



*Town of Orland
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LD 531: An Act Regarding Dam Ownership

Sponsored by:

- Representative Nina Azella Milliken, D - Blue Hill
- Senator David G. Haggan, R - Penobscot
- Representative Matt Moonen, D - Portland
- Senator Nicole Grohoski, D - Hancock
- Representative Steven M. Bishop, R - Bucksport

Committee: Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

In Favor of the Bill

My name is Gina Bushong. I am here today representing the Town of Orland, where I serve on the Select Board. In that capacity, I wish to strongly endorse the passage of LD 531.

The 4 towns in our region, Orland, Penobscot, Blue Hill, and Surry, have been involved in the Bucksport Mill LLC's (BuckMill) application to the Department of Environmental Protection for Release From Dam Ownership and Water Level Maintenance (38 MRSA §901-909) for nearly a year. The bill before you today seeks to provide the most viable option for the impacted communities to prevent two critically important water bodies from being drained.

The dams involved in this action are the Alamoosook Lake and Toddy Pond dams which are physically located in Orland. All of the properties on Alamoosook are in Orland, while Toddy Pond has residents in four communities. The distribution of properties on Toddy Pond is: Town of Blue Hill, 6%; Town of Orland, 43%; Town of Penobscot, 24%; and Town of Surry, 27%. The two bodies of water truly represent a regional asset.

The lakes have been in place for over 100 years and serve as an important environment for nesting loons and eagles as well as providing critical spawning habitat for migratory fish. In addition to the environmental significance of the lakes, they represent a significant year-round recreational asset for the region. Both lakes have public boat launches that are heavily used, providing access for fishing, boating, and swimming. People from not only the four towns but from across the region take advantage of the recreational opportunities the lakes provide.

The presence of the lakes has a significant economic impact to the region as well. In a recent survey conducted of area businesses, 93% of those that responded said the loss of

the lakes would negatively impact their business. Further, nine businesses said they would be likely or somewhat likely to close their business if the lakes were drained.

The impact on property tax revenue for the towns is significant. The town of Orland alone projects that we would sustain a loss of roughly \$500K in revenue from the approximately \$4 million in property taxes collected. This is a substantial loss for a small town like ours and would force us to either drastically cut services or raise taxes.

The bottom line to all of this is that the lakes need to remain.

In the more than a year since the dam owner, Bucksport Mill LLC (BM), made it clear that they wanted to divest of the dams, the entire region has come together to find a solution that would preserve the lakes. This is a problem none of us wanted on our plates. However, we have worked collaboratively to accommodate a large multinational company that simply wants to avail itself of the process provided in an old (never used before) State statute to abandon the dams and walk away, leaving a handful of very small towns to shoulder the consequences.

Our State legislators, along with the four towns and the two lake associations, have spent an enormous amount of time, energy, and money to develop the legislation that is the subject of today's hearing. In addition to the business survey mentioned previously, we have conducted a massive outreach campaign to not only inform our citizens but to seek their input into the design of the legislation. We have done surveys, mailings, and town meetings to better understand how our citizens want to address this problem. LD 531 represents this citizen input.

While the dams are physically in Orland, the town simply could not take on the sole responsibility of managing two aging dams classified as high hazard by the Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). The unique approach in LD 531 of sharing the costs of operating these dams among four towns and the lakefront property owners has wide community support. While the final decision to participate in the Districts created by the legislation will be up to the voters of our towns, we feel this is the best option we have for preserving the lakes for the long-term.

We want to sincerely thank the Bill sponsors and the Committee for helping us get to this point. Without your interest and willingness to support this legislation, the region would be left with few alternatives to resolve this situation.

Respectively submitted,



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