, with remediation and upgrades to the staff house estimated at \$150,000.

Best,

Nate