

Testimony in Support of LD 1548, "An Act to Prevent the Introduction or Transfer of Invasive Fish Species in Inland Waters of the State"

Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife,

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Johnson. I am a resident of Oakland. Prior to retiring in 2005 I spent 35 years as an IF&W fishery biologist in the Moosehead Lake region. I am familiar with the problem of illegal fish introductions and their consequences, and therefore a proponent of L.D. 1548 with its measures to discourage future illegal fish introductions and penalties for those who are determined responsible for it.

Three minutes do not provide nearly enough time to elaborate on the multitude of past illegal introductions of fish eggs and non-native fish species into Maine waters and the ecological damage they have caused. I will note that brook trout and arctic charr, which the Legislature has identified as a Heritage species, landlocked salmon, which 56 years ago the Legislature identified as Maine's State Fish, and also lake whitefish are species especially vulnerable to, and have been most adversely affected by illegal fish introductions.

At the end of the last ice age 10,000 years ago these native fish species followed the retreating ice sheet, establishing populations in lakes and ponds that the glacier had carved out of the land we now call Maine. As the land rebounded from the weight of the ice, natural barriers were created downstream from these lakes and ponds preventing other warmwater species from entering them where they could prey on or compete with their coldwater species. These waters, these species are Maine's natural heritage. Yet, in the blink of an eye in geologic terms introductions of non-native fish species have bastardized some of these lakes and ponds, compromising or eliminating coldwater fish populations that have thrived in them for thousands of years. In most cases these illegal introductions are irreversible, and in that regard, at least in my mind, on par with capital offenses.

As a fishery scientist and a Maine citizen deeply concerned over our natural resources and their future, I am greatly disturbed by selfish, deliberate, illegal introductions of non-native fish species into Maine waters. Maintaining the quality of our existing native fisheries wherever they occur should be among our highest priorities. I hope that the enactment of L.D. 1548 will send a message that Maine people continue to value very highly the natural resources with which we have been blessed, and that we will take all reasonable steps to protect them. Public knowledge of the provisions in this legislation may help to prevent future illegal introductions. The legislation provides the financial means to reverse at least some illegal introductions by those who have and those who will continue to ignore the law. They will pay a price for compromising 10,000 years of natural history.

I respectfully urge you to give L.D. 1548 a unanimous "ought to pass" recommendation.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak before this committee. I welcome any questions you may have and will be happy to provide any information you would find helpful in your consideration of this legislation.