

March 24, 2025

**Testimony in Support of LD 976: Resolve, to Restore Accessible Public Transportation to Swan Island in Perkins Township**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee.

My Name is Frank Burroughs and I currently live in Topsham. My wife and I moved to Maine in 1968. We lived on the Cathance River in Bowdoinham, between the village and Merrymeeting Bay, and raised our three daughters there. I began duck hunting and knocking around on the bay that fall, and have continued to do so. By talking to older hunters I came to know something of the Kennebec Estuary's history, and eventually published a book, Confluence: Merrymeeting Bay in 2006, with fine photographic illustrations by Heather Perry, of Bath. For the cover photograph, she provided an aerial view of the foot of Swan Island, looking northwestward. It was taken early in the morning, at high tide, in late summer or early fall. The guzzles reach all the way in to shore, the Bowdoinham shore is in sunlight, the island itself is still in shadow, the river is an unruffled blue and an exceptionally good crop of wild rice covers the flats.

We chose that photograph for the cover because it captures the sense of confluence—of human history, natural history, and private experience coming together—that is the theme of the book.

I have made multiple visits to Swan Island over the years, sometimes with a group of visiting naturalists, sometimes with a few friends. With our children and another family or two, we occasionally camped beside the beautiful stream that separates Swan and Little Swan islands. Old houses are scattered along the road that runs down the spine of the island. They are “out of all this too much with us,” like something from a Robert Frost poem. Not much evidence remains of the great sheds that stored tons of Kennebec ice and shipped it around the world, or of the shipyard that once was there. A whole economy once was here.

And beneath that was another, much older one. *Swan* comes from the Abenaki *Sowango*: Eagle. Anadromous fish swarmed in the rivers: salmon, stripers, shad, sturgeon, alewives, river herring, smelt. The divided channels of the Kennebec

concentrated the fish and they passed on up river to Augusta, known to the Abenaki as *Cushnoc*—the head of tide. This concentration attracted swarms of predators: the Abenaki themselves, with their weirs and spears; eagles, ospreys, gulls, cormorants, mink, otters, bears, seals. Industrial pollution killed all that.

Today a tide is turning. When I came to Maine in 1968, there were four active eagle nests east of Hancock County. Three of those were in the Kennebec Estuary, and they often produced infertile eggs. Now eagles are commonplace throughout the state. Alewife and herring populations are recovering. And so, astonishingly, are Atlantic Sturgeon. All of these can be observed at Swan Island, and I believe it is in the best interests of the State of Maine to ensure our residents and visitors have the opportunity to do so. LD 976 would be an important step toward providing that opportunity.

At the end of a day in early summer, a weary committee member can go downhill to *Cushnoc*, sit on the deck of a fine pub, and stand an excellent chance of seeing an Atlantic Sturgeon—a fish about the size on an NBA power forward—leap. Nobody knows why the jump, and I doubt they do it to encourage you to support LD 976. But Representative Cluchey and I do. Swan Island needs, and repays, our attention.