



April 11, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

RE: LD 1340 – An Act to Establish the Municipal Stream Crossing Fund

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, The Nature Conservancy and Maine Audubon thank you for the **opportunity to testify in support of LD 1340, An Act to Establish the Municipal Stream Crossing Fund.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Maine Audubon is the state's oldest and largest wildlife conservation nonprofit.

LD 1340 builds on the success of the existing Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program by establishing it as permanent Fund within the Maine Department of Transportation. The popular program, also known as the "culvert grants" or "Waterbond" is a competitive grant for culvert upgrades and replacements on municipal roads. The main goal of this program has been to match local funding for these critical upgrades to improve fish and wildlife habitats, increase flood resiliency and community safety, and ensure regional economic vitality. The established fund would continue to operate the program with the same criteria and eligible project sponsors as it has been since its inception in 2015.

Culverts are an essential but often overlooked element of Maine's transportation infrastructure. They provide water conveyance and drainage beneath roads crossings and serve as connectors for fish and wildlife. Unfortunately, most culverts in Maine were designed to meet standards from 50+ years ago that not only were not built to truly accommodate streams, but are also not keeping up with the current realities of our storm patterns. As a result, they are rapidly deteriorating, putting fish and wildlife habitats, as well as community safety, at risk.

According to robust TNC data, there are over 4,000 "barrier" culverts on municipal roads across Maine – culverts that are undersized or "hanging" and restrict fish and wildlife passage. These culverts are also at high risk for washout and failure, which blocks emergency and essential services, strains town budgets, and destroys stream habitat for many years. Catastrophic culvert failures have increased statewide, and have hit rural communities especially hard.

The Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program has demonstrated success in addressing these challenges to stream health and transportation. Since its inception, the grant program has offered 7 competitive grant rounds. Each round saw high demand for project support from municipalities across the state. With the track record of nearly 200 funded upgrades, the project is a tremendous demonstration of success, and the demand far exceeds the funding available. Over the life of the grant program the total number of applications has consistently exceeded the number of funded projects, with the most recent round able to fund less than a third of the requests. Access to long-term funding allows communities to plan ahead – either to build the resources they need to apply or have the opportunity to reapply if they haven't been selected in a previous round.

One key partner to the Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program is a program called Stream Smart, launched by Maine Audubon in collaboration with a large group of state, federal, and nongovernmental partners. Stream Smart organizes workshops to train road professionals on how and why to install and replace culverts with science-based solutions. Stream Smart solutions allow the stream act like a stream, last considerably longer than undersized crossings, reduce the risk of flooding and road washouts, and save money in the long run.

In the aftermath of the number of disastrous storms Maine has experienced in the past few years, culverts funded by this program, designed to these Stream Smart standards, are proving their resilience and value by passing the increased amount of water, staying in place, and needing little to no repair. As storms continue to intensify and increase in frequency, and as construction costs rise, access to funds and design standards through this program are paramount to municipalities across the state as they strive to keep their communities safe, their natural resources intact, and their budgets manageable.

Maine hosts nearly all of the nation's intact brook trout habitat, thanks to our clean, cold waters. These fishing opportunities draw not only Mainers but visitors from far and wide and are a significant economic boon to the State and local communities. Brook trout are particularly put at risk by culverts that block their passage, but many other species, from salmon to turtles to deer, depend on uninterrupted stream corridors to traverse the landscape.

LD 1340 works in tandem with a companion bill, LD 836, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Upgrade Municipal Culverts at Stream Crossings. LD 1340 creates a permanent home for this grant program, and LD 836 recapitalizes the program. The 131st Legislature invested in this program, but the grant funds have all been allocated to projects. Over the last several months our staff teams have heard repeatedly from the communities and partners they work with in the field - many people rely on this grant and are concerned that existing funding has been exhausted.

TNC and Maine Audubon urge you to support LD 1340 and to seek additional funding to recapitalize the program. This work is critical to ensuring the health of our state's natural resources, protecting our communities from flooding and extreme weather, and creating and supporting jobs in the areas of construction, engineering, and design work.

