



**Testimony neither for nor against
LD 1026 An Act to Provide Mapping Services for Aquaculture Lease Siting**

March 27, 2025

Greetings Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources. On behalf of Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation, I would like to submit testimony neither for nor against LD 1026 *"An Act to Provide Mapping Services for Aquaculture Lease Siting"*.

We would like to thank the sponsors of this bill for acknowledging that there is a user conflict issue regarding aquaculture lease siting and for working to find a solution to this issue.

We fully support and encourage municipalities to identify and map their marine resources and marine dependent uses.

However, LD 1026 will create another layer of state bureaucracy for what should be a local municipal decision. LD 1026 does not require that the Department of Marine Resources deny any permit or lease that would interfere with mapped uses. We are also concerned that all stakeholders will not be fairly represented in the process of creating a template. Furthermore, will the "template" be a general guide for mapping or a strict definition of what qualifies as a "use". Again, Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation believes that municipalities must be able chart their own future and to define "use" according to their vision for their municipality.

Finally, we are concerned that developing this template and providing technical assistance to various organizations will require funding that is a contentious subject today.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our thoughts regarding LD 1026.

Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation

THE WORKING WATERFRONT

Another view on aquaculture conflicts

PROTECT MAINE'S FISHING HERITAGE WANTS UNBIASED DISCUSSION

BY ROCK ALLEY

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Yes, please, let's have an honest conversation about aquaculture (as the op-ed by Benjamin Ford of the law firm Archipelago argued in the April/May issue of *The Working Waterfront*).

Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage agrees—it's time to have an honest conversation about aquaculture, so everyone benefits. It's essential to everyone who makes a living on the water, everyone who recreates on the water, and everyone who is part of the wild harvest and small aquaculture community.

An honest conversation about aquaculture has been something Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation has been advocating since its inception. There are, however, roadblocks with those who want only their agenda and are unwilling to listen or change.

If we are going to get real, neither the Maine Aquaculture Association nor the lawyer who represents large aquaculture projects want to have a conversation about what is best for all Maine stakeholders, reducing aquaculture conflicts and supporting local town decision making.

Protect Maine supports zoning the waters and leasing in 5-acre increments up to 50 acres.

Protect Maine tried to have an open conversation in Augusta and the Department of Marine Resources was not willing to listen or change. Given the state level roadblocks, Protect Maine focused on a grass roots effort, going town by town sharing other state best practices and supporting local decision making about aquaculture.

If the conversation is to be had, here are some of the points.

Maine is the only state that allows large scale, industrial open net pen salmon farming. Cooke Aquaculture, a Canadian company, leases more than 600 acres of Maine water and is currently being sued for allegedly violating the Clean Water Act.

Why have multiple countries and Washington state banned open net pen salmon farming, while Maine and the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA) continue to support Cooke Aquaculture and promote large scale, industrial aquaculture regulation?

The MAA is funded by paying membership. Cooke Aquaculture is the largest paying member with seats on the MAA board. It's in MAA's financial interest to support Cooke and welcome large-scale, industrial aquaculture operations.

If MAA were indeed an unbiased supporter of the industry, then it should have engaged legislatively, calling for more testing after the fish die-offs at Cooke's Pens at Black Island in 2022 and Beals Island in 2024.

DMR officials have stated there is no Maine aquaculture strategic plan. Outdated regulations along with an aquaculture at all cost bias have fueled significant local conflicts. Just attend a large-scale aquaculture lease hearing to witness the conflicts firsthand.

It's no secret that DMR doesn't have enough staff or enough qualified staff. Turnover has been significant, and the brain drain with anyone who has historical knowledge has been profound. Without a plan or staffing for enforcement there are serious issues, such as Cooke salmon die-offs and bays where aquaculture has pushed out wild harvesters.

So what is the right acreage for aquaculture in Maine? Having studied other state plans, Protect Maine supports zoning the waters and leasing in 5-acre increments up to 50 acres. It's a starting point for discussion, which should be debated and decided locally.

Protect Maine has been working with communities to encourage local regulations for aquaculture. It's odd that DMR and MAA are against allowing towns to decide what is best for their communities. As it turns out, towns are enacting aquaculture ordinances that are even more restrictive than 5-acres.

Why is this happening? Maine residents, harvesters, and recreators are seeing an increasing number of aquacultures leases on their water. In some areas, wild harvesters believe the larger bivalve farms impact their harvest.

Most importantly, Maine is worse off by not having a conversation that includes everyone. Organizations with direct economic benefit from large-scale, industrial aquaculture need to listen to all stakeholders, not just their wallet.

Maine needs to learn why states and countries have banned open net pen salmon farming, consider zoning its waters to let local communities lead, and develop an aquaculture plan. Protect Maine continues to welcome open conversation and to be part of a state level solution. Until then, we will continue working at the local level with towns to encourage an aquaculture plan that is best for their communities.

Rock Alley is director of Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation and a marine harvester. Also contributing to this op-ed were Zach Piper, a lobsterman and president of Protect Maine's

Fishing Heritage Foundation, and lobsterman Adam Ulrickson, secretary of Protect Maine's Fishing Heritage Foundation.



Residents of Penobscot vote to enact an ordinance regulating aquaculture operations at a meeting last year.