

Dear Members of the Maine State Legislature,

HP: 350 LD 531: Regarding Dam Ownership

Sponsored by: Representative Nina Azella Miliken, 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

Chairs: Senator Denise Tepler and Representative Victoria Doudera

Good morning, Senator Tepler and Representative Doudera. My name is Phil Roberts, and I am here to represent the Toddy Pond Association. I have written to you and am testifying today to express my strong support for the proposed legislation to establish a watershed management district responsible for the ownership, operation, and maintenance of the Toddy Pond Dam in Hancock County. This initiative is vital for preserving the ecological integrity, recreational value, and economic benefits of Toddy Pond and its surrounding communities.

### Background

The Toddy Pond Dam, located in Orland, Maine, has historically played a crucial role in maintaining water levels essential for recreational activities, wildlife habitats, and local water quality. Constructed in 1921, the dam was initially associated with the paper mill industry. The body of water created by this dam has become so much more over these many years.

After Bucksport Mill closed in 2014, dam ownership was transferred to AIM American Iron and Metals [Doing Business As] Bucksport Mill LLC, which has petitioned DEP (the Maine Department of Environmental Protection) to relinquish ownership. This petition raises significant concerns among local municipalities and residents about the future ownership, management and maintenance of the dam.

### The Need for a Watershed management district

Establishing a watershed management district offers a structured and collaborative approach to managing the Toddy Pond Dam. Under Title 38, §2001 of the Maine Legislature, watershed management districts are authorized to protect, restore, and maintain the natural functions and values of water resources within their jurisdictions. By forming such a district, we can ensure that the dam is properly maintained, water levels are effectively managed, and ecological balances are preserved.

### Benefits of the Proposed Legislation

1. Environmental Protection: A dedicated watershed management district would focus on safeguarding the natural habitats and water quality of Toddy Pond, ensuring compliance with environmental standards, and promoting biodiversity. The Pond and surrounding area are the home of numerous fish species as well as loons, eagles, cormorants, and other bird species as well as beavers, foxes, deer, and other animals. For more than 100 years this wildlife has relied

on the waters of Toddy Pond to thrive and raise their young. Would such wildlife adapt to a new environment without the pond? No doubt, but this body of water has become as much a part of the local environment as Great Pond Mountain or Blue Hill.

2. **Community Engagement:** Local representation within the district would empower residents and stakeholders to have a direct say in the management practices affecting their environment, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

3. **Economic Stability:** Proper maintenance of the dam supports recreational activities such as boating and fishing, which are vital to the local economy. A well-managed watershed enhances property values and attracts tourism. Toddy Pond serves as a powerful economic resource for the region. Property tax paid by the lakefront property owners significantly impacts the tax revenues for the four towns surrounding the pond – Blue Hill, Orland, Penobscot and Surry. Beyond that is the additional tax and revenue brought to the state and local businesses by those who visit Toddy Pond. The TPA Outreach Committee has, using some of the same methods as the University of Maine did when they looked at the impact of Maine lakes on the local economy, estimated that the net economic benefit to the towns, and the state, is on the order of millions of dollars annually. The loss of such a potent economic engine would be devastating to the four towns. The boat launch on Toddy Pond, located on Route 1 in Orland, is one of the busiest in Hancock County. Last year our Courtesy Boat Inspection program inspected over 1000 boats, and we know that is only a percentage of all boats launched. Boaters come to Toddy not only from adjacent towns, but from all over Maine and indeed from a great many states beyond Maine and New England. Numerous fishing derbies are held on Toddy, both summer and winter, providing much appreciated wholesome and family friendly recreational opportunities. Truly, Toddy Pond is a much beloved four-season recreational resource for Hancock County and beyond.

4. **Risk Mitigation:** Proactive management by the watershed management district would address potential issues related to the safety and infrastructure of the dam, reducing the risk of accidents, *structural failures and associated liabilities.*

## In Conclusion

The effort to bring this legislation to this point has been led by a grassroots effort, by the people and towns most affected by the petition to abandon the dams on Toddy Pond and Alamoosook Lake, to find local solutions to a problem which, frankly, is not unique to these ponds/lakes and dams. Across Maine there are aging dams that have served their original purpose and evolved to provide a greater purpose in the environmental, economic, and recreational areas. The State of Maine should embrace and encourage efforts such as this to solve local problems at the local level. This can-do attitude and effort reflect all of what's best about our state and its people and we encourage your support in this legislative effort. The establishment of a watershed management district for the Toddy Pond Dam is a proactive and necessary step to ensure the long-term sustainability of this valuable resource. It aligns with Maine's commitment to environmental stewardship, community involvement, and economic vitality. Also, if I might add, I have talked to hundreds of people living around and recreating on the pond. They feel much as I do that this body of water adds to the enrichment of our lives in so many ways that we cannot

imagine a future without it. I urge you to support this legislation, thereby securing the future of Toddy Pond for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Philip A. Roberts

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