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Norway Culvert – replaced 2024. Site ID# 20536

Maine Stream Habitat Viewer

Welcome Layers Add Search Identify

About Layers

Layers are only visible if they are selected on your map. To see the legend for each layer, click the arrow to the left of the layer name. Legend information is only available for layers that are selected in the map. To see the legend for the Maine Layers, click the information icon in the legend.

Crossings & Barriers

- Crossings
- Dams
- Natural Barriers
- Impassable Waterfalls

Priority Habitats

- Atlantic Salmon
- Alewife
- Sea Run Rainbow Smelt
- Wild Eastern Brook Trout
- Tidal Marshes

Other Habitats

- Water Features
- Watersheds
- Other Layers

Labels/Hover:

- Check this box to enable labels on crossings. Labels will appear as you zoom in.
- Check this box to enable labels on dams. Labels will appear as you zoom in.
- Check this box to enable your mouse to hover over crossing locations and a small window with smudged information will appear. Click on the feature to identify full information.

Culvert Flood Risk Explorer

Terms & Explanations are accessible in the icon.

Select Town(s)

Culvert Selection

View culvert summary by flood risk level or explore the information in **More Detail** below.

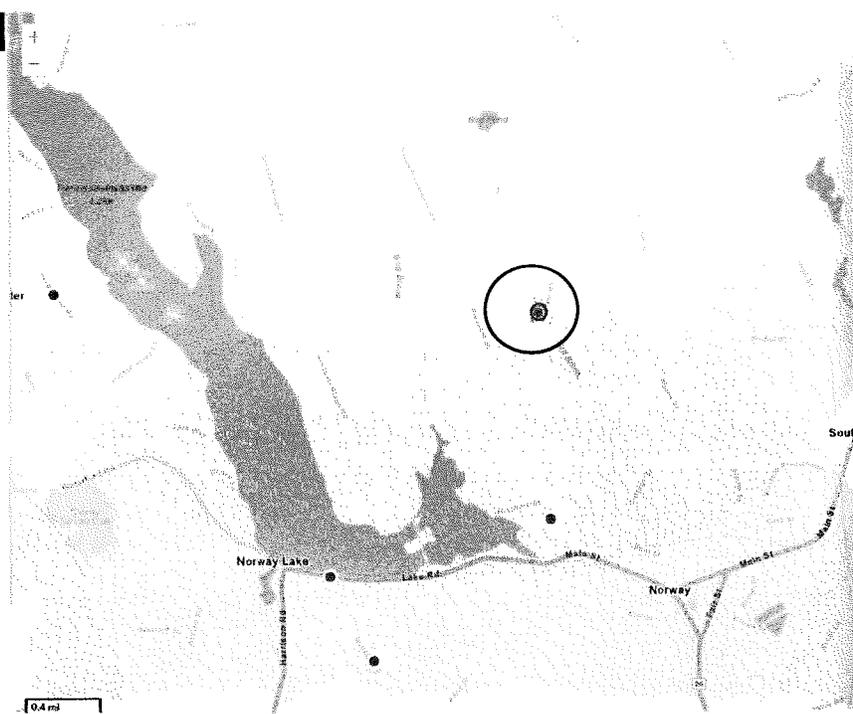
Flood Risk More Detail

Risk of flood in next 30 years:	Culverts affected:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High	3/11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	1/11
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low	5/11
<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	2/11

Culverts listed as N/A did not have flood risk or detour calculated due to data availability.

Summary of Culvert Selection

9 Selected Culverts (out of 11 in selected town(s))



Emerson Rd over Bird Brook In Norway



Site ID: 20536

30 year flooding probability
High

traffic counts (total daily)
63

detour length (total miles)
No Detour

fish priorities
Brook Trout Higher Priority
Salmon Higher Priority

road class
Town

Site ID 20536 (Norway) – Before restoration



After restoration

